

# Taxi and Private Hire Newsletter

Spring 2024

issue **13**

## Taxi and Private Hire Newsletter Spring Edition 2024

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

I am pleased to announce that I have been re-selected as the Chair of the Regulatory Committee.

I am looking forward to another year working with our officers and the trade, particularly as there are many exciting changes being considered by the Regulatory Committee.

Earlier this year, the largest consultation ever was undertaken by the service, following the publication of the Department for Transport's Best Practice Guidance.

Over 2,200 responses were received on a wide range of topics, including the removal of

licence conditions which restricted private hire drivers from working with multiple operators, removing vehicle age limits in place of an emissions policy and defining assistance dogs to ensure clarity for drivers.

These matters are to be considered by the Regulatory Committee on 12 June 2024 and if any are agreed it will be communicated clearly to the trade.

I hope that you enjoy this newsletter as we strive to raise awareness around matters such as NIP farms and ghost plates.

Finally, for any drivers please remember to ensure that we have your current address on file, as your new badges will be posted to their in the coming weeks.



**Councillor Zee Russell**



# Private hire drivers revoked for using 'NIP farms' to avoid motoring convictions

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In December 2023 Leicestershire Police road safety unit reported several City of Wolverhampton Council licensed private hire drivers using Notice of Intended Prosecution (NIP) farms in an attempt to avoid the prosecution of motoring offences.

When the police undertake an investigation into a motoring offence, such as speeding or traffic signal offences, a Notice of Intended Prosecution (NIP) form is sent to the registered keeper of the vehicle under investigation. This form invites the registered keeper of the vehicle to nominate and disclose the details of the driver who was driving vehicle at the time the offence was committed.

Typically, the driver completes the form admitting the offence, which in turn leads to the driver being fined and their DVLA driving licence endorsed with penalty points. Alternatively, the driver may be offered a speed awareness/road safety course instead of receiving penalty points on their DVLA driving licence.

However, some drivers in receipt of a NIP form seek to avoid prosecution by obtaining the services of a NIP farm. To obtain the services of a NIP farmer, the registered keeper of the vehicle, who in most cases is the driver, will pay a substantial fee to the farmer. Such fees are often more than the fine the driver would receive following admission via the NIP form.

NIP farm services are run by organised criminals who tout their service as a legitimate way to deal with speeding or traffic signal offences. The NIP farmer completes the NIP form using a false name and address or legitimate details of people whose identity has been stolen. Once complete with this false information, the NIP farmer returns the form to the police.

Some people genuinely believe NIP farm services to be a legitimate means as a way of providing a response via the NIP form, while others knowingly use such services solely to avoid a fine and penalty points on their driving licence.

Either way, persons who use NIP farms to avoid taking responsibility for the motoring offences and deliberately avoid prosecution, are potentially committing the offence of perverting the course of justice or fraud by false representation - offences which can result in jail time.

To protect their own identity and interests, as organised criminals the NIP farmer will often threaten the registered keeper of the vehicle with violence to maintain the lie and deception. It has been known for NIP farmers may make demands on and threats to the registered vehicle keeper ensuring they maintain the deception.

Working closely with Leicestershire Police, the council's investigating officer undertook an investigation into each of the drivers concerned. These drivers were referred for a licence review hearing.

To date, every driver licensed by City of Wolverhampton Council referred for a review of their driver licence, for using a NIP farm, has had their drivers licence revoked.

Not only did each driver lose the money they paid to the NIP farmer, but they also received a fine and penalty points for the motoring conviction they attempted to avoid. But most damaging of all, they have lost their livelihoods by losing their driver licence, as each driver was no longer considered to be a fit and proper person to hold a licence.

Instead of taking responsibility for their actions when first given the opportunity by Leicestershire Police, each driver took the gamble of trying to avoid prosecution, by using the services of a NIP farm. It was a gamble that did not pay off.

## Original DBS certificates

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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.

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 verification process.

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

Existing drivers, vehicles and operators will be required to post in their future DBS certificates so that their applications can be processed accordingly. Please ensure that these certificates are posted in advance of your licence expiring.

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.

## New driver ID badges

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From June 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.

## My Licence Portal

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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 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.

## Keep on top of traffic disruptions

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For the latest traffic information on road closures, please visit <https://one.network/>

## Infra-red cameras and 4D ghost plates

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Compliance officers are working with police to crack down on illegal 4D reflective number plates being used on licensed vehicles around the country.

This comes following IR reflective plates being installed on many vehicles, preventing them from being able to be read by infra-red cameras. This means that they are not visible to speed, bus lane or low emission zone cameras – which is an offence. Under the Road Vehicles (Display of Registration Marks) Regulations 2001, it is illegal to alter any characters or apply or use material which makes the plate retroreflective.

However, these are clearly visible to officers using infra-red cameras, such as below:



Any drivers caught with the illegal plates can expect to be prosecuted for a vehicle construction offence, pay a fine and have their licence reviewed, risking suspension or revocation.

## Driving licence number required for all applications

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Since December 2023 drivers have been required to provide their DVLA licence number as part of new badge applications. This will soon enable City of Wolverhampton Council to undertake checks to a driver's driving licence record, with the DVLA's Access to Driver Data (ADD) Service.

This is intended to save drivers money, as they will no longer have to pay third parties to undertake checks of their driving licence, as these will be included in the application fee paid to the council.

Checks will then be undertaken by the council over the lifetime of a driver's badge with automated notifications flagging any changes to a driving licence.

## Right to work evidence soon to be uploaded with applications

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As part of the ongoing development to improve the driver licence application process, the council is introducing the ability to upload right to work documentation as part of the initial application.

This will assist with ensuring the process is more streamlined and should reduce any delays caused by having to speak to applicants about their current right to work status and re-issue licences to be in line with the driver's right to work in the UK expiry date.

Once a driver receives the email to attend the council's offices to prove their right to work status, they should bring the original documents that they uploaded as part of the application process, to confirm authenticity.

This will be more efficient and time saving.



## DBS Update Service registration

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It is a requirement for all drivers with enhanced DBS certificates to remain registered with the Update Service for the period of their licence. Drivers with enhanced DBS certificates have 30 days to subscribe to the DBS Update Service at the cost of £13 a year.

The subscription will automatically be cancelled if your bank card has either expired or been replaced due to the previous card being lost or stolen.

It should be noted that manual certificates cannot be registered on the Update Service, if you have a manual certificate then a new certificate would be required by licensing services every six months.

Licensing services are notified when drivers come off the Update Service – drivers will receive an email from licensing services. To purchase a new DBS certificate, please visit: [TaxiPlus](#)

Drivers must ensure their most up-to-date card is registered with the Update Service – failure to register or remain on the DBS Update Service is a breach of the licensing conditions and can result in a licence being reviewed and can subsequently mean that a licence could be revoked or suspended or a renewal being refused.

To subscribe to the Update Service please click here. [DBS CRSC \(crbonline.gov.uk\)](https://www.crbonline.gov.uk)

Any queries regarding the Update Service can be sent to [Driver.Lic@wolverhampton.gov.uk](mailto:Driver.Lic@wolverhampton.gov.uk)

## Medical certificates

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A new medical certificate template has been added to our website. You are able to download a copy of the new certificate via our website or by clicking [here](#).

The medical certificate now contains a section that the practitioner acknowledges and signs

to confirm that your full medical records have been seen on the day of the examination. If you get your medical certificate completed by a medical practitioner other than your GP, you should request your full medical records from your GP to take to the practitioner.

## No age limits for ZEVs

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Prospective vehicle proprietors are reminded that there zero emission vehicles (ZEVs), such as full battery electric vehicles with no engine, are exempted from the council's vehicle age policy.

This is intended to spread the cost of purchasing this type of vehicle over a longer period, to incentivise their purchase.

Zero emission vehicles help to reduce air pollution, reduce carbon emissions and preserve fossil fuel reserves.

Please note that this does not apply to 'zero emissions capable' vehicles.

## Vehicle licence renewals

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Please ensure there is sufficient time for your renewal applications and submit your renewal applications and all required documents as soon as possible in order to avoid any unnecessary delays with your applications.

The vehicle expiry letters are sent out well in advance of your expiry dates but you do not need to wait for the letters if you know your licence is due to expire within the next month. Submit your renewal application and all documents using [IApply](#).

## Prom bookings – advice for parents

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We are writing to all senior schools in Wolverhampton so that parents can be warned of the dangers of using unlicensed prom and novelty vehicles.

Parents are being urged to check if the vehicle and driver are licensed, this follows on from a successful operation last year where we worked with police and driver and vehicle standards agency (DVSA), to crack down on unlicensed prom and novelty vehicles.

This resulted in a Hummer and a limousine that were being used for prom journeys being seized as well as a further three vehicles being issued with prohibition notices for dangerous faults such as illegal tyres and dangerous mechanical faults.

## Joint authorisation of compliance officers in Milton Keynes

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City of Wolverhampton Council has entered into an agreement with Milton Keynes City Council. It authorises their enforcement team lead, pursuant to Section 101 (1) (b) of the Local Government Act 1972, to undertake functions under Sections 68 and 73 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, as amended.

This means that the Milton Keynes City Council enforcement team lead is authorised to inspect and test private hire vehicles licensed by City of Wolverhampton Council working within Milton Keynes.

Should the vehicle fail the test/inspection, the Milton Keynes City Council enforcement team lead licence is authorised to suspend the licence. The suspension noticed will given in writing, requiring the proprietor to address the issue and present the vehicle for further testing/inspection.

It is important to note that it is an offence if you:

- obstruct the officer
- fail to comply with any requirement properly made acting under this authorisation
- without reasonable cause, fail to give the officer any other assistance or

information which he may reasonably require

- make a statement which you know to be false to the officer

This is a pilot scheme running until 30 September 2024, when it will be reviewed.

## Compliance strategy consultation

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A draft compliance strategy report will shortly be published for public consultation over a 12-week period and will invite comments from interested parties.

The report is a proposed strategy for the taxi compliance service and outlines how we will achieve the service's primary objective of public safety as well as our secondary objectives, which are to

1. Enforce wherever licensed our trade work and against unlicensed people in Wolverhampton.
2. Prevent discrimination against the public and trade.
3. Protect the right of the hackney carriage trade to stand and ply for hire.
4. Ensure accountability and transparency, to improve the reputation of the licensing authority.
5. Inform the trade, public and partner authorities about safe transport in the industry.

The strategy includes the different types of compliance work that we are doing and intend to do to deliver these objectives. We have also included the policy on how we would normally handle and investigate complaints made about the trade.

## Hackney carriage information

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Hackney Carriage drivers are advised that they may ply for hire anywhere within the city boundary, which can be viewed here: [City Boundary](#).

## Use reminders for important dates

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### Handy tip:-

Use your calendars in your mobile phones to remind you of important dates. These can include the following:-

- Renewal reminder date for both badges and plates
- Registration with the DBS update service
- New Right to Work documentation

This will help prevent any delays with your extensions and renewal applications.

## Love Clean Streets

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Love Clean Streets is working with councils across the country to help people report graffiti, fly-tipping or fly-posting, potholes, abandoned cars, dog mess, and many other categories.

When you make a report you can choose from a list of categories relevant to your area.

Licensed drivers cover millions of miles every year and are amongst the first to notice issues such as pot holes. Reporting these to the local council means that they can be scheduled for repair sooner, helping to keep you moving.

Please note that a pothole must be 50mm deep to be repaired.

[Click here to download it for Android.](#)

[Click here to download it for Apple.](#)

## Private hire parking

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Private hire vehicles cannot wait without a booking in an area where you would reasonably expect to find a hackney carriage.

This means that private hire drivers must not wait outside train stations, nightclubs, pubs, theatres etc. without a booking.

If you are waiting in these areas, you may be required to evidence a booking to an authorised officer of any licensing authority or the police.

It is also an offence for a private hire vehicle to enter a hackney carriage rank at any time, even to drop off or pick up pre-booked passengers.

## Question time

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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.

## Taxi CCTV policy

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Drivers are permitted to use CCTV inside their vehicle as long as it has been registered with the Information Commissioner's Office. Please see the [Taxi CCTV Policy](#) for more details. Audio recording is strictly prohibited.

CCTV has benefits for both the driver and the passenger. The advantages of using CCTV are:

- Visible surveillance cameras deterring individuals from committing a crime knowing that evidence of it will be recorded.
- Occupants of the vehicle feeling reassured that crimes, as well as malicious complaints against drivers, are less likely to occur if protected by surveillance cameras.

## How to register on the Driver Portal

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If you hold a current driver or vehicle licence with City of Wolverhampton Council, please register to use the My Licence Portal. You can use the portal to keep your licence details up to date and notify us of any amendments and changes you may have.

You need to register with your email address that is held on file. If you have amended your email address you must notify Licensing Services by emailing [driver.lic@wolverhampton.gov.uk](mailto:driver.lic@wolverhampton.gov.uk).

Once you have registered your email address, you will need to check your email account, including junk folders, for the verification email. Once you have clicked this link, your account will be activated. Follow the instructions to log in.

Once you have logged in, you can update details such as your address, operator and even report an accident.

## DfT - VAT treatment of private hire consultation

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This is to advise that a consultation on the VAT treatment of private hire vehicles has been launched by the Department for Transport. Further information is available at: [www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-the-vat-treatment-of-private-hire-vehicles](http://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/consultation-on-the-vat-treatment-of-private-hire-vehicles). We would be grateful if you can help raise awareness of this consultation.

Responses should be sent by 8 August 2024 via email to: [phvovatconsultation@hmrc.gov.uk](mailto:phvovatconsultation@hmrc.gov.uk), or by post to: HM Treasury, VAT & Excise Team, 1 Horse Guards Rd, London, SW1A 2HQ.

If you require this information in an alternative format contact:  
Correspondence Team  
HM Treasury  
1 Horse Guards Road

London  
SW1A 2HQ  
Tel: 020 7270 5000  
Email: [public.enquiries@hmtreasury.gov.uk](mailto:public.enquiries@hmtreasury.gov.uk)

## How to contact us

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For driver enquiries –  
[driver.lic@wolverhampton.gov.uk](mailto:driver.lic@wolverhampton.gov.uk)

For vehicle enquiries –  
[vehicle.lic@wolverhampton.gov.uk](mailto:vehicle.lic@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.