

RMT - TAXI DRIVER MEMBERS RESPONSE TO LICHFIELD DISTRICT COUNCIL HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE LICENSING POLICY (PROPOSED AMENDMENTS)

Introduction.

The National Union of Rail, Maritime and Transport Workers (RMT) is Britain's largest independent and specialist Transport Union with over 80000 members working in various modes of transport.

We are writing to you on behalf of RMT Taxi Driver members who serve as both Hackney & Private Hire drivers licensed by Lichfield District Council in response to the above proposed amendments to policy which we have been invited to consult on.

We are grateful for the opportunity to put forward our responses and take this opportunity to thank you for trusting in our member's expansive knowledge and real-life roadside job experience, being the consummate professional drivers that they are.

It is stated at this very early stage that our members are respectful law abiding citizens and are mindful that policies are reviewed from time to time in order to ensure that such policies remain applicable in line with current legislation and best practice. Our members wish to work with Lichfield District Council in a collaborative manner and to build upon our previous harmonious working relations to ensure that the interests of our members are taken into full consideration at all stages.

Our members should not be expected to buy into change just for changes sake.

We firmly believe that any proposed changes should not be restrictive, unduly onerous, damaging to the taxi trade or our members economic viability taking into consideration the countless on costs incurred annually by our members in ensuring that their vehicle is roadworthy and meets the current licensing standards and mandatory testing regimes.

To this end our members have suggested that Lichfield District Council set up a formal Taxi Trade Liaison Committee to meet on a regular basis with the Councils Officers and Elected

Representatives so as to ensure that issues of concern are addressed swiftly on such matters as licensing, highways or planning.

As a vital form of public transport we wish to ensure that the general public that we serve are dealt with in a respectful and dignified manner taking into consideration the many and varied “protective characteristics” within our society. At the same time we wish to receive support and protection for our members when out on the frontline and facing unruly, anti-social and even potential criminal elements.

Consultation.

This document has been compiled following limited consultation with members since receiving the consultation documents from Lichfield District Council, over a period of several weeks because of the impact of the various restrictions and guidance issued nationally by the Government due to the “Coronavirus Pandemic”.

We respectfully refer you to the guidelines contained within the following link

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/coronavirus-covid-19-taxis-and-phvs>

Therefore, in light of the respective lockdowns we have been unable to carry out a comprehensive consultation process or to bring together large numbers of our members for face to face meetings in a safe and responsible socially distanced manner so as to consider the proposed amendments to policy sufficiently and to provide a detailed response to each and every one of over 60 proposed amendment as contained within the summarised consultation document.

Furthermore, many of our members have had to shield or care for other family members throughout this awful pandemic, which has seriously restricted their ability to work and effectively “ply for hire” resulting in a significant impact on their potential earnings, financial security and standards of living.

We are sure that you will also consider that our members are heavily reliant upon a vibrant and active hospitality trade, where in the past many would work different shift patterns whether off a rank or via a radio. Regrettably that trade, due to the current pandemic and need for even more stringent lockdown measures has virtually disappeared because of the lack of travel and closure of theatres, hotels, pubs, bars, clubs, restaurants and other leisure facilities. Our members are struggling to come away with £10 per day, when all other vehicle running costs are taken into account.

Recommendation.

That Lichfield District Council suspend the current round of consultation on the proposed amendments to current policy and to review the position in three months when hopefully we may be better placed with the lifting of some of the lockdown restrictions which will allow for a more genuine and meaningful consultation to take place and for interested parties to provide more detailed and formal responses for consideration and decision.

Responses.

P1. Amendment agreed.

- P8. All Amendments agreed.
- P11. All Amendments agreed.
- P12. All Amendments agreed.
- P14. All Amendments agreed.
- P18. All Amendments agreed.
- P21. We believe this proposed amendment needs more clarity and further in depth discussion relating to “exceptional condition”, particularly as additional fees will be applied. Discussion should be held beforehand.
- P22. As above.
- P32. All Amendments accepted.
- P33. Amendment agreed.
- P35. Amendment agreed.
- P41. All Amendments agreed.
- P45. Amendment agreed.
- P48. A decision to refuse or revoke a licence on public safety grounds will be referred to the Police. Such decisions will only be taken where such evidence proves on the balance of probabilities and subject to appeal, in the interests of natural justice.
- P50. Amendment agreed.
- P51 a. Amendment agreed.
- P51 b. Amendment rejected. Ideally seek to retain 7 days as a maximum. As a compromise can live with 72hours.
- P57. Amendment agreed.
- P59. All Amendments agreed.
- P60. Amendment rejected. Ideally at least 7 years have passed since the completion of sentence and/or licence period.
- P61. Amendments agreed.
- P62 a. Amendment rejected. Ideally at least 7 years have passed since the completion of sentence and/or licence period.
- P62 b. Amendment rejected. Ideally at least 7 years have passed since the completion of sentence and/or licence period.
- P62 c. Amendment agreed with the insertion of “not” in 2nd line following will and before be.
- P63. All Amendments agreed.
- P64. Amendment rejected. Ideally a period of 3 years.
- P71. Amendment agreed.
- P73. Amendment agreed.
- P74. Amendment rejected. Ideally seek to retain 7 days as a maximum. As a compromise can live with 72hours.
- P75. Amendment agreed.
- P76. All Amendments agreed.
- P79. Amendment agreed.
- P80. Amendment rejected. Ideally seek to consistently retain 7 days as a maximum. As a compromise can live with 72hours.
- P81. Amendment agreed.
- P82. All Amendments agreed.
- P111. All Amendments agreed.

- P113. Amendment rejected. Ideally seek to consistently retain 7 days as a maximum. As a compromise can live with 72hours.
- P114. Amendment agreed.

Other Points of Concern to RMT members.

AGE & SPECIFICATION OF VEHICLES

Our members being professional drivers providing a necessary public transport service believe that the age restriction for licenced vehicles should be increased to a maximum of 10 years following the regulatory periodic inspections. This will allow our members the opportunity to recoup the capital expenditure and associated running costs taking into consideration the fair wear and tear on vehicles. Vehicle manufacturers design and build to much higher and stringent requirements of vehicle strength and integrity along with lower exhaust emissions – which are often accompanied with inflated on the road costs.

Vehicles that fall within the category “exceptional condition” we believe requires further discussion and clarity.

Our members remain concerned that such vehicles would require a costly independent Automobile engineer report that the vehicle is in immaculate condition. Furthermore, the Current policy fails to explain what exactly that report would be required to cover rather than a confirmation that a vehicle is in immaculate condition. RMT therefore respectfully suggest that further discussion is held with the trade representatives as soon as practical in the circumstances.

TAXI RANKS

Our members consistently report their concerns in respect of the taxi rank provided in town which due to the lack of monitoring has become a serious issue of them being used as “free” public parking and people leaving their vehicle after the permitted hours at the rank. The warning signage that says it is a designated taxi rank and a fine of up to £1000 for parking there is totally disregarded. We have evidence that confirms that our members have reported this to Lichfield District Council on several occasions with regrettably no visible action being pursued against offenders.

As our members have a litany of other reports relating to rank access, road closures, external un-booked licenced vehicles “pirating” for trade, etc., we believe should be addressed at a regular Trade liaison meeting as soon as practical in the circumstances.

Our members have also provided a list of issues that they perceive have not been addressed in any genuine or meaningful way which we list below and accordingly would seek to convene a meeting in order to resolve such matters.

- Introduction of WAITING TIME on to fare tariffs
- Review of all tariffs
- Driver Penalty Point scheme

- Table of Tariff – point 60
- Table of Tariff – point 32
- Table of Tariff – point 3

In light of the current issues which affect our members on a daily basis both prior to and during this world wide health crisis and pandemic we seek a degree of understanding and appreciation for the hardships our members have endured so far and accordingly we request that a meeting is convened as soon as practical to address our members legitimate and reasonable concerns.

I shall look forward to your response in due course.

With best wishes,

Ken Usher.
RMT Midlands Regional Organiser.