

Also sent to:
Leader of the Council
Head of Legal
Head of Licensing
Licensing Committee Chairman

South Cambridgeshire Executive Operators Group
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Cllr. Douglas de Lacey
Chairman of the Council
South Cambridgeshire District Council
Cambourne
Cambridgeshire
CB23 6EA

27 November 2019

Dear Councillor,

I am writing to you as the lead representative of The South Cambridgeshire Executive Operators Group. We are a trade group consisting of 20 private hire operators that work solely in executive chauffeur travel and currently utilise the plate exemption conditions.

We are asking you to reject the proposed new taxi policy before you on the 28th as, after taking legal advice we believe the consultation has not been carried out correctly and requires further discussion with the public and trade.

We have major life changing policy proposals being put forward for policy that were not in the consultation document such as:

1. The removal of dispensation for existing operators whose bases are up to 10 miles outside of the SCDC Border. This will serious effect employment and cause genuine hardship to experienced operators who were advised at the time that they should licence with South Cambridgeshire.
2. The introduction of a ban on forward facing dash cams. These safety devices are a recognised by the police and insurance companies alike and some insurance companies insist upon their use. There are some units that could possibly be excluded but we see no reason to ban non audio forward facing dash cams. This was not part of the consultation.
3. New policy is worded that drivers incurring more than one motoring offence will have their licence revoked. We support road safety and professionalism in driving but this stance is too severe and again was not in the initial consultation.
4. The safeguarding course (which we support) was described as a course or workshop, we now learn in the proposed policy that it is a test or exam rather than a training course.

In regard to the consultation process we feel there were a number of irregularities including:

1. A submission from the only national trade association (LPHCA) was not presented to the Licensing Committee as it was submitted but was cut and pasted into the electronic submissions and referenced as a driver.

2. We feel that it was inappropriate for the Licencing Enforcement Officer to be responding to their own consultation, any recommendations from the Officer should have been sought initially and included in the consultation.
3. The rights of privacy to the public have been ignored with the introduction of a blanket policy for CCTV. This goes against the guidance of the Information Commissioners Office and codes of practice. We submitted a significant number of objections from the public regarding this policy, there is clearly a much greater discussion needed regarding the different types of work that private hire vehicles do, particularly those performing business transfers and chauffeur work and the need for CCTV
5. The reasons presented to you for the increase in volume of applications for the plate exemptions was given as due to the wording of the 2018 policy. We believe it to be more likely that the 2018 regulations introduced compulsory signage. We can't find this statement in the consultation.

Please see attached a copy of our submission to the council in response to the consultation.

In light of the above we respectfully ask that you refer the policy back for further discussion to achieve workable solutions.

Yours sincerely

Steve Russell

South Cambridgeshire Executive Operators Group

Taxi & Private Hire Vehicle Licensing Team

South Cambridgeshire District Council
South Cambridgeshire Hall
Cambourne Business Park
Cambourne
Cambridge
CB23 6EA

22 September 2019,

Dear Licensing Team

I am writing to you in response to your consultation on proposed changes to Taxi licencing on behalf of The South Cambridgeshire Executive Operators Group.

We are a newly formed group representing operators in the executive and chauffeur profession and our aim is to promote better communication and understanding between the licencing team and our members. Currently we represent 18 executive/chauffeur operators utilising over 150 licenced vehicles and drivers which places the group as a majority voice in this sector. We are affiliated to the LPCHA to assist with legal and procedural advice, the group is open to any operator that 1. Holds a SCDC operator's licence, 2. Operates a fleet of only plate exempt vehicles with no street hire, 3. Is a member of the LPCHA.

Our current members are:

Airport Lynx
Blue Rose Cars
Business Drive
Cambridge Business Chauffeurs
Cambridge Chauffeurs
Cambridge Premier Chauffeurs
Cambridge City Cars
Cambridge Connections
Carlton Executive Cars
Executive Car Service
Grafton Executive Cars
Kenway Chauffeur Services
Merlin Executive Cars
Milton Executive Cars
RJM Cars
Silver Star Chauffeurs
Voyager Executive Cars
Windrush Executive

To begin with we would like to reassure the licensing team that the group is fully behind having sensible regulations of a high standard that are correctly and fairly enforced. We don't want to have rogue operators competing against us without being accountable to a standard that their passengers

should expect, public safety is an important issue and by working together to improve the standard of private hire in the area will only increase public confidence in the trade and increase our business in turn. There are many things in the new consultation which we wholeheartedly support such as more frequent safety checks on licenced vehicles, the drive towards lower emission vehicles and sensible safeguarding and awareness training, in reality our concerns are reasonably limited.

We found it difficult to form a full opinion on the consultation as the handbook that was referenced on many occasions is not yet available to view, as a result it is only the broad issues we can comment upon.

Signage & Livery.

- It is our opinion that signage on Private Hire vehicles overall is unnecessary and only confuses the public when trying to identify a public hire vehicle such as a hackney carriage, it therefore increases the risk of criminal activity by impersonation. However the SCEOG is exclusively made up of operators who use vehicles that have been afforded an exemption from displaying this signage. What is new to us is the inclusion of an internal notice (previously these details were allowed to be given electronically). Most drivers are self-employed and often work for several operators, the internal notice contains the information of the operator as well as the vehicle so it can be misleading to passengers. It would not be practical to keep swapping multiple notices throughout the day, the potential for error is enormous and these notices could get lost or stolen.
- It is our opinion that this notice should be changed for plate exempt vehicles to a tamperproof disc similar to that used by Transport for London that would permanently be affixed to the windscreen. The notice would contain the licence number, vehicle details and the address of the licencing office, we believe it is important that the operator details are not given here as they are not permanent to the vehicle. It is really important that complaints are directed to the council, operators may try to hide the complaint and protect a driver from repercussions which is not in the interests of public safety. Situations where a passenger in a private hire vehicle does not know the operator are generally very rare and even rarer in an executive vehicle. In any event, the notice would contain the licence number, the proprietor of that vehicle is duty bound to keep records of the driver at the time and operators are bound to keep details of the journey so tracing a complaint would not be difficult.

CCTV.

- We strongly oppose the introduction of compulsory CCTV in executive (exempt) vehicles and there are a number of reasons for this:
- Our passengers value privacy and this is why they hire a private car. Customers have reported that they would seek operators from other areas who do not have to have CCTV, this is the crux of the problem, it would be wholly unfair to impose a significant financial cost and negative customer experience on South Cambridgeshire Executive Operators when our competitors (that can and do operate in our area) are not burdened by these conditions. This should be a decision made at national level or given as a subsidised option for drivers & operators.
- Current licensing policy states that exempt vehicles are excluded from needing CCTV, this was after a similar consultation a few years ago where a few of our members put forward

the need for privacy rights and that the violent disputes do not occur in executive vehicles. We are not aware of any increase in complaints involving exempted vehicles over the last two years, in fact no member of the group can recall any complaint that would have benefitted from CCTV footage.

- As operators, drivers and vehicle owners we do not feel any benefit from mandatory CCTV and this is also the view of our passengers. There has been no consideration made for the passengers right to privacy in their privately hired vehicle, this is something our trade hold very dear, discretion, reliability and professionalism are at the very front of our passengers wishes. At our meeting earlier this month you kindly asked us to provide evidence from our customers, this has been collected by our members and forwarded to the LPHCA (for confidentiality), to date the LPHCA has only received objections in writing and more are expected.
- On the subject of CCTV itself there are a number of things also not very clear in the consultation:
 1. The data is controlled by licensing and can only be accessed by them, what steps would be taken to ensure the data is managed in a proper way and compliant to GDPR and other data protection regulations?
 2. What allowances would be made for temporary vehicles in the case of breakdowns and accidents?
 3. What allowances would be made for system breakdowns, how will it be monitored that the system is even working at all?
 4. It is understood that the system can be turned off when the vehicle is being used privately, what steps are being made to ensure that the driver cannot accidentally turn it off?

Vehicle Ages & Emissions requirements.

- We do not believe that excluding vehicles by age is necessary. If a vehicle is safe and fit for purpose then it should be allowed to be licenced, if the reasoning is for roadworthiness then there is already a compliance test in place to ascertain that.
- If the reason is for lower emissions then there is already a well-used and researched European standard for this. We would recommend that all vehicles should comply with Euro 6 emissions standards at first test and for renewals by a date to be determined to allow for owners that have entered into financial commitments on the strength of existing policy.
- If the reason is for safety or structural integrity then again a more efficient European standard is available in the form of NCAP ratings, we would recommend only 5 star be permitted.
- The two parameters above would make a much clearer and understandable policy.
- We also have concerns regarding ULEV & Ultra Low emission vehicles. While there is certainly a need to try to reduce carbon emissions, two things are clear Firstly there are not enough charging points in the South Cambridgeshire area to cope with the proposed rise in PH vehicles. Secondly some studies have shown that when taking into account the style of electric production in the UK and the production of the batteries that a modern blue efficiency diesel car could be less harmful to the environment overall.

Smaller Issues

A few less concerning issues but for the sake of completeness to your request for comments are:

- New private hire drivers and operators licences are being restricted to one year as a blanket policy. The LPHCA has advised us that this is contrary to the requirements of the 2015 Deregulation Act. This seems unfair to new applicants that they be penalised for no reason other than they are starting out, we should be encouraging entry to the trade not discouraging.
- We believe clauses should be added to some regulations to allow the licensing officer discretion in exceptional circumstances, this could include vehicle accidents or family bereavements.
- The content of the competency test should be made available to operators and drivers so training can be given

Executive Private Hire Service.

Finally we would like thank you for recognising that there is a strong market for executive private hire services (often referred to as chauffeur services), it is always the subject of much debate as to what defines that, some would believe it is only reserved for pop stars, royalty and ceo's!

We would like to offer in the future to consult with the licensing team to establish a clear understanding of the market and help shape the definition.

Yours Sincerely,

Steve Russell
South Cambridgeshire Executive Operators Group