

GUIDANCE ON DETERMINING THE SUITABILITY OF APPLICANTS IN THE HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE TRADES

1. Many members of our society use, and even rely on, hackney carriages and private hire vehicles to provide transportation services. This can be on a regular basis, or only occasionally, but in all cases passengers, other road users and society as a whole must have confidence in the safety and suitability of the driver, the vehicle itself and anyone involved with the booking process.
2. All those involved in the hackney carriage and private hire trades (hackney carriage and private hire drivers, hackney carriage and private hire vehicle owners and private hire operators) should be persons of the highest integrity. This is true, of the vast majority of those involved in these trades, they are decent, upstanding, honest and hard-working individuals. Unfortunately, as in any occupation or trade, there are those few who fail to conform to those standards.
3. The purpose of this document is to offer guidance on how licensing authorities can determine whether a particular person is safe and suitable either to be granted a licence in the first place or to retain such a licence. A policy can be robust, it can include terms such as never, but each case is then considered on its own merits in the light of that policy.
4. Any decision by a licensing authority to refuse, suspend or revoke a licence can be appealed through the courts.

Pre-application requirements

5. Licensing authorities are entitled to set their own pre-application requirements. These will vary depending upon the type of licence in question but can include some or all of the following (these are not exhaustive lists):

Vehicles:

- Basic DBS checks;
- Specifications e.g. minimum number of doors, minimum seat size, headroom, boot space etc;
- Mechanical tests and tests of the maintenance of the vehicle e.g. ripped seats etc;
- Emission limits/vehicle age limits;
- Wheelchair accessibility requirements.

Drivers:

- Enhanced DBS checks with update service;
- Checks made to the National Anti Fraud Network database on refusals and revocations of
- hackney carriage and private hire licences (when available);
- Medical checks;
- Knowledge of the geographic area;
- Spoken and written English tests;
- Disability awareness training;
- Child sexual exploitation and safeguarding training.

Operators:

- Basic DBS checks;
 - Details of their vetting procedures for their staff;
 - Knowledge of the licensing area.
6. In relation to each of these licences, the licensing authority has discretion as to whether or not to grant the licence.
 7. Drivers and operators cannot be granted a licence unless the authority is satisfied that they are a “fit and proper person” to hold that licence (see Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 ss 51 and 59 in respect of drivers; s55 in respect of operators).
 8. There are no statutory criteria for vehicle licences, therefore the authority has an absolute discretion over whether to grant either a hackney carriage or private hire proprietor’s licence.
 9. “Fit and proper” means that the individual (or in the case of a private hire operator’s licence, the limited company together with its directors and secretary, or all members of a partnership) is “safe and suitable” to hold the licence.
 10. In determining safety and suitability the licensing authority is entitled to take into account all matters concerning that applicant or licensee. They are not simply concerned with that person’s behaviour whilst working in the hackney carriage or private hire trade. This consideration is far wider than simply criminal convictions or other evidence of unacceptable behaviour, and the entire character of the individual will be considered. This can include, but is not limited to, the individual’s attitude and temperament.
 11. Convictions for attempt or conspiracy will be regarded as convictions for the substantive crime. A caution is regarded in exactly the same way as a conviction. Fixed penalties and community resolutions will also be considered in the same way as a conviction.
 12. It is important to recognise that matters which have not resulted in a criminal conviction can and will be taken into account by the licensing authority where appropriate. In addition, complaints where there was no police involvement will also be considered. Within this document, any reference to “conviction” will also include matters that amount to criminal behaviour, but which have not resulted in a conviction. However appropriate weight must be applied to the evidence available.
 13. In the case of any new applicant who has been charged with any offence and is awaiting trial, the determination will be deferred until the trial has been completed or the charges withdrawn. Where an existing licensee is charged, it will be for the licensing authority to decide what action to take in the light of these guidelines.
 14. In all cases, the licensing authority will consider the conviction or behaviour in question and what weight should be attached to it, and each and every case will be determined on its own merits, and in the light of these guidelines.

15. Any offences committed, or unacceptable behaviour reported connected to a taxi licence will be viewed as aggravating features, and the fact that any other offences were not connected with the hackney carriage and private hire trades will not be seen as mitigating factors.
16. As the licensing authority will be looking at the entirety of the individual, in many cases safety and suitability will not be determined by a specified period of time having elapsed following a conviction or the completion of a sentence. Time periods are relevant and weighty considerations, but they are not the only determining factor.
17. In addition to the nature of the offence or other behaviour, the quantity of matters and the period over which they were committed will also be considered. Patterns of repeated unacceptable or criminal behaviour are likely to cause greater concern than isolated occurrences as such patterns can demonstrate a propensity for such behaviour or offending.
18. Most applicants or licensees will have no convictions and that is clearly the ideal situation. In relation to other people, it is accepted that human beings do make mistakes and lapse in their conduct for a variety of reasons, and it is further accepted that many learn from experience and do not go on to commit further offences. Accordingly, in many cases an isolated conviction, especially if committed some time ago, may not prevent the grant or renewal of a licence.
19. It is also important to recognise that once a licence has been granted, there is a continuing requirement on the part of the licensee to maintain their safety and suitability. The licensing authority has powers to take action against the holder of all types of licence (driver's, vehicle and operator's) and it must be understood that any convictions or other actions on the part of the licensee which would have prevented them being granted a licence on initial application will lead to that licence being revoked.
20. Any dishonesty by any applicant or other person on the applicant's behalf which is discovered to have occurred in any part of any application process (e.g. failure to declare convictions, false names or addresses, falsified references, cheating in tests) will result in a licence being refused, or if already granted, revoked and may result in prosecution.
21. As the direct impact on the public varies depending upon the type of licence applied for or held, it is necessary to consider the impact of particular offences on those licences separately. However, there are some overriding considerations which will apply in all circumstances.
22. Generally, where a person has more than one criminal conviction, this will raise serious questions about their safety and suitability. The licensing authority is looking for safe and suitable individuals, and once a pattern or trend of repeated offending is apparent, a licence will not be granted or renewed.
23. Where an applicant/licensee is convicted of an offence which is not detailed in this guidance, the licensing authority will take that conviction into account and use these guidelines as an indication of the approach that should be taken.

24. These guidelines do not replace the duty of the licensing authority to refuse to grant a licence where they are not satisfied that the applicant or licensee is a fit and proper person. Where a situation is not covered by these guidelines, the authority must consider the matter from first principles and determine the fitness and propriety of the individual.

Drivers

25. There is no evidence which can provide precise periods of time which must elapse after a crime before a person can no longer be considered to be a risk of reoffending, but the risk reduces over time. In light of that, the suggested timescales below are intended to reduce the risk to the public to an acceptable level.
26. As the criteria for determining whether an individual should be granted or retain a hackney carriage driver's licence are identical to the criteria for a private hire driver's licence, the two are considered together.
27. A driver has direct responsibility for the safety of their passengers, direct responsibility for the safety of other road users and significant control over passengers who are in the vehicle. As those passengers may be alone, and may also be vulnerable, any previous convictions or unacceptable behaviour will weigh heavily against a licence being granted or retained.
28. As stated above, where an applicant has more than one conviction showing a pattern or tendency irrespective of time since the convictions, serious consideration will need to be given as to whether they are a safe and suitable person.
29. In relation to single convictions, the following time periods should elapse following completion of the sentence (or the date of conviction if a fine was imposed) before a licence will be granted.

Crimes resulting in death

30. Where an applicant or licensee has been convicted of a crime which resulted in the death of another person or was intended to cause the death or serious injury of another person they will not be licensed.

Exploitation

31. Where an applicant or licensee has been convicted of a crime involving, related to, or has any connection with abuse, exploitation, use or treatment of another individual irrespective of whether the victim or victims were adults or children, they will not be licensed. This includes slavery, child sexual exploitation, grooming, psychological, emotional, financial or domestic abuse, but this is not an exhaustive list.

Offences involving violence

32. Where an applicant has a conviction for an offence of violence, or connected with any offence of violence, a licence will not be granted until at least 10 years have elapsed since the completion of any sentence imposed.

Possession of a weapon

33. Where an applicant has a conviction for possession of a weapon or any other weapon related offence, a licence will not be granted until at least 7 years have elapsed since the completion of any sentence imposed.

Sex and indecency offences

34. Where an applicant has a conviction for any offence involving or connected with illegal sexual activity or any form of indecency, a licence will not be granted.
35. In addition to the above, the licensing authority will not grant a licence to any applicant who is currently on the Sex Offenders Register or on any 'barred' list.

Dishonesty

36. Where an applicant has a conviction for any offence of dishonesty, or any offence where dishonesty is an element of the offence, a licence will not be granted until at least 7 years have elapsed since the completion of any sentence imposed.

Drugs

37. Where an applicant has any conviction for, or related to, the supply of drugs, or possession with intent to supply or connected with possession with intent to supply, a licence will not be granted until at least 10 years have elapsed since the completion of any sentence imposed.
38. Where an applicant has a conviction for possession of drugs, or related to the possession of drugs, a licence will not be granted until at least 5 years have elapsed since the completion of any sentence imposed. In these circumstances, any applicant will also have to undergo drugs testing at their own expense to demonstrate that they are not using controlled drugs.

Discrimination

39. Where an applicant has a conviction involving or connected with discrimination in any form, a licence will not be granted until at least 7 years have elapsed since the completion of any sentence imposed.

Motoring convictions - Minor traffic offences

40. You can still apply for a licence if you have a conviction for a minor traffic offence such as obstruction, waiting in a restricted street, speeding, etc. Hackney carriage and private hire drivers are professional drivers charged with the responsibility of carrying the public. It is accepted that offences can be committed unintentionally, and a single occurrence of a minor traffic offence would not prohibit the granting of a licence. However, applicants with multiple motoring convictions may indicate that an applicant or licence holder does not exhibit the behaviours of a safe road user and one that is suitable to drive professionally.
41. If as a current licence holder you accumulate 9 or more penalty points on your driving licence while you have a Council licence, you must undertake at your own expense a Council-approved driver's awareness course and pass a council approved driver assessment. You will have two months in which to complete both

the assessment and awareness course. After that, we will suspend your council licence until the assessment is completed and passed.

42. If you have acquired 12 or more penalty points on your licence the authority will expect you to be conviction free for a period of at least 3 years before a licence is granted when you will undertake a new driver application.

Motoring convictions - Major traffic offences (offences that can attract more than 3 points for a single offence)

43. To have a conviction for a major traffic offence demonstrates the driver does not take their professional responsibilities seriously. The council will expect applicants and licence holders to be free of such convictions for a period of at least 5 years and longer for offences that result in an immediate driving ban.

Drink driving/driving under the influence of drugs/using a hand-held telephone or hand held device whilst driving

44. Where an applicant has a conviction for drink driving or driving under the influence of drugs, a licence will not be granted until at least 7 years have elapsed since the completion of any sentence or driving ban imposed. In these circumstances, any applicant will also have to undergo drugs testing at their own expense to demonstrate that they are not using controlled drugs.
45. Where an applicant has a conviction for using a held-hand mobile telephone or a hand-held device whilst driving, a licence will not be granted until at least five years have elapsed since the conviction or completion of any sentence or driving ban imposed, whichever is the later.

Private Hire Operators

46. A private hire operator (“an operator”) does not have direct responsibility for the safety of passengers, other road users or direct contact with passengers who are in the private hire vehicle (except where they are also licensed as a private hire driver). However, in performing their duties they obtain and hold considerable amounts of personal and private information about their passengers which must be treated in confidence and not revealed to others, or used by the operator or their staff for criminal or other unacceptable purposes.
47. As stated above, where an applicant has more than one conviction, serious consideration will need to be given as to whether they are a safe and suitable person.
48. Operators must ensure that any staff that are used within the business (whether employees or independent contractors) and are able to access any information as described above are subject to the same standards as the operator themselves. This can be affected by means of the individual staff member being required by the operator to obtain a basic DBS certificate. If an operator is found not to be applying the required standards and using staff that do not meet the licensing authority’s overall criteria, that will lead to the operator’s licence being revoked.

49. As public trust and confidence in the overall safety and integrity of the private hire system is vital, the same standards will be applied to operators as those applied to drivers, which are outlined above.

Vehicle proprietors

50. Vehicle proprietors (both hackney carriage and private hire) have two principal responsibilities.
51. Firstly, they must ensure that the vehicle is maintained to an acceptable standard at all times.
52. Secondly, they must ensure that the vehicle is not used for illegal or illicit purposes.
53. As stated above, where an applicant has more than one conviction, serious consideration will need to be given as to whether they are a safe and suitable person to be granted or retain a vehicle licence.
54. As public trust and confidence in the overall safety and integrity of the private hire system is vital, the same standards will be applied to proprietors as those applied to drivers, which are outlined above.