



## Taxi and Private Hire Newsletter April 2020



Welcome to April's Taxi and Private Hire Newsletter which follows the recent updates issued by email to the trade via email.

Looking back on February's newsletter, there was only minimal mention of Coronavirus and it is a sign of how rapidly the county has changed remarkably (and for potentially a considerable time), in the few weeks since February's update. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the current situation features heavily in this edition.

We know there is very little taxi and private hire work at the moment and that your livelihoods are under threat. We also know that some of you may be thinking about not renewing your licence and some have asked if we can extend the period of your current licence, or waive renewal fees. During this concerning time, the licensing team will aim to support you and your business when possible.

However in the current situation, the Council still has a primary duty to maintain public safety in respect of taxi and private hire services, and we must still act within the law unless the emergency Coronavirus legislation allows us to depart from it. With the exception of MOT testing for vehicles, the laws affecting taxi and private hire services have not changed. This means that we must still process your licence applications when they are due for renewal and we must carry out the necessary medical, DBS and other checks, before we can renew your licence. We must also ensure that licensed vehicles are safe and roadworthy and that you are able to provide your services lawfully, safely and with a valid licence.

For these reasons we are unable to simply extend the period of your licence and we are unable to issue licences without first making the relevant checks. We would encourage you to renew your licence where possible however, we understand that for some of you this may not be possible or you may choose to let your licence expire and wait for the current situation to end before re-applying. Due to current circumstances, you may be self-isolating or have taken the decision not to work, and understandably you do not want to spend extra money on a licence renewal where you are not able to use the licence.

We have therefore taken the decision to allow the trade to delay a renewal application for a period of up to 3 months. This means that licences can expire and provided we would have granted the renewal application when the licence expired, we will then accept a late renewal application, for a period of up to three months.

However, please note that if you wish to do this, you would still need to apply in good time to allow the application to be processed before you wished to resume using the licence and obviously if a licence has expired it cannot be used again until it is renewed.

We will review the situation again in June. If your licence renewal is approaching and you choose to use this three-month grace period please contact us by email to inform us that this is your intention.

We would also remind the trade that the latest information is being regularly updated and is available at:

- <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-information-for-the-public>
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-stay-at-home-guidance/stay-at-home-guidance-for-households-with-possible-coronavirus-covid-19-infection>

Important messages to the trade will also appear under the 'Information for current licence holders' section on our website at:

<https://www.guildford.gov.uk/article/17617/Information-for-current-licence-holders>

From a business continuity perspective, we are also working to try and ensure that we have staff to run the licensing service however it may be that staff are diverted to other essential duties at short notice, meaning a delay to answering questions or processing applications.

Unfortunately, despite issuing regular advice and updates to the trade, we are getting a number of questions which could be answered by members of the trade reading the information that we has previously provided. As such, if you have any questions particularly about making applications and assistance available, please ensure that you have read the Council's updates **BEFORE** contacting us. Similarly, if you are making an application, please ensure you allow sufficient time (10 working days) for your completed application to be processed before contacting us.

As we have reported, the Council has taken the decision to close its reception counter and we are aware of the implications that this may cause for members of the trade who wish to renew their licences. We are therefore happy to accept application by email or post. Payment can be made by calling the Council's Customer Service Centre on 01483 505050.

**If members of the trade are having any difficulty making their application then please let us know and we will endeavour to assist.**

As we have also outlined, we will allow the trade to delay a renewal application for a period of up to 3 months. This means that licences can expire and provided we would have granted the renewal application when the licence expired, we will then accept a late renewal application, for a period of up to three months.

Currently, due to the restrictions, for both drivers and vehicles, once the licence has been renewed, you will be issued the paper licence by email, but no plates or badges – you will however be issued a covering letter detailing that due to the current circumstances, the plate or badge will show as being expired. You will need to carry both the paper licence and the covering letter with you in the vehicle, along with the expired plate or badge. Once the situation allows, we will start producing plates and badges and arrange for these to be distributed.

As usual, if have any ideas about the content you would like to see in the newsletter then we would be very pleased to hear from you. At this difficult time, any positive messages which you would wish us to communicate to the wider trade we are sure would be gratefully received.

In the meantime, please keep safe. We will update the trade further when there is further information to provide.

## Financial assistance, welfare and support available

On 26 March 2020, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rishi Sunak, announced details of a Self-Employed Income Support Scheme, through which the Government will pay those adversely affected by Coronavirus a taxable grant worth 80 per cent of their average monthly profits over the last three years, up to the value of £2,500 a month. Further details of the scheme are provided here:

- [www.gov.uk/government/news/chancellor-gives-support-to-millions-of-selfemployed-individuals](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/chancellor-gives-support-to-millions-of-selfemployed-individuals)

Other resources are available providing details of financial support that the Government is currently offering, including:

- <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/coronavirus-covid-19-guidance-for-employees-employers-and-businesses>
- [www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-those-affected-by-covid-19](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/support-for-those-affected-by-covid-19)
- [www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-andbusinesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/guidance-to-employers-andbusinesses-about-covid-19/covid-19-support-for-businesses)
- [www.british-business-bank.co.uk/ourpartners/coronavirus-businessinterruption-loan-scheme-cbils/](http://www.british-business-bank.co.uk/ourpartners/coronavirus-businessinterruption-loan-scheme-cbils/)

We recognise these are challenging and uncertain times and would encourage anyone struggling with their mental health and wellbeing or financial difficulties to seek help from the broad range of support available including:

- SANE: [www.sane.org.uk/home](http://www.sane.org.uk/home)
- Rethink Mental Illness: [www.rethink.org/about-us](http://www.rethink.org/about-us)
- Mind [www.mind.org.uk/](http://www.mind.org.uk/)
- Citizen's Advice Bureau [www.citizensadvice.org.uk/](http://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/)

The Money Advice Trust, a national charity, is also available to provide advice on tackling debts and managing money. It offers free, independent and confidential advice on personal debt and provides a Business Debtline, the UK's only free dedicated debt advice service for people who are self-employed and other small business owners.

## Department for Transport Update on the Taxi Trade

The DfT have issued the guidance below relating to the taxi trade on 25 March:

Taxis and private hire vehicles can continue to work. But the advice is absolutely clear - people should stay at home if possible. That is the way to save lives and protect our NHS. The public should avoid travel unless absolutely essential. The only reasons to leave our houses are set out in the [government guidance](#).

Clearly if absolutely necessary to travel by taxi or private hire vehicle, best efforts should be used to follow the guidance as far as is practically possible, including washing your hands as soon as you get home.

Taxi and private hire drivers should not generally be considered Critical Workers. Those undertaking Home to School transport or the transport of '[extremely vulnerable](#)' people may be considered Critical Workers on a case-by-case basis. Critical Workers should also whenever possible make suitable arrangements for their children to stay at home; [requests for children to attend school](#) should be discussed with the school.

## MOT and Vehicle Testing

The government has also announced that for vehicles whose MOT expires on or after 30 March 2020, MOT due dates for cars, motorcycles and light vans will be extended by 6 months to help prevent the spread of coronavirus.

Drivers do not need to do anything to extend a vehicle's MOT expiry date if it's on or after 30 March 2020. The vehicle will be automatically given a 6-month MOT exemption. This will extend your current MOT expiry date by 6 months.

However, you must make sure your vehicle is safe to drive ('roadworthy'). It can be unsafe even if your MOT expiry date has been extended.

Full information is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-mots-for-cars-vans-and-motorcycles-due-from-30-march-2020>

### Vehicle tests

The Council's Testing facilities at Woking Road have now closed and staff have been redeployed into the fleet workshops to ensure the Council is able to maintain the refuse fleet.

As such, it will not be possible to complete the vehicle inspection for either renewal applications or interim tests. As such, if you need to provide the Council with a vehicle test, please complete the declaration form in place of the vehicle test.

As per our previous updates, the expectation is that you will get the vehicle test done as soon as practically possible once the depot resumes service. If the vehicle is inspected and found to be unfit for use as a licensed vehicle, further action is likely to be taken against the driver and/or proprietor.

## Medical Examination

We are aware that the NHS is under pressure, so if your medical is due, you will need to write to us to confirm three things:

1. That since your last medical there have been no changes in your health, and
2. That since your last medical you have not been instructed not to drive, and
3. That in line with the condition of your licence you will inform the Council, in writing, within 7 days of any changes.

On receipt of confirmation on these three points, we will defer your medical for up to 6 months, at which we will review the situation, on the expectation that you will get a medical done as soon as possible once your surgery is in a position to start doing them again.

If you do not confirm there have been no changes and/or that you have not been instructed to drive, it is likely that the Council will consider you unfit to drive and suspend your licence.

## **NHS Calls for volunteers**

As has been widely reported in the media, NHS Volunteer Responders has been set up to support the NHS during the COVID-19 outbreak. It may be that the taxi trade is uniquely placed to assist as the NHS are looking for volunteer patient transport drivers with an Enhanced DBS.

For further details, and to sign up to volunteer please see:

<https://www.goodsamapp.org/NHS>

## **Can your business offer coronavirus support?**

The UK Government has updated its page asking for support from businesses on a wide range of issues. The support needed includes things like:

- medical testing equipment
- medical equipment design
- protective equipment for healthcare workers, such as masks, gowns and sanitiser
- hotel rooms
- transport and logistics, for moving goods or people
- manufacturing equipment
- warehouse or office space, for medical use or storage
- expertise or support on IT, manufacturing, construction, project management, procurement, engineering or communications
- social care or childcare

If your business Visit their website for more info: <https://www.gov.uk/coronavirus-support-from-business>

## **Coronavirus – can driver's refuse certain passengers at this time?**

We have also received a number of enquiries from members of the licensed trade about whether they can refuse certain passengers at this time, and unfortunately we have also received complaints from customers who have been left stranded as they were unable to complete their journey after being refused a service.

There is an article produced by noted Licensing Solicitor James Button on the Institute of Licensing webpages which covers this subject which we would direct the trade to:

<https://www.instituteoflicensing.org/news/covid-19-licensing-issues-can-hackney-carriage-and-private-hire-drivers-refuse-to-carry-certain-passengers-through-fear-of-infection/>

## Department for Transport Calls for Evidence on as part of 'Future of Transport Regulatory Review'

The Department for Transport has issued a call for evidence and views on micromobility vehicles, flexible bus services and mobility as a service as part of the 'Future of transport regulatory review'

The call for evidence asks for information and views on 3 areas of the 'Future of transport regulatory review'. The 3 areas are:

1. micromobility vehicles
2. flexible bus services
3. mobility as a service (MaaS)

This call for evidence asks:

- whether certain micromobility vehicles (such as electric scooters) should be permitted on the road, and if so what vehicle and user requirements would be appropriate
- how effective existing rules are around flexible bus services, and which other areas of the bus, taxi and private hire vehicle framework should be considered in this review
- what the opportunities and risks of MaaS platforms might be, and what role central and local governments should play in their development
- The 'Future of transport regulatory review' was first announced in March 2019 as part of the [Future of mobility: urban strategy](#).

The DfT indicate that they intend to use the responses to this call for evidence to determine whether there are changes they can make in the short term to improve the flexible bus service regime. If so, they will bring forward detailed proposals to amend the regulations and guidance.

The call for evidence response will also inform further work looking at how the bus, taxi and PHV regimes are converging and what legislative framework might be appropriate in future. They would be interested in respondents' views on what areas of the bus, taxi and PHV framework they should consider in future stages of the regulatory review.

Full details are available at:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-transport-regulatory-review-call-for-evidence-on-micromobility-vehicles-flexible-bus-services-and-mobility-as-a-service>

## TAG Meeting

Unfortunately the TAG meeting scheduled for 22 April has been postponed. We will update the trade when we are able to rearrange this date.

## Council Car Parks

The Council has temporarily stopped charging for council run car parks, except for Bright Hill, which will be permit only to support health care workers. We are doing this to make sure key workers and residents can park easily and safely. On street restrictions are still in place to protect emergency access.