

Appendix 2- Guide Dogs Consultation Response

Taxi and PHV Policy - Assistance Dogs

Under the Equality Act 2010, licensed drivers of taxis and private hire vehicles are under a duty to carry passengers with guide, hearing and other assistance dogs without additional charge. When carrying such passengers, drivers have a duty to:

- a) Convey the disabled passenger's dog and allow it to remain under the physical control of the owner; and
- b) Not to make any additional charge for doing so.

It is best practice to ask the passenger where they want themselves and their dog to sit in the vehicle.

Enforcement Policy

Under the Equality Act 2010, it is an offence for any operator or driver to refuse to carry assistance dogs or to charge more for the fare or booking. On conviction for such an offence, drivers can be fined up to £1,000 and have their licence removed.

To ensure that the Equality Act 2010 is upheld, the Licensing Authority will:

- Have a zero tolerance policy to access refusals - investigating all reported violations of the Act with a view to pursuing a conviction.
- Undertake periodic test purchasing with assistance dog owners on licensed vehicles to ensure that licensing requirements are being complied with.
- Make it a condition of taxi and private hire vehicle drivers licences that they have undertaken disability equality training, which includes information regarding the carriage of assistance dogs

Medical Exemption Certificates

Drivers who have a certifiable medical condition which is aggravated by exposure to dogs may apply to the council for exemption from the duty on medical grounds. If no exemption has been applied for and subsequently granted, then drivers are still required to carry assistance dogs.

The Council will:

- Make it a condition attached to the licence that the notice of exemption must be exhibited in the vehicle by fixing it in an easily accessible place, for example on the windscreen or in a prominent position on the dashboard.
- Seek to use tactile medical exemption certificates so that guide dog owners are able to identify the certificate, which should be presented to the guide dog owner upon request.
- Only issue an exemption certificate when it is authorised by the driver's GP and is accompanied by medical evidence, for example a blood test, a skin prick test or clinical history.

Tactile Medical Exemption Certificates

The Equality Act 2010 states taxis and private hire vehicles (PHV) must carry assistance dogs unless they have been issued with a medical exemption certificate. It is currently very difficult for people with vision impairments to verify the validity of these certificates. This can be overcome through the creation of tactile medical exemption certificates.

Benefits of tactile certificates

- They empower assistance dog owners to know that if a taxi or PHV driver prevents an assistance dog from travelling in their cab on medical grounds, the claim is genuine.
- Accessibility best practises are met for people with vision impairments.
- It presents positive publicity opportunities for councils – Guide Dogs are happy to produce a joint press release regarding the use of these certificates.

Is braille necessary?

No, only around 5% of people registered blind and partially sighted in the UK read braille (RNIB, 2011). A raised or embossed “E”, for example, will suffice. This would be larger than braille, and much simpler for those who do not read braille, making the certificate more accessible. However, both can be used.

Card Creation

- Certificates cost as little as £20 for 20.
- Cards can be ordered online from printing companies; the embossed E can be done either by the printing company or by using a stamp (similar to a Company Seal which can also be ordered online).
- We recommend councils work with local people with sight loss on the design but Guide Dogs is happy to support and advise.

Case Study and Example Card

Aberdeen City Council was the first authority to introduce a tactile medical exemption certificate. The card was designed in consultation with local disabled people, it is large print, on a yellow background and has an embossed E in the corner indicating authenticity. Other requirements included that the certificate must be affixed either to the vehicle windscreen or dashboard facing outwards in order that it may conveniently be

read from outside the vehicle and must be made available to inspect upon request. An example of Aberdeen's medical exemption certificate can be seen to the left.



Mary, a guide dog owner involved in the design said: "It's always been a concern to us that we have no way of knowing if a driver who refuses to carry our dog has a doctor's certificate. Now, they will be issued with a certificate with an embossed 'E' in the corner that we can feel. It would be great if other local authorities would follow Aberdeen City Council's lead".

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