

Hackney carriage and private hire newsletter April 2022

Welcome to the West Suffolk Council April 2022 hackney carriage and private hire newsletter containing updates on COVID-19, changes to the Mobility Bill, upcoming changes to right to licence, requirement to check income tax, taxi refresher courses and updated medical forms.

Please continue to check our webpage for regular updates:

<https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/taxi>

COVID-19 guidance

Please continue to consult the Government website for important updates on coronavirus.

[GOV.UK - People with symptoms of a respiratory infection including COVID-19](https://www.gov.uk/guidance/people-with-symptoms-of-a-respiratory-infection-including-covid-19)

There is no longer a legal requirement for people with COVID-19 infection to self-isolate. However, if you have any of the main symptoms of COVID-19 or a positive test result, the public health advice is to stay at home and avoid contact with other people.

Face coverings

There is no longer a legal requirement to wear a face covering. The government suggests that you continue to wear a face covering in crowded and enclosed spaces where you may come into contact with other people you do not normally meet.

Operators are free to set their own requirements for wearing face coverings.

- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): safer transport guidance for operators and people who work in or from vehicles](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): safer travel guidance for passengers](#)
- [Coronavirus \(COVID-19\): taxis and PHVs](#)

Please note that guidance is subject to change as per any government updates.

We are currently experiencing a high volume of calls and applications for all the licensing requirements under the Licensing Act, not just taxis or private hire. To allow urgent matters to be prioritised, please consult our website for any general enquiries in the first instance or email licensing@westsuffolk.gov.uk.

Please continue to submit all applications and supporting documentation via email to licensing@westsuffolk.gov.uk. You will receive an acknowledgment within three working days. Please only call or email if you do not receive an acknowledgment within this time frame.

Licensing team contact details

Email: licensing@westsuffolk.gov.uk

Website: <https://www.westsuffolk.gov.uk/taxi>

Phone: 01284 758050 Customer Services Licensing

Plate and badge collection

All plate and badge collections continue to be made via an agreed appointment with the licensing team. These collections will only be made from West Suffolk House where a member of the team will be available to assist you. Please ensure you submit your applications at least 14 days before expiry to ensure we have time to process, validate and arrange collection before the expiry date. A confirmation email will be sent by the licensing team confirming the date and time for collection.

Consultation on changes to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Conditions Policy Handbook.

We have emailed you separately, but a reminder that we are currently consulting on a package of licensing changes – this is in direct response to the independent survey on wheelchair accessible vehicles plus a wider review of some of our existing policies.

The proposed changes are:

- To remove all wheelchair accessible vehicle requirements for hackney carriage vehicle licensees.
- To merge the two existing taxi zones in West Suffolk into one single zone.
- To increase the maximum age of vehicle limit to 15 years old to allow more time for the trade to recover from the pandemic, and for advancements in electric vehicle charging technology, infrastructure, and vehicle options. This new age limit would still mean those taxis emitting the highest carbon emissions would be removed from the roads in 2025.

The three proposals should not be considered in isolation to each other. The changes to the WAV requirement for instance will not happen without the changes to the taxi zones.

We hope that these proposed changes offer a workable solution that will allow us to address the current imbalance of wheelchair accessible vehicle provision without having to stick to our existing policy.

Our longer-term aim is still to work together with the taxi trade to ensure we have a thriving, safe, accessible, and greener fleet. That will still include a level of wheelchair accessible vehicle provision and we will still have a legal responsibility to ensure that the needs and safety of the travelling public is met. This will require further policy changes as we approach 2030.

But in the shorter term, we recognise that the taxi trade needs to recover from the impact of the pandemic, and that the trade plays a significant role in supporting our local economy, including leisure, tourism, and education.

Have your say at [West Suffolk Council - West Suffolk taxi policy consultation 2022](#)

Mobility Bill changes being considered by Parliament

For many of the more than 14 million people in the United Kingdom with a disability, taxis and private hire vehicles are a vital means of transport and access to daily freedoms that most of us take for granted. The willingness of taxi and private hire vehicle drivers to carry people with disabilities and to offer the extra help that makes their journeys manageable therefore matters hugely to the capacity of people with disabilities to get around at all.

Adding to the Equality Act the bill is considering a duty for drivers to carry mobility aids used by the passenger unless it would be unsafe or otherwise unreasonable to do so. For passengers needing mobility assistance, the bill will require drivers to offer such assistance as is reasonably required.

The bill also follows the example of the Equality Act in making it clear that no additional charge may be made for complying with the duties that it provides for; neither can it be acceptable for drivers or taxi or private hire vehicle operating companies simply to refuse to carry disabled passengers at all to evade these duties.

This is for information at this time as the Bill is still with parliament and licensing will update drivers if it becomes law.

Medicals

The medical forms have been updated this month again and are available on our website. [West Suffolk Council D4 Medical Form](#)

No older forms will be accepted so please ensure you submit the current version from our website to ensure your application is not rejected. It is a standard Group 2 medical form with a cover page and end page specific to west Suffolk. Medicals must be carried out by a Registered General Practitioner. You can check if someone is a Registered GP on the General Medical Council (GMC) website: [GMC - The medical register](#). The GP must have access to your full medical records and complete the West Suffolk Council covering page in full. Please make sure they have completed this correctly before you leave your appointment.

A Group 2 medical will be valid up to the applicant's 45th birthday. Thereafter, a further Group 2 medical will be required every five years at ages 50, 55 and 60 until the age of 65. The medical will then be required every year thereafter. The council will not accept Medics on Wheels Group 2 Medicals at any time.

If you are not sure when your medical is due, please email us to check.

Due to current issues with getting medical appointments, you may wish to book this in advance. Medicals are valid for four months from the date of examination.

Please ensure you inform licensing immediately should your medical condition change.

Right to licence

Licensing authorities are required to ensure that driver and operator licences must not be issued to people who are illegally present in the UK, who are not permitted to work, or who are permitted to work but are subject to a condition that prohibits them from holding such a licence. This applies to all new applications, re-licences, and requests to extend a current licence.

To ensure the above requirement, drivers and operators will be required to provide documentation when applying for a licence or re-licence that evidences your right to work in the UK, and licensing officers will have to see these original documents when licences and badges are collected.

Refresher safeguarding and disability course

From 1 June 2022, drivers applying to re-licence must undertake a refresher course prior to the grant of their new licence and provide the completion certificate as part of their application. This is to ensure that applicants and licenced drivers are receiving the most up to date information at the time of the application. This has been in the taxi handbook since 2020 however the course itself due to COVID has not been available.

The courses are now available to book on to and are available in Bury St Edmunds and Haverhill [West Suffolk College - Find your perfect course](#). The course is called 'Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver Safeguarding Training' and is a half day course.

Failure to attend or provide evidence of course booking will result in the application being rejected from 1 June.

Tax conditionality

New tax requirements for applications to certain licences are being put in place by the Government. The tax check should only take a few minutes every few years and it is simply to confirm that someone is appropriately registered for tax.

Existing licence holders will be required to complete a tax check from 4 April 2022 for any re-licence application for combined hackney carriage and private hire drivers' licence and private hire vehicle operator's licence.

The tax check can be completed on the Government website, through a Government Gateway account [CGOV.UK - Complete a tax check for a taxi, private hire or scrap metal licence](#)

When the tax check is complete, a code will be issued. This code must be given to the council. The licence application or renewal cannot be processed until the tax check is completed and the code provided.

The council will not have access to any information about tax details, they will only receive confirmation that the tax check is completed.

More information regarding the tax check can be found here – [GOV.UK - Tax check factsheet](#) or here – [GOV.UK - Changes for taxi, private hire or scrap metal licence applications from April 2022](#).

Existing licence holders are encouraged to visit this website as soon as possible to ensure they understand the requirements before their licence is due for renewal. (This affects licences due for re-licence from 4 April 2022 onwards).

New driver courses

West Suffolk College are currently running courses for new drivers every other month. The next courses are scheduled for 19 April and 21 June 2022.

Courses can be booked via the west Suffolk College website:
[West Suffolk College - Find your perfect course](#)