

Review of Darlington Borough Council's Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Licensing Policies and procedures

Local residents, businesses and visitors to Darlington are invited to share their views on policies and procedures relating to taxis in the borough. Darlington Borough Council has launched a public consultation over proposed changes to the way taxis and private hire vehicles are licensed and operated. The key aim is to ensure the safety and welfare of the public, encourage environmental sustainability, and ensure efficient taxi and private hire services in the borough. This policy has been revised in line with the Department for Transport's recently published 'Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards'. The department expects their recommendations to be implemented unless there is a compelling local reason not to do so.

You can give your views either by e-mailing licensing@darlington.gov.uk or by completing the survey through the following link

This consultation period will end on the 2nd October 2020 whereupon all responses will be collated and a report submitted to the Licensing Committee for consideration. Approval of the new policy will be made by the full Council to be implemented on the 1st January 2021

Summary of proposed key changes to taxi policy

Subscribe to DBS update service – this has been included in the new 'Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards' for public safety. It will also be an essential requirement when a new on-line application process is introduced. All drivers to be routinely checked for new information every 6 months as required in the new standards.

NR3 register – this is a national register of all drivers who have had their licence revoked or refused to ensure that a further application to a different local authority can be scrutinised.

Disability awareness training – proposal that this becomes mandatory for all drivers when a course is developed by Tees Valley Licensing Authorities. It will be an on-line awareness course provided free or at a small cost. When introduced it will be a rolling programme, beginning with all new applications.

Insurance write offs – current policy will not allow any vehicle that has been an insurance write off to be licenced. Advances in technology and improved safety of vehicles over the years has led us to conclude that non-structural damage write offs could be considered. This would be on the provision that an engineer's report certifies it is safe and it has been declared suitable to be licensed by Darlington Borough Council mechanics.

Colour – it has been noted that Darlington appears to have different coloured Hackney carriage vehicles (various shades of red). Specifying a pantone colour 485 (basic red) in our policy will ensure consistency. This will apply to all new vehicles so it will be a number of years before all vehicles are basic red. 'Wrapping' of the vehicles will be permitted as a cheaper alternative to spraying

Age restriction and emissions – current policy only allows a vehicle to be licenced if it is initially under 3 years old and can no longer remain on the fleet after it is six years old unless it is exceptionally well maintained. It is proposed that vehicles are allowed to be licenced under 4 years old and be removed when they reach 8 years. This age policy would be applied from 1st April 2023, which

would mean that all vehicles will comply with Euro 6 engine emissions standards by that time. Once applied, there will be no longer be an exceptionally well maintained element. Drivers will have over 2 years notice to plan ahead should they need to change their vehicle. There will be no age restrictions for emission free vehicles. Concessions to the age will be available for wheelchair accessible vehicles to encourage their uptake.

On-line application and payments – when a new on-line system is introduced, all applications will be made using this system and payments will be made electronically. This will be essential if the new system is to work efficiently.

CCTV – it is not proposed to make this a mandatory requirement in this policy at the moment, however it is recommended. This situation will be regularly reviewed based on evidence and proportionality.

Tinted windows – the current policy requires rear windows to allow 70% light transmission (front windows have statutory requirements 75% and 70%). Many vehicles are now manufactured with rear window tints less than 70% as standard, meaning drivers are having to replace windows at great expense before they can be licensed. It is proposed that this window tint be reduced to 30%, which will represent a cost saving to the trade.

Previous convictions – This is for a minimum time to have elapsed before considering whether to grant or renew a licence. The conviction rates proposed are in line with the Statutory Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Standards.

Advertising - Vehicles are now applying wrapped advertising to panels and doors that have a different background colour to the vehicle. This enhances the advert but can make the vehicle look unsightly. It is proposed that the advert be limited in to the rear quarter panel only and must not change the underlying colour of the vehicle.

Spare wheels – in the current policy a spare wheel is a requirement, however some vehicles are now manufactured without a spare wheel and use a pressurised tyre sealant for emergencies or have. It is proposed that where a vehicle has been manufactured without a spare wheel, tyre sealants may be used in an emergency situation.