

North Tyneside Council Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy

PASSENGER GUIDANCE

The Authority is responsible for licensing hackney carriages, private hire vehicles, their drivers and private hire operators within the Borough of North Tyneside. The primary concern of the Authority is the safety of the public.

Vehicles

The Authority licences two types of vehicle: Hackney Carriages – also known as taxis or cabs - and Private Hire Vehicles.

Either vehicle must only be driven by drivers who are also licensed by North Tyneside Council. Before a vehicle is licensed the vehicle must be of an approved type and must meet certain, minimum specifications. It undergoes a thorough inspection at the Authority's Test Station at Killingworth (which includes an MOT) and must be appropriately insured. Vehicles over four years of age undergo an additional safety check every 6 months.

Hackney Carriages

Hackney Carriages licensed by North Tyneside Council can be flagged down in the street (only within the North Tyneside district) and they can also wait on one of the many official taxi ranks in the Borough. They can also be pre-booked.

Hackney carriages must:

- be black in colour,
- display a white licence plate on the rear of the vehicle showing the licence number, description of the vehicle including the registration number, maximum number of passengers that can be carried and contact details to make a complaint,
- be fitted with a roof-sign which must illuminate when available to hire,
- be fitted with an operating taximeter which must be sealed and must be used during each hiring to record the fare,
- not charge more than the fare displayed on the meter,
- display the Authority's maximum Hackney Carriage fare tariff in a prominent position in the vehicle,
- display a white decal on each front door showing the licence number,
- display a disc in the top left-hand corner of the windscreen showing the licence number, the maximum number of passengers that can be carried and contact details to make a complaint,

Private Hire Vehicles

Private Hire Vehicles can only be pre-booked in advance via an Operator (they cannot be flagged down or wait in the street or wait on a rank). They are not subject to the Council's maximum fare tariff and the cost should therefore be agreed before the start of your journey.

Private Hire Vehicles must:

- not be black in colour, or any colour resembling black,
- display a yellow licence plate on the rear of the vehicle showing the licence number, description of the vehicle including the registration number, maximum number of passengers that can be carried and contact details to make a complaint.
- not be fitted with a roofsign of any description,
- display a yellow decal on each front door showing the licence number.
- display a disc in the top left-hand corner of the windscreen showing the licence number, the maximum number of passengers that can be carried and contact details to make a complaint.

Private Hire Operators

These are licensed by the Authority to make provision for the invitation or acceptance of private hire bookings. Before a licence is issued an operator must undergo a criminal record check and provide a business plan setting how he/she intends to operate.

It is the responsibility of an operator to ensure that all vehicles and drivers working from the office are licensed. Operators are therefore required to maintain and make available for inspection various records relating to the operation of their business including lists of vehicles and drivers operated by them.

Drivers

The Authority issues two types of driver's licence depending on the type of vehicle the driver wishes to drive: Hackney Carriage and Private Hire. The criteria and qualifications for each are virtually identical.

Before a licence is issued an applicant must prove to the Authority that he/she is a 'fit and proper' person. This is done by:

- proving they have held a full UK or EEA driving licence for at least a year,
- undergoing a criminal record check,
- providing a Group 2 medical (which is the same standard as for bus and lorry drivers),
- pass a knowledge/locality test,
- prove a right to live and work in the UK,
- undergo training on preventing Child and Adult Exploitation,

Once an applicant has proven they are 'fit and proper' the Authority will issue a licence for up to 3 years. Two identity badges are also issued to the driver showing their photograph and the expiry date of the licence. One badge must be worn at all times when the driver is working in a position that is clearly visible to passengers; the other badge must be displayed on the dashboard of the vehicle.

Enforcement

The Authority employs Licensing Officers to undertake enforcement work and this includes investigating complaints and carrying out spot check inspections of vehicles both during the day and out of hours when the late night economy is active. Where non-compliance with conditions of licence or legislation is noted officers will follow this up with appropriate action. This may be by verbal advice or a warning, the issue of a notice requiring a vehicle defect to be remedied, suspension of a vehicle licence and in some cases prosecution of the driver and/or proprietor/operator.

Complaints

Using taxis and private hire vehicles is a safe form of transport and the vast majority of journeys take place without incident. If you do want to make a complaint about the conduct of a driver or the condition of a vehicle contact the Licensing Office by telephone (0191 6432165), by email at taxi.licensing@northynteside.gov.uk or online via the Authority's website at www.northynteside.gov.uk To assist us please make a note of the licence/plate number of the vehicle, the name or description of the driver and the date, time and place of the incident.

Refusals

A driver can refuse a fare with a reasonable excuse, for example a risk of physical violence, passengers who are abusive, racist, sexist, foul mouthed, extremely drunk, refuse to stop smoking, likely to vomit or have vomited over themselves etc.

Assistance dogs

A driver can only refuse to carry an assistance dog if he/she has a medical exemption certificate issued by the Authority. This must be shown on request.

Overcharging

It is an offence for a driver to charge a person with a disability, for example a wheelchair-user, more for a journey than any other comparable booking.

Staying safe

- If possible, pre-book your return journey before going out.
- Let a third party know the details of your journey.
- Check the vehicle has a rear licence plate and door decals, otherwise do not get in the vehicle.
- Make a note of the licence number displayed on the plate, decal and windscreen disc.
- Ask to see the driver's badge, make a note of his/her name and number.
- Do not get in the vehicle if the driver is unable to show you a badge or if it has expired.
- If you are on your own, sit in the back behind the driver.