

Taxi and Private Hire Newsletter

Autumn 2024

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Taxi and Private Hire Newsletter Autumn Edition 2024

Message from Councillor Zee Russell, chair of the Statutory Licensing Committee and Regulatory Committee.

With the clocks moving back, the nights are darker sooner and the roads during rush hour become more dangerous. In combination with the upcoming winter weather, it has never been more important for you to check the condition of your vehicle. Tyres with low tread have an increased stopping distance – in icy conditions, this could be the difference between rear-ending another vehicle or a near miss.

Earlier this year, the Regulatory Committee approved the requirement for drivers to undertake daily walkaround checks of their vehicles. This is primarily to reduce the risk of our drivers being involved in a road traffic

collision. This will be rolled out to all licensing conditions upon your next renewal.

We have also made the significant change of removing the operator door signage from private hire vehicles. This is to make hackney carriages more visible and to create a greater distinction for the public. There have been several instances of drivers using door stickers to illegally ply for hire.

Finally, I spent time at our fresher's fair meeting new students at the University of Wolverhampton. This is an opportunity for us to explain how to safely use taxis and private hire vehicles, particularly for those students who are new to the area or indeed, the country!



Councillor Zee Russell



Smokers offered free support so they can Swap to Stop

As licensed private hire vehicle drivers, you are aware that smoking in your private hire vehicle is a breach of your licensing conditions. Our drivers in Wolverhampton may find the following information useful if they are trying to stop smoking.

Smokers in Wolverhampton are being encouraged to 'Swap to Stop' and take advantage of free vaping kits and behavioural support on offer to help them quit.

The government recently announced a number of measures to ensure that the country achieves its ambition of becoming Smokefree by 2030, including the provision of a million 'Swap to Stop' kits as a way to support people to quit smoking.

City of Wolverhampton Council is working to make these kits available at a range of community venues, including the city's 8 Family Hubs, the 3 WV Active leisure centres and Bilston, Warstones and Wednesfield libraries.

The service will be delivered by trained members of staff, who will offer free vape starter kits alongside support and weekly 'check-in' sessions delivered from the convenience of local community venues to help people on their quitting journey over a period of 12 weeks.

The new service was officially launched this week. To sign up for free, please visit [Swap to Stop](#).

Councillor Jasbir Jaspal, City of Wolverhampton Council's cabinet member for adults and wellbeing, said: "Stopping smoking is the best thing you can do for your health and the health of those around you.

"Smoking is still the single largest preventable cause of death in England, accounting for

around for 64,000 deaths annually. Almost every minute of every day someone is admitted to hospital with a smoking related disease – but, when you stop smoking, there are almost immediate improvements to your health.

"And it's not just your body which will benefit, your purse or wallet will too. On average smokers spend £38.59 a week on tobacco – and that means you could have around £2,000 more to spend a year by quitting, and even more if you are a really heavy smoker.

"Nicotine vaping is substantially less harmful than smoking and is also one of the most effective tools for quitting, so we are delighted to deliver this Swap to Stop support in the community in Wolverhampton. If you want to quit, please sign up today."

For more help and support to stop smoking, please visit [Quit Smoking](#).

Council first to implement new national guidelines to combat fake taxis

City of Wolverhampton Council is implementing new government guidelines designed to combat fake taxis and improve passenger safety - making it the first licensing authority in the country to take such action.

From 1 August, the council implemented the government's best practice guidance, which requires private hire drivers not to display livery signage, such as that of a private hire vehicle operator, on their doors.

This aims to prevent impersonation of private hire vehicles by anyone who prints their own imitation signage and operates as an illegal taxi.

There have been incidents reported nationally of fake signs being used on unlicensed vehicles to impersonate genuine ones. In some serious cases, unlicensed drivers have attacked lone passengers.

The change, which has been approved by the council's regulatory committee, is designed to ensure that passengers focus on the private hire vehicle licence plate on the rear of the vehicle to verify their booking.

Customers can also check the driver and vehicle that has been sent to collect them by direct contact with the operator via phone, text message or app. The driver will also know their name and destination through the booking details the passenger provided.

The council has undertaken a three-month consultation with the trade to gauge their views. Feedback has been overwhelmingly positive, with more than 2,250 respondents and 93% in favour of the signage changes.

Those responding felt the changes would make journeys safer for passengers, prevent damage some felt the stickers could cause and reduce the risk of vehicles being targeted by vandals.

Government also believes that high levels of signage can draw attention to private hire vehicles and leads the public to mistake them for taxis. People then approach them for immediate hire, which is unlicensed, uninsured and illegal for the driver.

Private hire vehicles must be pre booked and the council provides a 'pre booked only' sign for licensed drivers to attached to each passenger window.

People who need a vehicle immediately, should look for hackney carriages (black cabs) with an illuminated 'TAXI' light, which indicates that they are available for hire. They should also then check that there is a valid hackney carriage licence plate on the rear of the vehicle and check that the driver is wearing their driver's hackney carriage or dual driver licence badge.

Councillor Bhupinder Gakhal, cabinet member for resident services, said: "It is important that, following consultation with the trade, City of Wolverhampton Council is implementing this guidance.

"The safety of all passengers is paramount and we are implementing government guidelines to try and prevent unscrupulous drivers creating fake signage and taking passengers under false pretences.

"This has led to instances of revoked drivers illegally plying for hire, as well as unlicensed drivers impersonating taxis. We want to work alongside the legitimate trade drivers to stop this type of fraudulent and frightening behaviour.

"I would encourage all passengers to look for the private hire vehicle licence plate on the rear of the vehicle and the badge worn by the driver. They can also contact the operator to double check details.

"People wanting to hail a cab in the street should only approach vehicles with an illuminated taxi sign, then check it has a valid hackney carriage licence plate. They should then verify the licence badge the hackney carriage driver is wearing."

Anyone who wants to make a complaint about their journey can contact the operator they made the booking with. Or they can report any concerns to the council at [Taxi Complaints – Report a taxi driver](#).

Original DBS certificates

As part of our continuous drive to ensure public safety and deliver a high-quality service, we will be requesting that all Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) original certificates are verified before licences can be issued.

You do not need to present your current certificate to licensing services, but any DBS certificates you receive in the future must be provided either in person (no appointment needed) or via post (which will be posted back to the address on the certificate) to:

City of Wolverhampton Council
Chapel Street
Bilston
WV14 0PH

Please ensure that these certificates are posted in advance of your licence expiring, essentially as soon as you receive it from the DBS.

New driver licence applicants will be required to bring their original DBS certificate and right to work in the UK documentation into reception as part of the document verification process, along with their driving licence.

Reception staff will take copies of the original certificate, this will then be validated by licensing officers prior to licences being issued.

Please note, it does need to be the **original DBS certificate** and not a copy or picture on your phone. Anything other than your original DBS will not be accepted and you may be required to reattend our offices.

Guidance on the law on carrying guide or other assistance dogs

Do you know that refusing a passenger with an assistance dog is a breach of your licence conditions?

A private hire driver was recently revoked for refusing to take Pyrgo and his owner Paul, following a trip to the groomers.

Paul has provided some very helpful information/guidance that will explain how important private hire drivers are to the visually impaired and blind community and the role of a guide dog.

“I’m Paul. I’m registered blind and have a Guide Dog called Pyrgo. I work in Birmingham and live in London with my partner. I use all kinds of transport as part of my travels.



My guide dog accompanies me wherever I go, as he is highly trained by the charity Guide Dogs to undertake tasks for me such as finding pedestrian crossings and kerbs; stopping and indicating flights of stairs; finding entrances to shops and restaurants; guiding me safely onto busses, trains, and much more.

Because of the special training guide dogs and assistance dogs are given, they are protected by law under the Equality Act 2010, which means they have the same rights to go where their owners go.

This all works fine most of the time, so it might surprise you to read that Pyrgo and I do encounter access refusals in a small but significant number of instances, in particular, private hire taxis.

The reasons drivers give for refusing are wide and varied, but unless the driver has an allergy certificate from their doctor, there is no reason why a guide dog or assistance dog should not be carried. Put simply, think of Pyrgo as a passenger with the same rights as we all have.

Being refused a taxi has many negative effects when it happens. I get delayed and miss a train. I end up being late for work. My confidence in travelling is weakened, and I am left feeling unsafe and vulnerable, often at the side of the road. I’ve even experienced drivers

pulling away while I've been leaning on their car trying to reason with them as to their obligations.

Taxi drivers are made aware through ongoing training as to what could happen if they refuse to carry customers like Pyrgo and me. If a refusal is proven, it is highly likely a driver will have their license revoked. Additionally, drivers can be taken to court and face fines and even a criminal conviction.

Fortunately, most drivers are fantastic. They help by pulling up as near to Pyrgo and I as they can. Letting us know who they are and offering help by opening doors and ensuring Pyrgo and I are safely in the car as well as assisting us to our destination when we arrive.

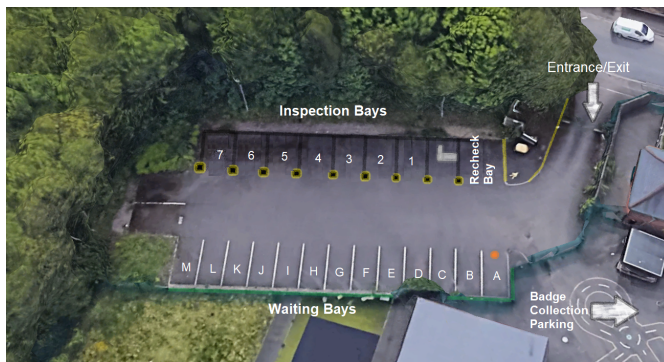
So, if you meet Pyrgo and I one day, don't be afraid. Guide dog and assistance dog owners like me are more than happy to reassure you and help you help us. But, please, don't refuse to carry us. We're more likely to use taxis than the average member of the public, meaning we're likely to spend more on taxis and recommend helpful drivers to our friends and colleagues."

For more information about Guide Dogs and their Open Doors Campaign, which is raising awareness around our right to access goods and services, click [here!](#)

Vehicle inspection parking

Please be mindful when attending your vehicle licence compliance check appointment that you drive with care. There has been an increase in onsite collisions, predominantly when vehicles are reversing out of the inspection bays.

Inspections take place in bays 1-7 underneath our inspection bay canopy.



Waiting bays are located opposite and are lettered A-M. Due to this increase in collisions waiting bay "A" is no longer in use.



Remember to pay attention to your surroundings when driving as this is a busy area of work. Drivers are also reminded to be aware of the inspection bay posts and surrounding fencing.

My Licence Portal

All licensed drivers are kindly asked to register to use the "My Licence Portal". You can use the portal to maintain your licence details and notify us of any amendments and changes you may have.

The email address you use to register with the portal **must** be the same email address on your driver/vehicle records. Register your email address here: [Signup](#).

You must verify the email address before you can log in - check your junk/spam folder for a verification email from "IAPPLY"

Once you have verified your email address you can log in [here](#) - if you are having issues on your mobile device, try a laptop/PC.

If you have forgotten the password that you have used and verified previously then use the "Forgot Password" – again, please check your junk/spam folder for password reset as this email will be from "IAPPLY"

If you are notifying us of a change of address, please ensure you include a copy of your driving licence showing your new address. A replacement paper licence cannot be issued showing your new address until we have received a copy of your driving licence showing your new address.

When sending emails to the licensing team, please ensure you include your badge and/or plate number. This will allow us to locate your records and respond to your enquiry quickly and efficiently.

Applying for a DBS Certificate

If you are applying for a new Enhanced DBS Certificate from TaxiPlus, you may have lots of questions or queries.

To make this process easier, TaxiPlus have created a comprehensive [FAQs page](#) for drivers to visit before you start your DBS journey.

Wheelchair accessibility stickers

As of August 1 2024, the licensing guidelines for City of Wolverhampton private and public hire vehicles has changed. For a copy of the guidelines please click [here](#).

While the new licensing guideline changes will require all drivers to remove side door operator signage, wheelchair accessible vehicles will still be allowed to display a wheelchair accessibility sticker on the rear of the vehicle if they wish to do so.

The sticker must not obscure the rear lights in anyway or be on the back window, where it can obscure the driver's line of site.

The sticker is not mandatory, however drivers who wish to display one are more than welcome to do so.

The accepted minimum standard wheelchair size is 700mm x 1200mm, and it must be suitable for a wheelchair passenger to safely and comfortably be able to take their journey without any need for them to leave the chair.

A wheelchair accessible vehicle is considered such if it has purpose-built fittings to hold and transport a minimum standard sized wheelchair. Being able to fold a wheelchair and put it in the boot of the car does not qualify it for wheelchair accessible vehicle status.

Get MOT reminders

As busy private hire licence drivers, it's hard to keep on top of important dates.

The Gov.UK website offers a helpful reminder service and provides text and email reminders for your MOT.

You can sign up to this using this [link](#)

Add your details and you will receive an email or free text message one month before your vehicle MOT is due.

Why is private hire vehicle operator door signage now prohibited?

The purpose of the [government's latest guidance](#) is to make private hire vehicles more discreet and less visible. The only people who need to identify the vehicle are its passengers, who should have the licence plate due to the journey being pre-booked. Drivers can identify themselves to the passengers by using their licensed driver badge. Further explanation is given [here](#)

While a livery requirement for private hire vehicles would give passengers a way to easily identify them, it does not enable the identification of the specific vehicle and driver. For this, a unique identifier such as the vehicle registration mark is needed. The government's view remains that a distinctive livery requirement would continue the current confusion between taxis and private hire vehicles. It would also complicate the need to raise public awareness of the differences between taxis and private hire vehicles.

Passengers have been using signage as a way of identifying a licensed vehicle, when this is not a true indicator.

We have received feedback that passengers are disappointed with the removal of signage, as they used the signage to identify their vehicle. This is the exact problem that we are trying to address by removing door signage.

What about young, elderly or disabled customers?

These customers have their own vulnerabilities which mean it is even more important that they identify the vehicle correctly.

How are customers supposed to know which vehicle is theirs?

Ideally the operator should communicate this in advance. If they are unable to do so, the driver can make themselves known to the customer, identifying themselves with the licence badge. Drivers have a responsibility to ensure that their passenger is aware they

have arrived, but are prohibited from sounding their horn to do so. Drivers are required to:

- convey a reasonable quantity of mobility aids, pushchairs and luggage;
- afford reasonable assistance in loading and unloading mobility aids, pushchairs and luggage,
- afford reasonable assistance in removing luggage to or from the entrance of any building, station or place at which they may take up or set down such person;
- take all reasonable precautions to ensure the safety of persons conveyed in or entering or alighting from a private hire vehicle driven, by hire or in their charge;
- wear their private hire vehicle driver's badge so as to be clearly and distinctly visible at all times whilst they are acting as a private hire vehicle driver (e.g. on the upper part of the body);
- ensure that they are recognisable from the picture on their driver licence badge by customers and authorised officers. Where the driver's appearance changes substantially, a new photograph must be provided to licensing services.

How does this make it harder for illegal taxis to work?

By tackling the problem that the public use door signage to identify a licensed vehicle. Passengers should verify that a vehicle is licensed by checking the licence plate, as well as the driver's badge.

Won't this mean that people are more likely to get into an unlicensed car without a booking?

Passengers should only get into a taxi with an illuminated sign that has a licence plate, then check the plate and driver's badge.

Drivers should also be aware that they have a legal duty to assist disabled passengers in identifying and finding the vehicle under [Section 165A](#) of the Equality Act.

Please note, you must retain your 'no smoking' signage which includes the complaints number on the doors.

Certificates of Good Conduct

Where a licence applicant has been outside of the UK for three or more months continuously since the age of 18, a 'Certificate of Good Character', 'Certificate of Good Conduct' or equivalent is required. If you have left the UK for more than 3 months continuously since the age of 18, you will need a 'Certificate of Good Character', 'Certificate of Good Conduct' or equivalent.

[Please see here for further information.](#)

This will delay your renewal if you do not have this upon renewing your licence.

New driver ID badges

From November 2024, new hackney carriage, dual and private hire driver licence badges will be posted out.

These new badges use contactless technology to verify your licence expiry date, allowing you to keep your licence through each renewal.

As such, all existing drivers should check the address on file is correct. You can do this at <https://iapply.co.uk/wdp/login>

Previously new drivers were required to attend the taxi licensing office in Bilston to collect their new driver licence and badges.

From June 2024, new applicants will need to attend the council's offices with original documents of their evidence of right to work in the UK, Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) certificate and driving licence.

After checks on these documents have been completed, new applicants will receive their licence in the post.

Drivers are also reminded that no other items should be attached to their lanyard, for example keys. There are media reports of a driver in a road traffic collision suffering a perforated bowel caused by keys on their

lanyard. If the keys were not there, it is highly unlikely that they would have been injured, but instead the driver was hospitalised for six weeks and off work for six months.

CCTV audio recording in all vehicles is prohibited

Audio recording is not currently allowed.

Results from our recent survey show that 90% of private hire drivers who do have non-voice recording CCTV in their vehicles felt safer then compared to when they did not have voice recording CCTV in their vehicles.

The council's Regulatory Committee has approved a consultation on panic-switch activated audio recording, due to be sent to the trade at the end of October.

We will keep you informed of any changes to the policy which is available from our website under Downloads

Vehicles are permitted to have no audio CCTV recording devices in their vehicles.

[Taxi-CCTV-Policy.pdf](#) – please read through our CCTV policy for more information.

Get Home Safe campaign

Councillor Zee Russell, chair of the Regulatory Committee met with Wolverhampton University students and Student Union President Adeyemi Adebayo at this year's Freshers Fair to launch our "Get Home Safe" initiative.

Cllr Russell, along with officers from the taxi compliance team, were there to welcome the hundreds of new students arriving into the city, many of whom will be away from home for the first time.

The team aimed to raise awareness around taxis and private hire vehicles and help

promote public safety and safer travel in the city. They explained the difference between taxis and private hire vehicles and the importance of only using pre-booked private hire vehicles.

This year's event was particularly important given the recent change in vehicle licence conditions whereby vehicles no longer need to display operator signage and how you should always check the vehicle registration and private hire plate against your booking notification.



Officers attended a number of events at freshers' fairs at Wolverhampton City Centre University Campus to promote the "Get home safe" message. Mugs, pens, spikeys, note pads were handed out to students.



Compliance officers also attended Walsall and Telford campuses.

How can private hire drivers improve their mental health?

Your role as a private hire driver can be stressful. You are dealing with members of the public and should be aware that your mental health should be considered.

We would like to provide a few recommendations to help you with your day-to-day activities and which may also help you with your role as a private hire driver.

- Sleep – having a good amount of sleep will help improve your mental health. The national sleep foundation recommends that the average adult should have between 7-9 hours of sleep per night.
- Exercise – exercise is vital for good mental health. The UK department of health recommends that every able adult should do at least 150 minutes of moderate intensity activity at least once a week or 75 minutes of vigorous intensity activity once a week.
- Rest – rest is an important factor in maintaining good mental health. Rest allows your mind to recharge and replenish mental energy.

Safety first

Do you worry about your safety when working late and alone?

We are committed to ensuring the safety of all our licensed private hire drivers.

Here are some tips to help you feel safe whilst working:

- Always remain vigilant – lock vehicle doors, keep personal possessions out

of sight, and keep money out of sight and in a safe place.

- Avoid confrontation – always remain calm and keep composed body language do not raise your voice, keep your hands visible and open and always maintain eye contact.
- Prioritise safety - you must always remain in control of your vehicle, and you should not be distracted by challenging customers. If a customer is distracting you, you should always pull over at the next safest opportunity to do so.
- Always trust your instincts. If you have any doubts regarding your safety then you should refuse the fare and cancel the job.
- We are currently working with Adult Education Wolverhampton to create refresher training for every driver to include personal safety.
- If you are in **imminent danger** while working, you should always **ring 999** and ask for the **police** immediately.
- You should report all non-urgent incidents to the police on 101.
- Safety tips for taxi and private hire drivers booklet is available on our website - [Safety tip for taxi and private hire drivers](#)

More information on the latest policy and rules

There has been a lot of changes recently regarding our hackney carriage and private hire vehicle licensing policy.

Please feel free to view the latest hackney carriage and vehicle licensing policy [here](#).

Please note that the refresher training will include the licence conditions and any changes since your last licence.

Question time

If you have any questions relating to taxi licensing, please [email us](#) with the subject 'Taxi Newsletter FAQ' and we will publish answers to the most interesting and frequent questions in the next issue.

You can also refer to [Taxi Licence FAQs](#).

How to contact us

For driver enquiries –
driver.lic@wolverhampton.gov.uk

For vehicle enquiries –
vehicle.lic@wolverhampton.gov.uk

All SSDC enquiries:
SSDC@Wolverhampton.gov.uk

Please make sure to include your name and badge/plate number in all correspondence. If you are a new applicant, please include your WTP reference number in all enquiries.

Please note, we no longer operate from out of Hickman Avenue, Wolverhampton, WV1 2HS. All operations are now at Chapel Street, Bilston WV14 0PH.

Please note that if you are reading a physical copy of this newsletter, a digital version with working hyperlinks can be found at:
<https://www.wolverhampton.gov.uk/licences/taxi-licences/taxi-licensing/newsletter>