

Comment from Consultee	Response by Officer
<p>Training: Does the BTEC Level 2 include a module on disability awareness? The policy should be clear that disability awareness is a required element of training?</p>	<p>The BTEC Level 2 Course does include a disability awareness module. The Licensing Team have included this into the policy under the Course Details.</p>
<p>2.19.2 All existing drivers on renewal will be expected to undertake the BTEC Level 2 in an Introduction to the Role of a Professional Taxi & Private Hire Driver Course and this training will be carried out at the drivers expense</p> <p>The majority of drivers who have been in the industry as long as we have are more than aware of these regulations and have been executing their duties accordingly. Whilst we can understand the need for new inexperienced drivers entering the trade to take this BTEC as a way of fast tracking their knowledge it is ultimately no replacement for time served skills. We find it questionable to expect the older generation who are often computer illiterate to complete this course.</p> <p>For years it has been compulsory to carry fire extinguishers and first aid boxes yet there has been no stipulation for us to know how to operate either. No courses have been made mandatory for either of these, so it is difficult to understand why are going from one extreme to the other. We feel a certain amount of “grandfather rights” should be applicable whereby people who have been in this work for upwards of ten years and have practiced these requirements should be spared the necessity or expenditure of a BTEC qualification.</p> <p>It is also a consideration that in this area some of the newest drivers are Asians and are perfectly able to execute their duties however English is not their mother tongue and this will just be another barrier to retaining the services of current drivers or indeed recruiting new ones.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team acknowledge this is an extra cost to the driver however the benefits of the course are that all drivers will be trained to a higher standard and this in turn will ensure that the drivers on the road are fit and proper to hold such a licence.</p> <p>The course will ensure all drivers have disability awareness and safeguarding training and other vital information to ensure they are fully compliant with their obligations in relation to protecting the public and compliant with the July 2020 Safeguarding Standards as set by the Department for Transport.</p> <p>Though the Licensing Team acknowledge you have never had “first aid training” this isn’t a requirement as the provision of a first aid kit is for your safety and wellbeing under the Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981 as a self-employed worker. You must not administer First aid to another individual unless you have been first aid trained. This is covered under the BTEC Course.</p> <p>The requirement to carry a fire extinguisher is under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 and the type required is under this policy. It is a legal requirement to carry this there is no legal requirement to use it. The Licensing Team would advise if your vehicle is on fire to remove yourself to a safe distance and call the emergency services.</p> <p>The course requires a good understanding of the English Language.</p>

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<p>6.1.5 Be no more than 8 years of age at the date of first registration. Considering the cost of purchase and set up incurred this needs to be more flexible as the initial outlay will be a prohibitive factor to many people currently licensed and any who may be considering joining the trade.</p>	<p>The Vehicle can be no older than 8 years of age when you first apply to licence the vehicle.</p> <p>Once the vehicle reaches 10 years of age more frequent testing is required.</p>
<p>6.1.8 The Council strongly recommend new, or replacement vehicles be either Hybrid or Electrical. What a wonderful it will be at some point in the future when this becomes the norm. However, at the moment very few people have secure parking spaces where they can charge their electric cars safely. The new housing estates that we weave our way through often have no provision for parking on their drives or in their garages and at the moment all I have is a mental vision of dozens of extension leads criss crossing their ways to the cars. It's nice saying they need to have a range of 140 miles. Brilliant I can get someone to the airport IF I don't use the radio, don't use my lights, don't have anything else that draws power however it has been proven unviable so far by Ipswich drivers who drop their passengers in Stowmarket Railway Station Yard as they will not do any further onward travel as they are electric. I feel that at the moment Electric cars are not the answer however they will come into play in the future. At the moment we need to be allowed to continue with our vehicles and have the ability to update them with newer ones until all petrol and diesel cars are phased out and it is possible to purchase a Hybrid/Electrical one second hand at a realistic price as opposed £25-£30k outlay a new one that would currently be prohibitive for many.</p>	<p>The Council recognises the need to move towards a greener fleet for the benefit of the environment.</p> <p>The motor trade is also moving in this direction under the central government direction to cease the sale of all new petrol and diesel cars by 2030.</p> <p>Given the current infrastructure and cost constraints it is impractical to require the trade to change wholesale to greener vehicles in the short term however the team are actively researching and looking into the development of an incentive scheme to encourage a move towards carbon reduction in line with the Council's Climate Change Strategy.</p>

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<p>6.1.12 The following categories of vehicle are unacceptable to be licensed: City Cars, Supermini, Small Family etc.</p> <p>As long as any vehicles we replace fall within the stipulated remit regarding head clearance/leg room as set by yourself then surely this is a step forward for the moment. Recently we have been looking at vehicles newer than the ones we currently drive. We have chosen to look only at estate vehicles as they can accommodate wheelchair/walking frames/ buggies etc however the majority have fallen into the (small family car) bracket as stipulated by Licensing and as such are not allowed. However, we can purchase a saloon car which is unsuitable to convey the above-mentioned items but falls within the Council's remit. By restricting our choice of purchase the Council will be restricting our ability to carry certain passengers such as my little old ladies that both need walking frames. They will now need to travel separately and will each be charged separately as their walkers would not fit into the boot of a saloon car. We understand where the Council are coming from on this issue, but a level of practicality should be considered before the blanket ban on (small family cars) is introduced. We personally feel this will discriminate against anyone who needs the use of walkers/prams etc.</p> <p>We are not Councillors nor specialists in the transport of special needs people however we have continued to do our best to ensure that travel is accessible to all and can assist with wheelchairs and offer the use of turntables for ease of access if required.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team propose to remove the additional condition regarding, City Cars, supermini and Small family cars as the comment rightly highlights the team have already incorporated conditions that stipulate, door provision, engine capacity and interior dimensions.</p> <p>The statement regarding not being specialists in the transport of disabled individuals highlights the necessity of having the BTEC Course which incorporates disability awareness training.</p>

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<p>2.19.1 All new applicants are required to undertake the BTEC Level 2 course in an Introduction to the Role of a Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver. This training is to be carried out at the drivers' expense and a pass certificate presented to the Council prior to acquiring a Combined Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Driver Badge. Refresher training will be required on a three-yearly basis. Drivers will be advised by the Licensing Team when refresher training is due.</p> <p>2.19.2 All existing drivers on renewal will be expected to undertake the BTEC Level 2 in an Introduction to the Role of a Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver course and this training is to be carried out at the drivers' expense. A pass certificate must be presented to the Council within six months of the renewal of their Combined Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Driver Badge. Refresher training will be required on a three-yearly basis. Drivers will be advised by the Licensing Team when refresher training is due.</p> <p>FOR NON-DRIVER OPERATORS (including all partners and company directors) 10.2.3 Applicants are required to undertake the BTEC Level 2 course in an Introduction to the Role of a Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver. This training is to be carried out at the applicants expense and a pass certificate presented to the Council prior to acquiring a Private Hire Operators.</p> <p>I worry that 2.19.1 the requirement for new drivers to undertake this course at their expense will introduce a barrier to entry that for people wanting to enter the industry on a part time basis may consider to high either financially or in terms of difficulty to achieve.</p> <p>Please note that we have already noticed increased difficulty in finding new part time drivers with the addition of the knowledge test. As stated above most of my part time staff are working on a single Suffolk County council issued route consistently.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team acknowledge this is an extra cost to the driver however the benefits of the course are that all drivers will be trained to a higher standard and this in turn will ensure that the drivers on the road are fit and proper to hold such a licence.</p> <p>The course will ensure all drivers have disability awareness and safeguarding training and other vital information to ensure they are fully compliant with their obligations in relation to protecting the public and compliant with the July 2020 Safeguarding Standards as set by the Department for Transport.</p>

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<p>Continued</p> <p>“3. CONDUCT OF ALL DRIVERS” if fit for purpose should already be a comprehensive policy that ensures that drivers remain professional and thus I struggle to understand what benefits an introductory course could offer. In respect to 2.19.2 I find it rather contemptuous that all existing drivers would be made to undertake a course called “an Introduction to the Role of a Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver”. I, like many other existing licenced drivers, have been working in the industry for many years and have operated in a professional manner throughout those years. The fact that we have been working in the industry and have abided by “3. CONDUCT OF ALL DRIVERS” without complaint for so long should be evidence enough that we do not need undertake an introductory course in being a Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver. I am sure many if not all other existing licensed drivers will take offence at this proposal.</p> <p>10.2.3 Goes on to extend the need for qualification in “BTEC Level 2 course in an Introduction to the Role of a Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver” to all partners and company directors. I fail to see why all partners and company directors should be required to take this introductory course, provided that the director(s) or partner(s) who are in charge of the licenced operations are adequately knowledgeable of the councils policies (e.g myself, an operations manager who has been working in the industry for years). It would be detrimental to impose that all partners and company directors have this knowledge as there is no need for a financial backer (silent partner) to be qualified and it could introduce another barrier for anyone wishing to invest in the industry.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team acknowledge this is an extra cost to the driver however the benefits of the course are that all drivers will be trained to a higher standard and this in turn will ensure that the drivers on the road are fit and proper to hold such a licence.</p> <p>The course will ensure all drivers have disability awareness and safeguarding training and other vital information to ensure they are fully compliant with their obligations in relation to protecting the public and compliant with the July 2020 Safeguarding Standards as set by the Department for Transport.</p> <p>Under 10.2.3 the purpose of this requirement is to ensure all directors or partners who are named on the application form will have to undertake the BTEC Level 2 course to ensure they are fully compliant as they are in a position of trust.</p>

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<p>6.1.2 All licensed vehicles shall comply in all respects with the requirements set out below as appropriate for the type of vehicle (Hackney Carriage or Private Hire Vehicles including Stretched Limousines). This is in addition to all requirements of the Road Traffic legislation, which relates to all motor vehicles. 6.1.5 Be no more than eight years of age since the date of first registration</p> <p>The wording currently used in 6.1.5 when taken with the context of 6.1.2 states that “All licensed vehicles shall be no more than eight years of age since the date of first registration”. The retirement of vehicles based on age is not going to be good for the environment, as the majority of the carbon footprint in the production the new vehicle, and I would draw comparison to the environmental issues with so called “fast fashion”. In my opinion vehicles should be used for as long as possible while remaining financially viable as the impact on the environment from vehicle production (including all environmental impact in the acquisition of a new vehicle and disposal of old vehicles) is far higher than that of a vehicle remaining in use for longer. The forced retirement of vehicles based on age, especially such a young one, will not be financially feasible for the industry in the vast majority of cases.</p> <p>I don’t believe that this is what 6.1.5 is supposed to mean and I believe that the correct wording should read “In applications for a new Hackney Carriage or Private Hire Vehicle licence, the vehicle shall be no more than eight years of age since the date of first registration at the time of application”. This will make far more sense and help with the move towards a greener taxi and PHV fleet. In the vast majority of cases 8 passenger vehicles are built on a commercial platform that is designed to last for longer periods and higher mileages. Couple this with the higher purchasing price at new and higher residual values when used and I feel that there is a fair case to increase the age from 8 years to 12 or more years for 8 passenger vehicles specifically so as to not outweigh any incentive for owners to acquire 8 seater vehicles. This may, in a lot of cases, also be applicable to wheelchair vehicles as the purchase price and residual values when used are so high in comparison to a standard 4 or 6 passenger vehicles. Without doubt it would be detrimental to the needs of wheelchair uses if any benefits of an operator offering a wheelchair accessible vehicle were outweighed by the financial outlay.</p>	<p>The Vehicle can be no older than 8 years of age when you first apply to licence the vehicle.</p> <p>Once the vehicle reaches 10 years of age more frequent testing is required.</p> <p>The Council’s main priorities are public protection and public safety therefore the age requirement and more frequent testing for fossil fuelled vehicles is the appropriate balance between the priorities of the Council and the needs of the trade.</p>

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<p>6.1.11 Any application for a new Hackney Carriage or Private Hire Vehicle for 8 passengers must be Wheelchair accessible.</p> <p>I fear that a policy such as 6.1.11 fails to recognise the cost implications in regard to acquiring 8 passenger vehicles, wheelchair accessible vehicles and 8 passenger vehicles that are also Wheelchair accessible, nor the physical size, engine capacity and layout of the vast majority of 8 passenger vehicles that are also wheelchair accessible that are currently on the new and used market.</p> <p>As a company we have had many 8 passenger vehicles that are also wheelchair accessible and have found that in most cases they are in the form of long wheelbase high top vehicles that usually come fitted with larger engines due to the commercial platforms primary uses in the eyes of the manufacturer, or if not, are smaller short wheel base vehicles that are unpractical for non-wheelchair users that are traveling with a wheelchair user (for example a family that has a member who is a wheelchair user.) Couple these issues with that stated above in response to 6.1.5 and I think that this policy will have not only an adverse effect on wheelchair users but also on families and larger groups who wish to travel as the benefits of acquiring such a vehicle will be far outweighed by the financial outlay. My business in particular has in the past acquired vehicles like these for use on Suffolk County council routes and have then had the vehicles available for when other wheelchair users wish to use our services. If this policy was to be implemented, I will not be in the position to acquire any future 8 passenger vehicles!</p> <p>If the Council’s intention with this policy is to improve the availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles, I would suggest as above in response to 6.1.5 to increase the age that newly licenced vehicles can be from 8 years to 12 or more years for wheelchair access vehicles and 8 passenger vehicles (regardless if they are 8 passenger vehicles that are also wheelchair accessible). This would create an incentive for an operator to acquire wheelchair accessible vehicles and 8 passenger vehicles over a standard 4 or 6 passenger vehicles. This would in turn improve access to transport for wheelchair users and larger families and groups that, in a lot of cases, are currently having to book multiple smaller vehicles.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team need to make sure there is sufficient provision of wheelchair accessible vehicles in the district. As part of this policy review the team approached the Suffolk Disability Forum who undertook a Survey with disabled passengers, and it was identified that more disabled people prebooked their journeys with Private Hire vehicles as these were easier to access however, they identified that this provision is sometimes lacking when they approach operators.</p> <p>The costs for Wheelchair accessible vehicles varies. The maximum age when first licensing the vehicle is proposed to be 8 years of age therefore the driver can purchase a second-hand vehicle that was registered in 2014.</p>

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<p>Continued The Council could use a similar incentive to steer operators into the purchase of hybrids and electric vehicles over petrol and diesel. As mentioned in 6.1.8 The Council strongly recommends that new and replacement vehicles are either hybrid or electric, however if also imposing a maximum age for vehicles when applying for a new application, then, as in the case of 8 passenger vehicles and wheelchair accessible vehicles, the higher purchasing price at new and higher residual values when used may make it un financially viable for an operator to choose a hybrid or electric vehicle over a petrol and diesel equivalent. I would suggest again to increase the age that newly licenced vehicles can be from 8 years to 12 or more years for hybrids and potentially an even bigger increase for fully electric vehicles as the emissions of operating a fully electric vehicle are so low.</p>	<p>The Council recognises the need to move towards a greener fleet for the benefit of the environment.</p> <p>The motor trade is also moving in this direction under the central government direction to cease the sale of all new petrol and diesel cars by 2030.</p> <p>Given the current infrastructure and cost constraints it is impractical to require the trade to change wholesale to greener vehicles in the short term however the team are actively researching and looking into the development of an incentive scheme to encourage a move towards carbon reduction in line with the Council’s Climate Change Strategy.</p>
<p>6.15.4 Self-adhesive identification signs as approved by the Council, indicating that insurance is invalid unless the vehicle is booked by private hire, must be affixed to the drivers’ door and front passenger door panels of the vehicle. These signs should not be tampered with in any way and must be displayed at all times whilst the vehicle has current private hire vehicle plate affixed.</p> <p>The way 6.15.4 is currently worded is factually incorrect. None of my private hire vehicle’s insurance is invalid simply because it is not booked. If this were the case I would be driving without valid insurance whenever I did not have a paying passenger. So as to be factually correct I would change the wording “indicating that insurance may be invalid if the vehicle is booked by means other than private hire”. Although I can see no need for the statement to be affixed to the drivers and front passengers’ doors as the nature of a private hire vehicle is pre booked in any case.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team having taken on board your comments on this matter. The team propose to remove this from the policy.</p>

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<p>6.16.1 Any advertising on the vehicle must be restricted to the name, logo or insignia, telephone number, free-phone number, fax number, email address or web site of the owner or operator of the vehicle. Advertising of other businesses or products or services is not permitted, including art works, emblems, symbols, slogans, or other displays of any kind.</p> <p>I feel that 6.16.1 is detrimental to not only the local taxi and PHV industry but also to other local industries. I can see no better time than now to allow the advertising of other businesses as many of our local businesses are struggling to regain traffic after the recent covid restrictions. Advertisements for other local businesses would not only help the taxi and PHV industry with a small income stream but also offers a fantastic way for local businesses to advertise. A statement in the policy such as “all advertising of other businesses must first be approved by the council” would ensure that the aesthetic and businesses advertised remain respectable.</p>	<p>Mid Suffolk District Council have never allowed advertising on a vehicle previously. This is due to the potential confusion for fare paying passengers who wish to contact the company but are unsure from all of the attached advertisements the correct number to contact.</p> <p>If the district were to permit these it would need to stipulate how many and their sizing.</p> <p>The operators run the risk of extra costs if a company were to change its name, details or they fold altogether. It doesn't appear to the team to be cost effective to allow this to happen.</p> <p>There are several Private Hire companies who have purely executive cars and have the exemption in regard to displaying their plates.</p>
<p>6.16.5 PRIVATE HIRE VEHICLES (i) For saloons and estate cars the lettering of all advertising/graphics etc must be a maximum height of 7.5 cm and must be confined to either the rear doors, the rear wings, or the rear of the vehicle to a size which does not exceed 800 sq. cms on either side or on the rear of the vehicle. This is in keeping with the ‘executive vehicle’ nature of private hire.</p> <p>The wording in 6.16.5 (in bold) is incorrect and therefore the size of the graphics differing to Hackney carriage vehicles is irrelevant: as previously stated for many years our business activities have almost solely been supplying transport services to Suffolk County Council, primarily school transport and vulnerable adults. Also, the statement “This is in keeping with the ‘executive vehicle’ nature of private hire.” is incorrect as in Mid Suffolk one could not say that the primary nature of private hire is to the executive market. Although I do accept that the executive market will make up a portion of private hire consumers It is only a portion and my PHV business in no way could be described as executive in nature. I understand that this statement may make more sense in a city like London where the executive travel will be in far higher demand.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team take on board your comments and have amended the proposed sizing for Private Hire Advertising.</p>

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<p>9.4.2 Prior to submitting the vehicle for testing owners must ensure that the vehicle is in good condition, i.e., mechanically sound, bodywork in a satisfactory condition and the engine and full chassis steam cleaned.</p> <p>As we have stated in previous policy consultations, steam cleaning of an engine should not be mandatory or recommended by the Council as in a lot of cases (and even more so in newer vehicles) vehicles have many complicated and sensitive electronics housed in the engine bay that are crucial to the operation of the engine, it should not need to be mentioned that sensitive electronics and water (even that in the form of steam) should be kept apart. It is unwise for the council to include wording in the policy that indicates that at the council’s request someone do something that is so likely to cause very costly damage their vehicle.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team acknowledge the comments made regarding the steam cleaning of the engine. The Team are proposing to remove this condition.</p>
<p>9.4.3 Owners of vehicles will be subject to a re-charge fee in respect of vehicles that have to be resubmitted for a second inspection test on the grounds of mechanical/MOT related reinspections pertaining to the specified requirements for hackney/private hire vehicles.</p> <p>As we have previously discussed with the Council, any re-test fee is at the testing station’s discretion as such a fee may well not be charged by the testing station, for example, if the vehicle that has failed a test, then goes on to have all of the remedial work carried out by the same testing station and then retested by the same testing station it is unlikely that a retest fee is charged by the testing station. If the testing station does not feel the need to charge the council a re-test fee, then it is clearly wrong & I suggest illegal for the council to profit by charging an operator the fee. I recommend the word “will” be replaced with the word “may”.</p>	<p>This recharge fee is for the 6 monthly checks and if the vehicle receives safety complaints at any time after your annual taxi inspection. The Licensing Team are proposing to reword this condition as it is ambiguous in its meaning.</p>
<p>Clause 2:19 You refer to training to a BETEC Level 2 ‘Role of a Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver’ course. I would question whether this training includes safeguarding training? I know that previously, Mid Suffolk/Babergh did not include any safeguarding training for new and existing taxi drivers, and this is the ideal opportunity for this to change. <i>It is essential that taxi drivers have a good understanding and awareness of safeguarding both to protect their customers and to ensure they do not put themselves in a vulnerable situation.</i></p>	<p>The Licensing Team have contacted the course provider and the slides indicate that the course does cover safeguarding as well as Child Sexual Exploitation, Grooming, PREVENT etc.</p>

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<p>Clause 5.3 I welcome the intended consultation on mandatory CCTV in licensed vehicles. We deal with incidents where licensed drivers have complaints made against them, and if CCTV were available, this could help resolve the complaint potentially with more accuracy within a faster timeframe.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team are yet to do a full consultation on this matter however the earlier talks with the trade in 2020 did highlight that they were not keen on the provision being made mandatory as it is an additional cost for them.</p>
<p>A) we note that you are proposing to add an BTEC National Diploma to the requirement. I have consulted with all of our drivers and we do not feel that this is a necessary requirement to becoming or staying as a Taxi driver. Most people fall into Taxi driving as either a 2nd income or a change of employment. The process is as it is drawn out, which doesnt aid us as an employer in recruiting drivers. We certainly dont feel the need for an additional qualification at our own expense. Again as an employer we'd like to see how this process can be speeded up and certainly not lengthened.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team acknowledge this is an extra cost to the driver however the benefits of the course are that all drivers will be trained to a higher standard and this in turn will ensure that the drivers on the road are fit and proper to hold such a licence.</p> <p>The course will ensure all drivers have disability awareness and safeguarding training and other vital information to ensure they are fully compliant with their obligations in relation to protecting the public and compliant with the July 2020 Safeguarding Standards as set by the Department for Transport.</p>
<p>B) We feel that the age of a vehicle is immaterial as long as its maintained and meets the taxi test criteria as well as the existing Midsuffolk criteria. We note that a vehicle must be no more than 8 years old. Having looked at the whole of the Midsuffolk fleet there are very very few who meet that criteria. To insist on this change will be to place unecessary additional costs at the feet of your operators.</p>	<p>The Vehicle can be no older than 8 years of age when you first apply to licence the vehicle.</p> <p>Once the vehicle reaches 10 years of age more frequent testing is required.</p> <p>The Council's main priorities are public protection and public safety therefore the age requirement and more frequent testing for fossil fuelled vehicles is the appropriate balance between the priorities of the Council and the needs of the trade.</p>
<p>C) Tax disclosure is surely a private thing between the individual and HMRC and has no bearing on ones ability to transport passengers. Surely this contravenes the Data protection act.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team are only required to check that the applicant (new or renewal) have undertaken the HMRC tax check. The Licensing Team are yet to be informed how this check will be undertaken. This is an external check via the HMRC and will be mandatory.</p>
<p>D) Ranks there are simply not enough spaces / ranks for the taxis that we have at the moment so we feel this needs to be increased and possibly just outside the train station.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team take on board your comments and will contact the relevant Authority to look at when and where we can increase the ranks available.</p>

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<p>E) We wholeheartedly agree with the proposal to stop the sub contracting of School contract routes by preventing the transfer of safeguarding for children and vulnerable adults as this has long provided an unfair advantage to some of the larger firms in Stowmarket making money without actually doing the work. Hopefully this policy will cut that out which it needs to do.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team are unsure where this is referred to within the policy. Sub-Contracting is part of the nature of a Private Hire business and exists solely outside of the realms of Licensing’s remit unless there is any suggestion that this is being undertaken illegally.</p>
<p>F) If the combination of the two unitary authorities goes ahead which would make sense does that mean vehicle and driver licensing will be valid in Midsuffolk and Babergh. We feel this would be beneficial to all.</p>	<p>Babergh & Mid Suffolk are still separate Licensing regimes. The Councils are working together but are not merged. The Team are not aware of a merger having been decided upon of the two Council’s.</p>
<p>G) We'd like more help obtaining grants i.e in the recent pandemic these were not easily accessible and we probably missed out on help because we got referred to websites which are hard to navigate in large organisations on their main sites.</p>	<p>The Council during Covid-19 were offering grants via our Economic Development Team. The Licensing Team did when asked directed drivers to these grants. Unfortunately, we cannot pass comment on the ease or difficulty of accessing these grants as it is outside of the Licensing Teams remit.</p>
<p>F) It was massively easier in the pandemic when you guys accepted digital copies of documents and the like with this in mind are there plans to add a specific licensing portal like Suffolk on board for the new combined authority.</p>	<p>The provision of electronic documents has been extended by Central Government until April 2022 whereby we must begin accepting original documentation in person.</p>
<p>We have heard tell of some kind of board which consists of the likes of Kellys cabs and others on important town council related issues, we were not aware this existed and we're certainly never offered any consultation or opinion.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team are not aware of a “board” but as you have stated it may be a provision from Stowmarket Town Council and therefore the Licensing Team would not be involved with this.</p>
<p>2.19.1 The requirement for new drivers to undertake this course at their expense will introduce another barrier to entry. We have already noticed increased difficulty in finding new part time drivers with the recently implemented but limited availability of the knowledge test.</p> <p>2.19.2 “An Introduction to the Role of a Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver”. I have held a Taxi and Private Hire driver licence for many years and strongly feel that I do not need to attend an introductory course, especially at my own expense, with the course costing between £150 - £300 and taking at least 3 days. In my role driving children to school and back Suffolk County Council advise as to my role and conduct.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team acknowledge this is an extra cost to the driver however the benefits of the course are that all drivers will be trained to a higher standard and this in turn will ensure that the drivers on the road are fit and proper to hold such a licence.</p> <p>The course will ensure all drivers have disability awareness and safeguarding training and other vital information to ensure they are fully compliant with their obligations in relation to protecting the public and compliant with the July 2020 Safeguarding Standards as set by the Department for Transport.</p> <p>As a licensed Driver of Mid Suffolk District Council, you must comply with all conditions of your licence. Your contract with Suffolk County Council Passenger Transport is dependent on being licensed within this District.</p>

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<p>10.2.3 All partners and company directors have to attain this BTEC qualification. If a partner or director is not a professional driver I suggest there is no benefit to them having to take this course.</p>	<p>Under 10.2.3 the purpose of this requirement is to ensure all directors or partners who are named on the application form will have to undertake the BTEC Level 2 course to ensure they are fully compliant as they are in a position of trust.</p>
<p>Part 2 6.1.5 (6.1.2 All licensed vehicles....) Be no more than eight years of age since the date of first registration. I assume 6.1.5 refers to new registration and my comments below assume this.</p> <p>I fail to see any logic to this, especially if the Council are trying to move towards a greener fleet. An average 4 door saloon car reduces it's carbon footprint by 50% simply by doing 200,000 miles rather than 100,000. The older the car, while still meeting the MOT and test in 9.4.1 then the LOWER it's carbon foot print. The large majority of an average 4 door saloon's carbon foot print is in it's manufacture.</p> <p>Surely this (no more than 8 years old at new application for PHV) will not apply to 8 and above seaters as that would simply be ridiculous if trying to be "green".</p> <p>6.1.6 Clearly in contradiction to 6.1.5. I assume by mistake.</p> <p>If any vehicle reaches the standards as required by the MOT and the additional test at 9.1.4 what actual grounds are there for limiting it's life for commercial use ?</p> <p>In any event I fail to see any logic to this, especially if the Council are trying to move towards a greener fleet. An average 4 door saloon car reduces it's carbon footprint by 50% simply by doing 200,000 miles rather than 100,000. The older the car, while still meeting the standards in an MOT and test in 9.4.1 then the LOWER it's carbon foot print. The large majority of an average 4 door saloon's carbon foot print is in it's manufacture.</p>	<p>The Vehicle can be no older than 8 years of age when you first apply to licence the vehicle.</p> <p>Once the vehicle reaches 10 years of age more frequent testing is required therefore 6.1.6 is not a mistake.</p> <p>The Council's main priorities are public protection and public safety therefore the age requirement and more frequent testing for fossil fuelled vehicles is the appropriate balance between the priorities of the Council and the needs of the trade.</p> <p>There is no evidence to suggest an older vehicle is better for the environment than a new vehicle. The Council is attempting to find a middle ground to allow the trade to retain their fossil fuelled vehicles as long as they remain fit for service. After this point we are strongly recommending an alternative fuelled vehicle.</p>

Comment from Consultee	Response by Officer
<p>6.1.8 I'm not entirely sure that any 8 seater or above vehicles are available which match these recommendations</p>	<p>There are a few options available for alternative fuelled vehicles that have 8 passenger seats. These include but are not limited to Dynamo Taxi, LEVC TX etc.</p>
<p>6.1.11 This will mean unnecessarily large vehicles for school transport, causing more congestion (and pollution) at educational facilities and will undoubtedly put drivers out of work as the cost of purchase of an 8 passenger + wheel chair vehicle will prevent many drivers and/or operators from bidding for contracts.</p>	<p>The team are not asking for all vehicles to be wheelchair accessible just 8-seater vehicles. The team are aware that within the Babergh District several wheelchair accessible vehicles are already used to facilitate school contract work. Therefore, this provision shouldn't hinder you from obtaining Suffolk County Council School Contract work.</p>
<p>6.15.4 The insurance on our vehicles is NOT INVALID unless the vehicle is booked by private hire and in any event there will be garage trips, fuel trips, relocation of vehicle trips, return from drop off trips etc etc etc.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team having taken on board your comments on this matter. The team propose to remove this from the policy. If a member of the public gets into your vehicle without first booking you are undertaking a Hackney Carriage Function and therefore your Private Hire Insurance would be invalid.</p>
<p>6.16.5 "Executive vehicle" Nature of private hire ? It was my belief that dispensation to not display the licence plates was for the "executive vehicles" as I was unaware of any pre existing nature of private hire vehicles (perhaps in the very old days).</p>	<p>The Licensing Team take on board your comments however there are several companies within Mid Suffolk who are running executive vehicles and would need/prefer the smaller signage so as not to detract from the vehicle. However the Team are proposing to amend this condition.</p>
<p>9.4.2 It is unwise for the council to include wording in the policy that indicates that at the council's request someone do something that is so likely to cause very costly damage their vehicle. (Electrics)</p>	<p>The Licensing Team acknowledge the comments made regarding the steam cleaning of the engine. The Team are proposing to remove this condition.</p>
<p>9.4.3 Re-charge fee - As we have previously discussed with the Council, any re-test fee is at the testing station's discretion as such a fee may well not be charged by the testing station, for example, if the vehicle that has failed a test then goes on to have all of the remedial work carried out by the same testing station and then retested by the same testing station it is unlikely that a retest fee is charged by the testing station. If the testing station does not feel the need to charge the council a re-test fee then it is clearly wrong & I suggest illegal for the council to profit by charging an operator a retest fee. I recommend the word "will" be replaced with the word "may".</p>	<p>This recharge fee is for the 6 monthly checks and if the vehicle receives safety complaints at any time after your annual taxi inspection. The Licensing Team are proposing to reword this condition as it is ambiguous in its meaning.</p>

Comment from Consultee	Response by Officer
<p>2.19.2 As a licensed driver of 18 years with an impeccable record with Mid Suffolk I do not feel that it would be necessary or beneficial to undertake this training course. Surely the title itself indicates that this is for drivers that are new to the hackney carriage or private hire industry</p>	<p>The course will ensure all drivers have disability awareness and safeguarding training and other vital information to ensure they are fully compliant with their obligations in relation to protecting the public and compliant with the July 2020 Safeguarding Standards as set by the Department for Transport.</p>
<p>6.1.5 I agree that electric or hybrid cars are the future but for now and with the taxi industry on its knees due to the pandemic I feel strongly that it is unfair to stipulate that a car needs to be a maximum of 8 years old when first registered. We need to encourage more people to the trade and not make it more difficult to get started. If a car is roadworthy, well maintained, clean and tidy I don't see why age is an issue, especially in the short term for the above reasons mentioned.</p>	<p>The Council's main priorities are public protection and public safety therefore the age requirement and more frequent testing for fossil fuelled vehicles is the appropriate balance between the priorities of the Council and the needs of the trade.</p>
<p>6.1.6 With regards to 2 tests a year for older cars, surely 1 m.o.t and 1 taxi test is more than sufficient? It is already tested twice yearly.</p>	<p>The Council's main priorities are public protection and public safety therefore the age requirement and more frequent testing for fossil fuelled vehicles is the appropriate balance between the priorities of the Council and the needs of the trade.</p>
<p>Section 2.19.2 The sudden need for this training for experienced drivers, although reluctantly I except at least all can then show it. It is the need for refresher training every 3 years that seems superfluous as little has changed in 20 years. It just feels like an additional cost burden on drivers.</p>	<p>Legislation in regard to safeguarding is adapted all the time and drivers need to be aware of the updated information to protect both themselves and their passengers.</p>
<p>Section 6.1.5 This section leaves me confused, is it saying all vehicles over 8 years ols must be scrapped at next renewal, or only vehicles less than 8 years can be licensed for the first time. This would mean no immediate problems for me as oldest vehicle is less than 6 years old, would wipe out significant numbers of taxis, and has huge cost implications for drivers. Then we move onto 6.1.6 which talks about vehicles 10 year old being tested twice a year.</p>	<p>The Vehicle can be no older than 8 years of age when you first apply to licence the vehicle.</p> <p>Once the vehicle reaches 10 years of age more frequent testing is required.</p>

Comment from Consultee	Response by Officer
<p>Section 6.1.8 I agree that hybrid or electric vehicles are currently the way forward, but they are expensive to buy. It seems the policy is against self-charging hybrids (we operate one) but in favour of Plug-in hybrids, fine if these are charged regularly but much more polluting if not. This of course raises the issue of charging points which the council has failed to produce to date.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team on consideration of this consultation response will include self-charging hybrids to the policy.</p>
<p>Section 6.1.15.4 Private Hire Signage, other councils locally have dedicated stickers on their vehicles, I am not aware that we have an equivalent, so then all private hire vehicles would be consistent, thus helping the wider public.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team having taken on board your comments on this matter. However, the team propose to remove this from the policy.</p>
<p>Section 6.22.4 What is the point of refresher training if a course can be found if you are already regularly handling wheelchairs, it is insulting to the driver and may lead to even fewer wheelchair accessible vehicles in the future.</p>	<p>The refresher course will be necessary to ensure that the driver is fully aware of and up to date with all manual handling processes. This is a protection for the public and the drivers.</p>
<p>Section 9.4.2 Why is steam cleaning of the chassis a requirement, clearly it must be clean enough to allow inspection. Steam cleaning may not be safe or appropriate for modern hybrids and electric vehicles. Clearly if an inspector cannot view a part due to dirt the vehicle should be failed.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team acknowledge the comments made regarding the steam cleaning of the engine. The Team are proposing to remove this condition.</p>
<p>Sections 10.2.2-4 Why? is the first thought that springs to mind, in the case of a limited company you could have several of these, what is the need or the benefit? What use is the Role of a Taxi Driver qualification or the knowledge test when they will have google maps or similar available for setting fares.</p>	<p>As a Non-Driver Operator you are still in a position of trust therefore under 10.2.2, 10.2.3 and 10.2.4 the purpose of these requirements is to ensure all directors or partners who are named on the application form are fully compliant and aware of their responsibilities.</p>

Comment from Consultee	Response by Officer
<p>We worry that 2.19.1 the requirement for new drivers to undertake this course at their expense will introduce a barrier to entry that for people wanting to enter the industry on a part time basis may consider to high either financially or in terms of difficulty to achieve. Please note that we have already noticed increased difficulty in finding new part time drivers with the addition of the knowledge test.</p> <p>“3. CONDUCT OF ALL DRIVERS” if fit for purpose should already be a comprehensive policy that ensures that drivers remain professional and thus, I struggle to understand what benefits an introductory course could offer.</p> <p>In respect to 2.19.2 we find it rather insulting that all existing drivers would be made to undertake a course called “an Introduction to the Role of a Professional Taxi & Private Hire Driver “. Myself and many of the drivers that work alongside us, have been working in the industry for many years and have operated in a professional manner throughout those years. The fact we have all ben working in the industry and have abided by “3. CONDUCT OF ALL DRIVERS” without complaint for so long should be evidence enough that we do not need undertake an introductory course in being Professional Taxi & Private Hire Driver. We are sure that many if not all other existing drivers across the board would take offence at this proposal.</p> <p>10.2.3 Goes on to extend the need for qualification in “BTEC Level 2 course in an Introduction to the Role of Professional Taxi and Private Hire Driver” to all partners and company directors. We do not understand why all partners and company directors should be required to take this introductory course, provided that the director(s) or partner(s) who oversee the licensed operations are adequately knowledgeable of the Council’s policies. We believe it would be detrimental to impose that all partners and company directors have this knowledge as there is no need for a financial backer (silent partner) to be qualified and it could introduce another barrier for anyone wishing to invest in the industry.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team acknowledge this is an extra cost to the driver however the benefits of the course are that all drivers will be trained to a higher standard and this in turn will ensure that the drivers on the road are fit and proper to hold such a licence.</p> <p>The course will ensure all drivers have disability awareness and safeguarding training and other vital information to ensure they are fully compliant with their obligations in relation to protecting the public and compliant with the July 2020 Safeguarding Standards as set by the Department for Transport.</p> <p>Under 10.2.3 the purpose of this requirement is to ensure all directors or partners who are named on the application form will have to undertake the BTEC Level 2 course to ensure they are fully compliant as they are in a position of trust.</p>

Comment from Consultee	Response by Officer
<p>We are aware of the current environmental pressures that we all need to be accountable for however requiring all new licensed vehicles to be no more than 8 years old will add pressure to the industry because any newcomer wanting to enter the industry would struggle to afford the initial outlay of an 8-year-old vehicle without the use of other means such a finance agreement which instantly would add pressure and overheads thus becoming a negative point against entering the industry in the first place. Also, accessible vehicles having the ability to carry 4, 6 or 8 passengers do come with an additional premium compared to a standard 4, 6 or 8 passenger vehicle. Add to this the fact that most standard 8 passenger vehicles are mass produced and firstly aimed at the commercial industry therefore these vehicles hold on their values so again extending the age limit of a viable vehicle could help with maintaining overall overheads. Maybe extending the age limit of a viable vehicle may help with making it more attainable and attractive to new entrants. Also, in my opinion vehicle should be used for as long as possible whilst still remaining suitable for their intended purpose. The environmental impact involved in the producing and disposing of vehicles surely far out way the environmental impact of reusing/recycling a used car.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team are aware that Mid Suffolk have never had an age policy previously. The purpose of an age policy is to encourage a move towards a less fossil fuelled fleet. The Licensing Team are attempting to compromise with regards to the needs of the trade and the requirements of the Climate Change Crisis.</p> <p>The provision of the age policy will allow Mid Suffolk Drivers to purchase second-hand vehicles from 2014 which should hopefully be more affordable than the purchase of a brand-new vehicle.</p>
<p>I would just like clarification that the two tests a year is in addition to the VOSA MOT required by law.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team can confirm that the two tests would be in addition to the VOSA MOT.</p>
<p>We as a company use 8-seater vehicles for school transport and have consulted with other operators that run both non wheelchair and wheelchair accessible vehicles and have been informed that as stated above, the initial financial outlay for these vehicles are greatly impacted by the commercial industry as this is the blueprint most of these vehicles are designed for. Also, the vehicles that are purposely designed for wheelchair use are typically in the form of a long wheelbase, high topped vehicle with a greater engine size to accommodate the additional aerodynamic flaws therefore making a bigger imprint on the environment. The smaller wheelchair accessible vehicles could be used but are unpractical for non-wheelchair users that are travelling with a wheelchair user. If this section of the policy becomes a reality I can say with certainty that I will not be in position to acquire future 8 passenger vehicles for the general public or Suffolk County Council.</p>	<p>The team are not asking for all vehicles to be wheelchair accessible just 8-seater vehicles. The team are aware that within the Babergh District several wheelchair accessible vehicles are already used to facilitate school contract work. Therefore, this provision shouldn't hinder you from obtaining Suffolk County Council School Contract work.</p>

Comment from Consultee	Response by Officer
<p>Continued If the Council's intention with this policy is to improve the availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles, I would suggest as above in response to 6.1.5 to increase the age that newly licenced vehicles can be from 8 years to 12 or more years for wheelchair access vehicles and 8 passenger vehicles (regardless if they are 8 passenger vehicles that are also wheelchair accessible). This would create an incentive for an operator to acquire wheelchair accessible vehicles and 8 passenger vehicles over a standard 4 or 6 passenger vehicles. This would in turn improve access to transport for wheelchair users and larger families and groups that, in a lot of cases, are currently having to book multiple smaller vehicles.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team need to make sure there is sufficient provision of wheelchair accessible vehicles in the district. As part of this policy review the team approached the Suffolk Disability Forum who undertook a Survey with disabled passengers, and it was identified that more disabled people prebooked their journeys with Private Hire vehicles as these were easier to access however, they identified that this provision is sometimes lacking when they approach operators.</p>
<p>I would like to bring your attention to the "must not have been written off for insurance purposes at any time" It is our thoughts that due to the expensive nature of cars and car parts many insurance companies will "write off" a vehicle for the simple fact that they, as a company, do see the viability in repairing the damage if it outweighs the book value of the vehicle. Due to the rising costs and the likelihood of cosmetic dents/scratches caused by an accident would be deemed too expensive by insurance companies the DVLANOSA have restructured the categories of a vehicle being "Written off". Whilst I understand that a "Cat S" (A Cat S car is one which has sustained structural damage during a crash — think items such as chassis and suspension. While the car can safely be repaired and put back on the road, Cat S cars must be re-registered with the DVLA.) has been deemed so due to structural safety and therefore may not be safe to use as a Hackney Carriage/Private hire vehicle, a vehicle categorised as a "Cat N" (A Cat N classification encompasses all non-structural damage, such as lights, infotainment and heated seats. As with Cat S cars, Cat N vehicles can be put back on the road, however, unlike Cat S cars, there is no need to re-register it with the DVLA — though you will still need to inform them your car has been written-off.) has been deemed so purely because the financial outlay the insurance company would need to make does not meet the insurance companies policies.</p>	<p>Once a vehicle has been written off the safety of the vehicle is called into question as once damaged there would be an inherent weakness within the vehicle. The paramount concern here is public safety and a structurally unsound vehicle is not safe for use as a public service vehicle.</p> <p>The Licensing Team would consider relicensing a Category N only and will propose to reword the condition.</p>

Comment from Consultee	Response by Officer
<p>Continued</p> <p>Therefore, may I suggest that in the case of a current licensed becoming a Cat N vehicle, once damage has been rectified, DVLA has been notified and VOSA has passed the vehicle as roadworthy an additional "Taxi Test" be required to ascertain if the vehicle is still "Fit for purpose" and able to carry on in the industry. In the case of a new licencing being issued for a "Cat N" vehicle, the vehicle is checked in the same way as any other new licence procedure.</p>	<p>Once a vehicle has been written off the safety of the vehicle is called into question as once damaged there would be an inherent weakness within the vehicle. The paramount concern here is public safety and a structurally unsound vehicle is not safe for use as a public service vehicle.</p> <p>The Licensing Team would consider relicensing a Category N only and will propose to reword the condition.</p>
<p>I can see no need for any signage to be affixed to the drivers and front passengers' doors as the nature of a private hire vehicle is pre booked. In addition to this, any signage added onto a vehicles' paintwork, over time will cause damage the vehicles paint work either by scratching which would lead to rusting or fading.</p> <p>This then leads to additional, unneeded damage being caused which would devalue/deface the vehicle therefore the vehicle would be no longer "Fit for Purpose".</p>	<p>The Licensing Team have taken on board your comments on this matter. The team propose to remove this from the policy.</p>
<p>The condition of steam cleaning of an engine should not be mandatory or recommended by the Council. A lot of vehicles have many intricate and sensitive electronics within the engine bay that are crucial for the correct engine to run as it should. If water were to get into places where electronics come into play then it is likely to cause damage which could be very costly to the vehicle owner.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team acknowledge the comments made regarding the steam cleaning of the engine. The Team are proposing to remove this condition.</p>
<p>We believe that any re-test fee is at the testing station's discretion as such a fee may well not be charged by the testing station, for example, if the vehicle that has failed a test then goes on to have all of the remedial work carried out by the same testing station and then retested by the same testing station it is unlikely that a retest fee is charged by the testing station. If the testing station does not feel the need to charge the council a re-test fee then it is clearly wrong. We recommend the word "will" be replaced with the word "may".</p>	<p>This recharge fee is for the 6 monthly checks and if the vehicle receives safety complaints at any time after your annual taxi inspection. The Licensing Team are proposing to reword this condition as it is ambiguous in its meaning.</p>

Comment from Consultee	Response by Officer
<p>BTEC Qualification</p> <p>I do not think that anyone who has served 5 years plus in the role of taxi driver should be subjected to this, its quite an insult. I've been doing this going on 30 years and must be one of if not the longest serving taxi driver in Mid Suffolk, I really doubt that there is any situation that I haven't come across or anything you could teach me that I don't know.</p>	<p>The course will ensure all drivers have disability awareness and safeguarding training and other vital information to ensure they are fully compliant with their obligations in relation to protecting the public and compliant with the July 2020 Safeguarding Standards as set by the Department for Transport.</p>
<p>Fire Extinguisher</p> <p>I don't think we should carry them in front of the vehicle, unfortunately you must live in a world that's full of unicorns and rainbows as this is basically handing a weapon to anyone that wants to use it against us, also drunk people like to fiddle and play with things, I really don't want to be travelling at the speed limit on the A14 and my passenger asks "what does this do" as they set the extinguisher off! And lastly after speaking with my insurance company they have told me that if I try and put the car fire out and burn myself I will not be covered for any kind of medical claim for loss of earnings, so with that in mind it negates the need to carry them.</p>	<p>The requirement to carry a fire extinguisher is under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 and the type required is under this policy. It is a legal requirement to carry this there is no legal requirement to use it. The Licensing Team would advise if your vehicle is on fire to remove yourself to a safe distance and call the emergency services.</p> <p>The carriage of a fire extinguisher in the front of the vehicle is for limousines only as stated within the policy. The reason it is in the front for a limousine is the driver doesn't have a passenger sit in the front area with them.</p>
<p>First Aid kit</p> <p>Similarly to the fire extinguisher I don't believe that we should carry one either as unless fully up to date and certified as a first aider we cannot render any assistance, so therefore it becomes a very expensive ornament and when the contents expires we have to waste yet more money on purchasing another one that we still can't use.</p>	<p>A first aid kit is for your safety and wellbeing under the Health and Safety (First Aid) Regulations 1981 as a self-employed worker. You must not administer First aid to another individual unless you have been first aid trained. This is covered under the BTEC Course.</p>
<p>CCTV</p> <p>I think a more important subject that should be looked into and I think is definitely more important than looking at other changes is the fitting of CCTV. All through out your draft it only mentions the safety and security of the public, yes, that is important, but the driver is not even given a second thought, you, as our licensing do nothing to help and protect us. Hull council think that this subject is very important as they have given all of their Taxi drivers a £500 grant to get CCTV installed into their vehicles.</p>	<p>The Licensing Team are yet to do a full consultation on this matter however the earlier talks with the trade in 2020 did highlight that they were not keen on the provision being made mandatory as it is an additional cost for them.</p> <p>The Licensing Team are unaware of any grant that could be used to subsidise the cost of implementing CCTV.</p>