



Taxi and Private Hire Newsletter May 2020



Welcome to May's newsletter. As we enter the second month of 'lockdown' we wanted to provide an update to the licensed trade. As the planned TAG meeting for April had to be cancelled, we appreciate that many members of the trade would have wished to discuss matters affecting the trade with us, however please be assured that we will rearrange this for when we are able to. In the meantime we are still available to assist the trade with any question they may have.

April's newsletter detailed advice to the licensed trade as to how to continue to make applications if necessary, and how to make vehicle test and medical declarations should the circumstances require. We would remind the trade that declarations are provided as a temporary measure during the coronavirus pandemic to demonstrate that either a driver is still medically fit to drive a licensed vehicle whilst you cannot access your doctors surgery to complete your medical examination; or a licensed vehicle is still safe to drive whilst the Working Road Depot is closed. The declaration does not change the date that your medical or vehicle test is due, or replace the need for it to be completed once current restrictions are lifted. Please also note, declarations do not need to be submitted too far in advance, only at the date your medical/vehicle test is due, as circumstances can change and it is important that you are providing the correct and up to date information to the Council so that we can ensure the public are safe. If you have submitted your declaration for a test which is due at a further date in future, it is important that you inform the Council of any changes which will affect your declaration.

We are however still experiencing members of the licensed trade asking questions without seemingly having read our updates. We are also getting a number of emails from the licensed trade who are not providing basic information such as their licence number when contacting us. All of which unfortunately delays us being able to respond and assist members of the trade and public as quickly as we would like to. In addition, a number of members of the licensing team have been redeployed with assisting with the Council's coronavirus response including promoting business rates grants and calling on vulnerable residents meaning that we may be delayed in responding to the licensed trade.

We are aware that as ideas of how to end the lockdown begin to develop, that the hospitality and entertainment sectors will likely be the last to reopen with the subsequent continued impact on some members of the trade. In the meantime, we would continue to reiterate the government advice that whilst taxis and private hire vehicles can continue to work, 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.

Please do stay safe and well.

Social distancing and PPE

While we appreciate all efforts to support key workers at the forefront of tackling the pandemic or maintaining key services, it is important that any passenger carrying journeys are undertaken within Public Health England social distancing guidelines to ensure passengers and drivers are not put at risk.

The Department for Transport recently published updated guidance on the use of transport services. Guidance that is relevant to taxi and private hire services can be found below:

Guidance for transport sector workers: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-for-staff-in-the-transport-sector/covid-19-guidance-for-staff-in-the-transport-sector>

Insurance when undertaking deliveries: <https://www.abi.org.uk/products-and-issues/topics-and-issues/coronavirus-hub/motor-insurance/>

Social distancing in the workplace during coronavirus: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/social-distancing-in-the-workplace-during-coronavirus-covid-19-sector-guidance#transport-businesses>

- See 'Deliveries' and 'Transport businesses' for information on delivery work.

- See 'Use of private vehicles and carpooling' which also applies to taxi and private hire vehicles.

Cleaning of non-healthcare settings: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-decontamination-in-non-healthcare-settings>

The Government does not currently advise use of face masks outside of care settings, in line with PPE guidance: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/wuhan-novel-coronavirus-infection-prevention-and-control/covid-19-personal-protective-equipment-ppe>

We continue to maintain contact with the DfT and will endeavour to ensure that updated guidance is communicated, however due to the regularity with which guidance is changed we would recommend that the trade keep up to date using the links provided.

Government launches new support finder tool

A new 'support finder' tool has been launched by the government which will help businesses and self-employed people across the UK to quickly and easily determine what financial support is available to them during the coronavirus pandemic. The new business support finder tool can be found at <https://www.gov.uk/business-coronavirus-support-finder>

Taxi drivers, who are self-employed and earn less than £50,000 a year, are able to apply for a government grant worth up to a maximum of £2,500 a month. Grants are calculated on 80% of your average monthly profits over the last three years based on your tax returns for 2016/17, 2017/18 and 2018/19.

If you became self-employed after April 2018, your 2018/19 tax return will be used instead. If you only have a few months' self-employment on your 2018/19 return, this will be counted as your total profit for the year.

The money will be backdated to cover March, April and May and will be paid in one instalment directly into your bank account from HMRC in June.

All grants are taxable and need to be declared on your January 2022 tax return.

Self-employed taxi drivers can continue to work while still receiving financial support.

Advice about 'loan sharks'

With a number of members of the trade facing uncertain times, taxi and private hire drivers are being urged not to turn to loan sharks to make up for any loss of income during the pandemic. Drivers are urged to take expert advice from a credit union or Citizens Advice during these tough financial times instead of turning to unscrupulous loan sharks for support.

Loan sharks prey on vulnerable people by charging extortionate interest rates then often harassing and intimidating their clients for repayments. Anyone worried about loan sharks can call the Loan Shark News team on 0300 555 2222 (24hr) for advice, information and support.

If you've been affected by a loan shark, or know of loan sharks operating in your area, contact the Loan Shark News team on their 24-hour confidential helpline on 0300 555 2222. You can also report online here: www.stoploansharks.co.uk

Licence holder welfare and support

During these challenging times, it is more important than ever to prioritise your mental and physical wellbeing. It is important to be self-aware and spot any early warning signs of feeling mentally unwell and to seek help and support at the earliest opportunity. Below are examples of support services available to all licensees:

SANE: <http://www.sane.org.uk/home>

Rethink Mental Illness: <https://www.rethink.org/aboutus/>

Mind: <https://www.mind.org.uk/>

Citizen's Advice Bureau: <https://www.citizensadvice.org.uk/>

CALM: <https://www.thecalmzone.net/help/get-help/>

Age UK: <https://www.ageuk.org.uk/>

Stress Management Society (SMS): <https://www.stress.org.uk/>

UK Active: <https://www.ukactive.com/>

The Money Advice Trust: <http://www.moneyadvicetrust.org/Pages/default.aspx>

We are also aware that some private hire operators across the country are offering financial support for drivers who are undertaking bookings on their platform. Drivers who are affected by coronavirus can contact operator(s) for further information and to understand if they would qualify for one of the financial support schemes in place during this time.

Screens in licensed vehicles

We are aware that nationally some drivers are making use of temporary screens / partitions in licensed vehicles. Anything that helps to protect passengers and drivers from the spread of coronavirus is welcomed but it is important that we ensure that the installation of any aftermarket equipment is safe and doesn't cause any unintended safety hazards.

We would also remind drivers and proprietors that it is a licence condition NOT to make any modifications to a licensed vehicle without the permission of the Council. Therefore any temporary screens or partitions installed would need to have the Council's permission.

Should you be considering installation of a screen, please contact us by email for advice.

People at increased risk

As established by Government guidelines, all persons aged 70 or older have been identified as people at increased risk.

The Government has issued specific advice to all persons aged 70 or older to remain at home for their own safety and welfare and be diligent in following social distancing measures. This advice is likely to remain in place for 12 weeks. In these circumstances, drivers over the age of 70 are strongly advised to remain at home, even if in good health.

All licensees, regardless of age, that fall within the vulnerable category should follow Government advice and continue to self-isolate.

For more information please see:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/covid-19-guidance-on-social-distancing-and-for-vulnerable-people/guidance-on-social-distancing-for-everyone-in-the-uk-and-protecting-older-people-and-vulnerable-adults>

<https://www.nhs.uk/conditions/coronavirus-covid-19/people-at-higher-risk-from-coronavirus/>

Speeding

Together with Surrey Police, we are committed to keeping Guildford's roads safe for all users.

As has been reported in the media, there have been a perceived increase in the number of vehicles speeding on the nation's roads. We are reminding all drivers that it is essential for public safety to observe the speed limits on any given road.

Confirmed cases of coronavirus

We would like to remind all drivers of their obligation to inform us in any changes of their medical circumstances. This would include confirmation that you have been tested positive for coronavirus.

We urge any operator to contact us if they become aware of a driver that has tested positive to ensure that we have taken the relevant licensing action.

Council Tax Refund 'scam'

The Council is asking residents to be diligent about fraudsters who are using scam text messages to offer households council tax refunds during the coronavirus pandemic.

The messages advise that the individual is eligible for a refund and asks for personal information. The Council is also aware of examples of scammers posing as inspectors or officials, trying to gain access to houses.

The Council would not ask residents for such sensitive, confidential or personal information in this way and as such we would remind people to increase their vigilance at all times and to assist family members and elderly relatives in maintaining personal safety.