

## **Draft Convictions Policy**

### **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The purpose of this policy is to provide guidance on the criteria taken into account by the licensing authority when determining whether or not an applicant or an existing licence holder is a fit and proper person to hold a hackney carriage and/or private hire driver or operator licence.
- 1.2 The overriding aim of the licensing authority is to protect the safety of the public. The licensing authority is concerned to ensure:
- That a person is a fit and proper person
  - That the person does not pose a threat to the public
  - That the public are safeguarded from dishonest person
  - The safeguarding of children, young persons and vulnerable adults
- 1.3 This policy provides guidance to any person with an interest in taxi and private hire licensing. In particular, but not exclusively:
- Applicants for drivers' licences
  - Existing licensed drivers whose licences are being reviewed or renewed
  - Licensing Officers
  - Members of the licensing sub-committee ('sub-committee')
  - Magistrates and Judges hearing appeals against the licensing authority's decisions
- 1.4 Where Officers have delegated powers to grant licences, they will utilise these guidelines when making a decision to grant a licence. In all other cases applications for licences will be referred to the licensing sub-committee. Whilst officers and the sub-committee will have regard to the guidelines contained in the policy, each case will be considered on its individual merits and, where the circumstances demand, the sub-committee may depart from the guidelines.
- 1.5 For renewal applications and current licence holders the guidance will not be applied retrospectively. However the policy will be applied if any additional convictions are incurred or brought to the attention of the licensing authority that would call into question a person's suitability to hold a licence.
- 1.6 There is no judicially approved test of fitness and propriety and, accordingly, a number of local tests have developed. These tend to be based on a test similar to the following:
- 'Would you (as a member of the licensing committee or other person charged with the ability to grant a hackney carriage driver's licence) allow your son or daughter, spouse or partner, mother or father, grandson or granddaughter or any other person for whom you care, to get in to a vehicle with this person alone?'

If the answer to this question (or a similar test) is an unqualified 'Yes' then the test is probably satisfied. If there are any doubts in the minds of those who make the decision, then further consideration should be given as to whether this person is a fit and proper person to hold a hackney carriage or private hire driver's licence.

- 1.7 The Council will undertake whatever checks it considers necessary to ensure that licences are not issued to unsuitable people. In assessing the suitability of an applicant or licence holder, the licensing authority will take into consideration the following factors:
- Criminality
  - Number of endorsed DVLA driving licence penalty points
  - The conduct of the applicant in making the application (e.g. whether they have acted with integrity during the application process).
  - The previous licensing history of existing / former licence holders.

In addition, the licensing authority will also consider further information from sources such as, but not limited to, the Police (including abduction notices), Children and Adult Safeguarding Boards, Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub, Immigration Service, Social Services other licensing authorities, other departments within the Council, and other statutory agencies.

- 1.8 As licensed drivers often carry unaccompanied and vulnerable passengers, the licensing authority will take a strong line in relation to applicants or existing licence holders with convictions for sexual offences. A licensed PHV or taxi driver is expected to be trustworthy. In the course of their working duties drivers will deal with cash transactions and valuable property may be left in their vehicles. Drivers may well deal with customers who are vulnerable or intoxicated and potentially easily confused. Taking drugs and driving poses an obvious risk to public safety, whilst applicants who have convictions for the supply of drugs should also be treated with considerable concern, The nature and quantity of the drugs, whether for personal use or supply are issues which will be considered carefully. As licensees are professional vocational drivers, a serious view is taken of convictions for driving, or being in charge of a vehicle while under the influence of drink or drugs. More than one conviction for these offences raises significant doubts as to the applicant's fitness to drive the public.
- 1.9 The licensing authority reserves the right to overturn or annul a decision that has previously been made, or refuse a renewal of a licence, where clear errors are discovered.
- 1.10 In this policy, the word "applicant" refers to either new applicants, existing licence holders who are seeking renewal and existing licence holders that are the subject of periodic auditing or having their licence reviewed by the council as part of the policy implementation process. It also includes existing licence holders who are being considered by the licensing authority by virtue of offending activity having recently come to light.

- 1.11 In this policy, the word “conviction” is to be defined as including convictions, cautions, warnings, reprimands and other relevant information.

## **2. General Policy**

- 2.1 Whilst the committee may consider that a person with a conviction for a serious offence need not be automatically barred from obtaining a licence, it would normally be expected that the applicant would be required to:

- Remain free of conviction for an appropriate period as detailed below; and
- Show adequate evidence that her or she is a fit and proper person to hold a licence (the onus is on the applicant to produce such evidence).

(Simply remaining free of conviction may not generally be regarded as adequate evidence that a person is a fit and proper person to hold a licence).

- 2.2 The standards and criteria set out below are those that would normally be applied to applications and licences. Each case will be considered on its own merits, and the licensing authority may depart from these criteria, however it must only do so in exceptional circumstances. The otherwise good character and driving record of the applicant of licence holder will not ordinarily be considered as exceptional circumstances.

- 2.3 Any offences committed, or unacceptable behaviour reported whilst driving a hackney carriage or private hire vehicle, concerning the use of a hackney carriage or private hire vehicle, or in connection with an operator of a private hire vehicle 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.

- 2.4 Where an applicant has been convicted of a criminal offence, the licensing authority cannot review the merits of the conviction [Nottingham City Council v. Mohammed Farooq (1998)].

## **3 Pre-requisites to making an application**

- 3.1 It is the policy of the licensing authority that every application for a licence to drive a Hackney Carriage and/or Private Hire Vehicle must be accompanied by satisfactory evidence of the following matters (and that applications that are incomplete will not be deemed to have been made until such time as they are completed) -
- That the applicant has the right to live and work in the country
  - An enhanced criminal record check and evidence that they are not on a child and/or vulnerable adult barring list
  - A certificate of their current medical fitness [to Group 2 standard]
  - That the applicant is authorised to drive a vehicle of the same classification as that which the licence will allow them to drive together with a check of any current driving endorsements held by the driver
  - That the applicant has successfully completed of an advanced driving assessment (DSA Test)
  - That the applicant has provided two personal references

- That the applicant has passed a local knowledge test
- That the applicant has sufficient ability to speak English and to understand spoken English to provide the service that they wish to be licensed for
- (For persons who seek to be authorised to drive a wheelchair accessible vehicle) that the applicant has the ability to safely load and secure wheelchair users in a wheelchair accessible vehicle whilst in their chair.

3.2 If an applicant has spent six continuous months or more overseas in the past 5 years the licensing authority would expect to see evidence of a criminal record check from the country/countries covering the period before a licence application can be made.

#### **4. Appeals**

4.1 Any applicant refused a driver's licence on the grounds that the licensing authority is not satisfied he is a fit and proper person to hold such a licence has a right to appeal to the Magistrates' Court within 21 days of the notice of refusal (Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976, s 77 (1)).

4.2 Any applicant refused an operator licence on the grounds that the licensing authority is not satisfied he is a fit and proper person to hold such a licence has a right to appeal to the Magistrates' Court within 21 days of the notice of refusal.

4.3 Any licensee whose licence is suspended or revoked has a right to appeal to the Magistrates' Court within 21 days of the notice of suspension or revocation.

#### **5. Powers**

5.1 Section 61 and Section 62 of the Local Government Miscellaneous Provisions Act 1976 allow the licensing authority to suspend, revoke or refuse to renew a licence if the application/licence holder has been convicted of an offence involving dishonesty, indecency, violence; failure to comply with the provisions of the Town Police Clauses Act 1847; failure to comply with the provisions of Part II of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976; or any other reasonable cause.

5.2 The Rehabilitation of Offenders Act 1974 (Exceptions)(Amendment) Order 2002, allows the licensing authority to take into account all convictions recorded against an applicant or the holder of a private hire vehicle or hackney carriage driver's licence, whether spent or not. Therefore the licensing authority will have regard to all relevant convictions, particularly where there is a long history of offending or a recent pattern of repeat offending. Applicants need to be aware that, in accordance with this Act, all convictions, cautions, warnings and reprimands must be declared.

5.3 In this policy the term "disqualification" refers to the period served, in order to take account of the fact that a court may reduce the period of disqualification from driving. An applicant must provide evidence in advance to prove that the court agreed a reduction in the period of disqualification.

## **6. Consideration of disclosed criminal history**

- 6.1 Under the provisions of Sections 51, 55, and 59, Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, the licensing authority is required to ensure that an applicant for the grant or renewal of a hackney carriage and/or a private hire vehicle drivers' licence and/or private hire vehicle operator's licence is a 'fit and proper' person to hold such a licence. However, if an applicant has any convictions, warnings, cautions or charges awaiting trial, the licensing authority will look into:
- How relevant the offence(s) are to the licence being applied for
  - How serious the offence(s) were
  - When the offence(s) were committed
  - The date of conviction
  - Circumstances of the individual concerned
  - Sentence imposed by the court
  - The applicant's age at the time of conviction.
  - Whether they form part of a pattern of offending
  - Any other character check considered reasonable (e.g. personal references)
  - Any other factors that might be relevant for example:
    - The previous conduct of an existing or former licence holder,
    - Whether the applicant has intentionally misled the council or lied as part of the application process,
    - Information provided by other agencies/council departments
- 6.2 In this policy 'from date sentence has ended' is taken to be the date which is reached once the whole of the period as sentenced by the court has elapsed and not necessarily the length of time served by the applicant. For example, if a sentence is five years imprisonment then the date that the sentence ends will be five years from the date of sentencing – regardless of the amount of time actually served by the applicant. If the sentence is amended by a court at a later date then this new sentence becomes relevant for the purposes of this policy. The term 'since completion of sentence' is to be construed in a similar way.
- 6.3 Existing holders of driver's licences are required to notify the licensing authority in writing within seven working days of receiving a driving licence endorsement, fixed penalty notice, warning, reprimand, police caution, criminal conviction or other criminal proceedings (including their acquittal as part of a criminal case). In addition, licence holders must inform the licensing authority within seven working days of their arrest for any matter (whether subsequently charged or not). To fail to do so, will raise serious questions for the licensing authority as to the honesty of the licence holder and will be taken into account as part of any subsequent renewal applications.
- 6.4 It is an offence for any person knowingly or recklessly to make a false declaration or to omit any material particular in giving information required by the application for a licence (Section 57 Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976). Where an applicant has made a false statement or a false declaration on their application for the grant or renewal of a licence, the licence will normally be refused.

- 6.5 Any offences or behaviour not expressly covered by this Policy may still be taken into account.
- 6.6 The licensing authority is also entitled to use other records and information that may be available to it in determining applications or an entitlement to continue holding a licence. This may include information held by the licensing authority or other licensing authorities, and information disclosed by the police.
- 6.7 Admission of guilt is required before a Police caution can be issued. Every case will be considered on its own merits including the details and nature of the offence.
- 6.8 Applicants can discuss further what effect a caution/conviction may have on any application by contacting the licensing officer in confidence for advice.

## **7. Options when determining an application/licence**

- 7.1 When determining an application or reviewing an existing licence in relation to convictions or other relevant information the licensing authority have the following options:
- grant the licence or take no further action
  - grant the licence with additional conditions
  - refuse, revoke, or suspend the licence
  - issue a warning
- 7.2 If a current licence holder's conduct is such that, were they to be applying for a new licence their application would normally be refused, they should expect consideration to be given as to the suspension or revocation of their licence.

## **8. Serious offences involving violence**

- 8.1 Licensed drivers have close regular contact with the public. A firm line is to be taken with those who have convictions for offences involving violence. An application will normally be refused if the applicant has a conviction for an offence that involved the loss of life.
- 8.2 Unless there are exceptional circumstances a licence will not normally be granted where the applicant has a conviction for an offence such as:
- Murder
  - Manslaughter
  - Manslaughter or culpable homicide while driving
  - Terrorism offences
  - Or any similar offences (including attempted or conspiracy to commit) offences which replace the above
- 8.3 A licence will not normally be granted where the applicant has a conviction for an offence of similar offence(s) which replace the below offences and the conviction is less than 10 years prior to the date of application:

- Arson
- Malicious wounding or grievous bodily harm which is racially aggravated
- Actual bodily harm
- Grievous bodily harm with intent
- Robbery
- Possession of firearm
- Riot
- Assault Police
- Common assault
- Violent disorder
- Resisting arrest
- Any racially-aggravated offence against a person or property
- Affray
- Any offence that may be categorised as domestic violence
- Any offence that may be categorised as stalking
- Harassment, alarm or distress, intentional harassment or fear of provocation of violence
- Or any similar offences (including attempted or conspiracy to commit) offences which replace the above

8.4 A licence will not normally be granted until at least 5 years have passed since the completion of any sentence and / or licence period following conviction for an offence shown below:

- Obstruction
- Criminal damage
- Any offences (including attempted or conspiracy to commit offences) that are similar to those above.

8.5 A licence will not normally be granted if an applicant has more than one conviction for an offence of a violent nature.

## **9. Offences involving a weapon**

9.1 If an applicant has been convicted of possession of a weapon or any other weapon related offence, this will give serious concern as to whether the person is fit to carry the public.

9.2 Depending on the circumstances of the offence, an applicant should be free of conviction for 7 years (or at least 7 years must have passed since the completion of the sentence, whichever is longer), before a licence is granted.

## **10. Sexual and indecency offences**

10.1 As licensed drivers often carry unaccompanied and vulnerable passengers, the licensing authority will take a strong line in relation to applicants or existing licence holders with convictions for sexual offences. All sexual and indecency offences will be considered as serious. Applicants with convictions for sexual or indecency offences that involve a third party will normally be refused a licence.

10.2 An application will normally be refused where the applicant has a conviction for an offence such as:

- Rape
- Assault by penetration
- Offences involving children or vulnerable adults
- Sexual assault
- Indecent assault
- Exploitation of prostitution
- Trafficking for sexual exploitation
- Possession of indecent photographs, child pornography etc.
- Indecent exposure
- Soliciting (kerb crawling)
- Or **any** sex or indecency offence that was committed in the course of employment as a taxi or PHV driver
- Or any similar offences (including attempted or conspiracy to commit) offences which replace the above.

10.3 In addition to the above the licensing authority will not grant a licence to any applicant who is currently on the Sex Offenders Register.

## 11. Dishonesty

11.1 A licensed PHV or taxi driver is expected to be a trustworthy person. They deal with cash transactions and valuable property may be left in their vehicles. Taxi drivers are required to deposit such property with police within 24 hours. PHV drivers must pass lost property to the operator. The widespread practice of delivering unaccompanied property is indicative of the trust that business people place in licensed drivers. Moreover, it is comparatively easy for a dishonest driver to defraud the public by demanding more than the legal or agreed fare. Overseas visitors can be confused by our currency and may be vulnerable to an unscrupulous driver. For all these reasons, a serious view is taken of any conviction involving dishonesty.

11.2 In general, a minimum period of 7 years free of conviction or at least 7 years from completion of sentence (whichever is longer) should be required before granting a licence. Offences involving dishonesty include:

- theft
- burglary
- fraud
- benefit fraud
- handling or receiving stolen goods
- forgery
- conspiracy to defraud
- obtaining money or property by deception
- other deception
- taking a vehicle without consent
- and any similar offences

- Or any similar offences (including attempted or conspiracy to commit) offences which replace the above

11.3 A licence will not normally be granted if an applicant has more than one conviction for a dishonesty offence.

11.4 Applicants or existing licence holders that are found to have intentionally misled the licensing authority, or lied as part of the application or renewal process, will not be issued with a licence.

## **12. Drugs**

12.1 A serious view is taken of any drug related offence. The nature and quantity of the drugs, whether for personal use or supply are issues which should be considered.

12.2 A licence will not normally be granted where the applicant has an isolated conviction for an offence related to the supply of drugs and has not been free of conviction for 10 years.

12.3 A licence will not normally be granted where the applicant has more than one conviction for offences related to the possession of drugs and has not been free of conviction for 5 years.

12.4 An applicant who has an isolated conviction for an offence related to the possession of drugs (other than for supply) within the last 3-5 years may be granted a licence, but consideration should be given to the nature and quantity of the drugs.

12.5 If there is evidence of persistent drugs use, misuse or dependency a specialist medical examination (in accordance with DVLA Group 2 medical standards) may be required before the licence is granted. If the applicant was an addict then they would normally be required to show evidence of 5 years free from drug taking after detoxification treatment.

12.6 A licence will not normally be granted if an applicant has more than one conviction for a drugs related offence.

## **13. Driving offences involving the loss of life**

13.1 A very serious view is to be taken of any applicant who has been convicted of a driving offence that resulted in the loss of life. Unless there are exceptional circumstances a licence will not normally be granted where the applicant has a conviction for an offence such as:

- Causing death by dangerous driving
- Causing death by careless driving whilst under the influence of drink or drugs
- Causing death by driving: unlicensed, disqualified or uninsured drivers
- or any similar offences

## **14. Drink driving/driving under the influence of drugs/using a mobile phone whilst driving**

- 14.1 As licensees are professional vocational drivers, a serious view is taken of convictions for driving, or being in charge of a vehicle while under the influence of drink or drugs. An isolated incident would not necessarily debar an applicant from proceeding on the restoration of his DVLA driving licence but he should be warned as to the significant risk to his licence status in the event of re-offending. Normally at least 5 years after the restoration of the driving licence following a drink/drug drive conviction should elapse before an application will be considered. If there is any suggestion that the applicant is alcohol or drug dependent, a satisfactory special medical report must be provided before the application can be allowed to proceed. If an applicant has more than one conviction for driving or being in charge of a vehicle while under the influence of drink or drugs the application should normally be refused.
- 14.2 Applicants should also be aware of the serious risk posed by driving whilst using a mobile phone. There is a substantial body of research (see for instance <http://www.rospa.com/rospaweb/docs/advice-services/road-safety/drivers/mobile-phone-report.pdf>) which shows that drivers who use a mobile phone suffer physical and cognitive distraction which means they:
- are much less aware of what's happening on the road around them
  - fail to see road signs
  - fail to maintain proper lane position and steady speed
  - are more likely to 'tailgate' the vehicle in front
  - react more slowly, take longer to brake and longer to stop
  - are more likely to enter unsafe gaps in traffic
  - feel more stressed and frustrated.
- 14.3 There is evidence to show that drivers who use a mobile phone have slower reaction times than those who have consumed up to the legal alcohol limit. In light of this, an equally serious view should be taken of convictions for driving whilst using a mobile phone as for driving under the influence of drink or drugs.
- 14.4 A licence will not normally be granted if an applicant has more than one conviction for an offence of driving under the influence of drink or drugs or whilst using a mobile phone.

## **15. Other Motoring Offences**

- 15.1 There are many motoring offences which attract penalty points and fines. Some of these are not necessarily a bar from an applicant being granted a licence or an existing driver retaining a licence.
- 15.2 Traffic offences such as driving without due care and attention, reckless driving, more serious speeding offences (usually dealt with by a court), or offences of a similar nature will give rise to serious doubts about the applicant's suitability to be a driving professional. An applicant with any such convictions will be required to show a period

of at least 1 year free of such convictions. For applicants with more than one offence this should normally be increased to 5 years.

- 15.3 In cases where the courts have imposed a disqualification in respect of the DVLA driving licence, the periods stated above should normally commence from the date of the restoration of the licence.
- 15.4 In this policy, the term “disqualification” refers to the period served, in order to take account of the fact that a court may reduce the period of disqualification from driving. An applicant must provide evidence in advance to prove that the court agreed a reduction in the period of disqualification.
- 15.5 In “totting up” cases where disqualification is considered by the Court, even if the court does not disqualify (e.g. because of exceptional circumstances) a driver, the licensing authority is likely to refuse a hackney carriage or private hire driver’s licence because different criteria apply. An applicant will normally be expected to show a period of 12 months free from conviction from the date the court made its finding of exceptional circumstances justifying the non-disqualification.

## **16. Licensing Offences**

- 16.1 Certain offences under taxi legislation such as plying for hire, overcharging and refusing to carry disabled persons would normally prevent a licence being granted or renewed until a period of 5 years has passed since .
- 16.2 A licence will not normally be granted if an applicant has more than one conviction for a licensing related offence.

## **17. Insurance offences**

- 17.1 A serious view will be taken of convictions of driving or being in charge of a vehicle without insurance. An isolated incident in the past will not necessarily stop a licence being granted provided he/she has been free of conviction for 3 years, however strict warning should be given as to future behaviour.
- 17.2 A licence will not normally be granted if an applicant has more than one conviction for an insurance related offence.
- 17.3 An operator found guilty of aiding and abetting the driving of passengers for hire and reward whilst without insurance will normally have his operators’ licence revoked immediately and be prevented from holding a licence for at least three years.
- 17.4 Where a specific offence is not mentioned, a suitable period will be determined by reference to offences described. The licensing authority reserves the right to refuse a licence where there are aggravating circumstances, even where these guidelines would otherwise indicate that a licence might be granted.

## **18.0 Outstanding charges or summonses**

- 18.1 If the individual is the subject of an outstanding charge or summons their application can continue to be processed, but the application will need to be reviewed at the conclusion of proceedings.
- 18.2 If the outstanding charge or summons involves a serious offence and the individual's conviction history indicates a possible pattern of unlawful behaviour or character trait, then in the interests of public safety the application may be put on hold until proceedings are concluded or the licence may be refused.

## **19. Non-conviction information**

- 19.1 If an applicant has been arrested or charged, but not convicted, for a serious offence which suggests he could be a danger to the public, consideration may be given to refusing the application or revoking an existing licence.
- 19.2 The licensing authority will take into account intelligence it receives which has not led to a conviction. This may include but not be limited to information regarding acquittals, circumstances in which convictions were quashed due to misdirection to the jury, circumstances where the decision was taken not to prosecute, situations where the person has been arrested and bailed but not yet charged, and complaints from the public. In considering the most appropriate action to take following the receipt of information), the credibility of the witness / complainant and the licence holder will be taken into account.
- 19.3 In assessing the action to take, public safety will be the paramount concern. Decisions will be taken on balance of probability.

## **20. Once a licence has been granted**

- 20.1 If a licence holder's conduct is such that, were they to be applying for a new licence their application would normally be refused, they should expect consideration to be given as to the suspension or revocation of their licence.
- 20.2 A suspension or revocation of the licence of a driver takes effect at the end of the period of 21 days beginning with the day on which notice is given to the driver. If it appears that the interests of public safety require the suspension or revocation of the licence to have immediate effect, and the notice given to the driver includes a statement that is so and an explanation why, the suspension or revocation takes effect when the notice is given to the driver. [Road Safety Act 2006, s 52, 2A&2B]
- 20.3 A suspension or revocation of the licence of an operator takes effect at the end of the period of 21 days beginning with the day on which notice is given to the operator.

## **21 Licences issued by other licensing authorities**

- 21.1 Applicants who hold a licence with one licensing authority should not automatically assume that their application will be granted by another. Each case will be decided on its own merits.
- 21.2 Licensees who are licensed by multiple authorities are expected to inform all such authorities of the authorities that they are licensed by and to advise each authority of any changes in this respect; and should expect those authorities to share information regarding their conduct and to take it into account as appropriate.

## **22 Summary**

- 22.1 To summarise, a criminal history in itself will not automatically result in refusal and a current conviction for a serious crime need not bar an applicant permanently from becoming licensed. As the preceding paragraphs indicate, in most cases, an applicant would be expected to remain free from conviction for 3 to 10 years, according to circumstances, before an application can be considered. However, there may be occasions when an application can be allowed before 3 years free from conviction have elapsed.
- 22.2 Any person who has committed an offence and has to wait before an application is positively considered is more likely to value their licence and act accordingly.
- 22.3 While it is possible that an applicant may have a number of convictions that, individually, meet the above guidelines, the overall offending history must be considered when assessing an applicant's suitability to be licensed. A series of offences over a period of time is more likely to give cause for concern than an isolated minor conviction. Some discretion can be afforded if an offence disclosed is isolated and there are mitigating circumstances, but the overriding consideration is the protection of the public.