

# **St Albans Licensing**

## **Newsletter**

### **August 2020**

#### **Travelling with confidence**



Watford Borough Council has created a new 'quality assurance' mark for transport operators in Watford. This mark is designed to reassure passengers that when they use the bus, on demand transport, hackney carriage or private hire vehicles in the town, the right controls are in place to minimise the spread of coronavirus.

As part of the programme, and to qualify for the confidence mark, all Watford based licence holders receive specialist infection control and risk assessment training and, for those who meet the strict standards required, the council is making a grant available for the installation of a passenger safety screen. Once drivers have successfully completed the programme, they will be awarded the mark to display in their vehicles as a clear sign to customers they can use the hackney carriage or private hire vehicles with confidence.

St Albans Council are currently speaking with Watford Council about bringing this initiative to St Albans and more information will be sent to you all in due course.

#### **Usage of Hackney Carriage ranks at night**

We have received complaints in regards to hackney carriages by Harpenden station rank using raised voices in the early hours of the morning.

Please be considerate when awaiting a fare at any rank, as your rank may have residential properties nearby. Please make sure you consider the time of day and the residents who may live in close proximity.

## **Renewal applications**

As you are aware the Council offices are still closed due to COVID-19. All appointments are cancelled at present. The process to renew your licence is now fully electronic and will require you to send scanned or photographed documents to us via email. Anyone with a renewal due during this time will be sent a renewal letter detailing the current procedure.

We have started to hold appointments for Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks. If you have applied to renew your driver badge and have this check pending we will contact you to invite you in.

For anyone who had renewed their vehicle plate during this time we ask you to continue using your existing vehicle plate. Please do not dispose of your old plate. Your new paper licence will be emailed to you as a PDF and will contain the correct dates should anyone ask you to provide proof of valid licence. We will contact you once you are able to collect your new vehicle plate.

## **High Street Rank**

As you are aware there are a number of roads closed at the moment around St Albans for social distancing purposes, one of these being the high street. The rank is not currently available for use due to this closure. We are aware that some drivers have used this area to drop off passengers, which is currently allowed as access to the road is not prohibited. If you do use this area to drop off passengers please ensure you move on promptly.

At the moment the road closure being reviewed by Hertfordshire County Council, there is potential that a barrier may be placed to close off access to the road. This is just one option being considered. We will update you of any changes once we become aware of this.

## **Home Office campaign to help taxi and private hire vehicle staff identify and safeguard victims of "County Lines"**

To help safeguard vulnerable children and protect them from gangs, the Home Office, Institute of Licensing and CrimeStoppers are working to increase awareness among taxi and private hire vehicle drivers, and licensing staff, of the signs to spot a potential victim. Thousands of children and teenagers - some as young as 12 - may be being exploited by criminal gangs to carry drugs to coastal and market towns.

Many of these children travel in taxis or private hire vehicles in a criminal activity known as 'county lines'.

The signs to spot are:

- A child, normally 14-15 years old, but can be as young as 12 travelling a long train journey alone.
- They may be from another area, so may not be familiar with an area (may look lost) and may have an unfamiliar accent for the local area.
- They may be travelling during school hours or unusual hours (e.g. late in the evening).

- An obvious relationship with controlling, older individuals.
- Suspicion of self-harm, physical assault or unexplained injuries.
- Excessive receipt of texts or phone calls.

There are online posters provided by the Home Office to help taxi and private hire vehicle drivers and booking staff recognise the signs to spot potential victims. Taxi drivers who spot a vulnerable young person should report their concerns to CrimeStoppers.

This is just one part of the wider work set out in the Serious Violence Strategy which includes:

- providing funding to establish the new National County Lines Co-ordination Centre to co-ordinate the police and wider law enforcement response to tackle County Lines
- continuing to work with the Crown Prosecution Service and national police lead on the prosecution of county lines cases
- undertaking awareness-raising activity to help young and vulnerable people understand how to avoid becoming involved and exploited by County Lines gangs

## **Safeguarding**

The UK-wide Modern Slavery Helpline, which is operated by Unseen, was established in the autumn of 2016.

The National Crime Agency estimates that there are tens of thousands of people being held in modern slavery in the UK, trapped in situations such as forced labour, domestic servitude or sex exploitation. In reality, the number could be far higher.

Drivers are on the frontline, often coming into contact with people who may be vulnerable, for example because they are young, have learning difficulties, be suffering ill health, or be elderly or who have drunk to excess on a night out, or who may have taken an illegal substance. Such persons may be travelling alone or accompanied by another person.



Unseen launched an app in 2018. The App provides a simple guide to recognising the signs of modern slavery and reporting concerns in anonymously to free more victims of slavery. The app was developed for Unseen by the Helpline's founding partner BT and can be found by searching 'Unseen UK' in app stores now. This app is free to download and we would encourage drivers to do so.

## **COVID-19**

While working you during these uncertain times you need to take steps to protect yourselves from potential infection, and to protect any customers.

If anyone suffers from flu like symptoms they should follow the government advice to self-isolate for at least 10 days. For any shared households (including flats or other spaces) where another person has flu like symptoms, all people within the household should all self-isolate together for at least 14 days. This is to account for the incubation period.

The symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) are similar to other illnesses that are much more common, such as cold and flu.

The flu like symptoms of coronavirus (COVID-19) can include:

- a new and persistent cough
- a high temperature
- shortness of breath
- loss of taste or smell

There are things you can do to help stop viruses spreading:

- cover your mouth and nose with a tissue or your sleeve (not your hands) when you cough or sneeze
- put used tissues in the bin immediately
- wash your hands with soap and water often – use hand sanitiser gel if soap and water are not available
- dry hands after hand washing with disposable towels
- try to avoid close contact with people who are unwell
- do not touch your eyes, nose or mouth if your hands are not clean
- detergent based disinfectants can be used with disposable non- latex gloves, and disposable cloths to clean hand contact points in the vehicle, such as steering wheel, hand break, gear stick, dials, and door handles;
- you should consider ways in which you can reduce contact with customers where possible, for example, avoid shaking hands, and using a contactless card payment system.

## **Switch on to SWITCHING OFF**

When vehicles stand stationary with their engines running they emit **20 times more pollution** than when they are moving. Air quality in some parts of the District, particularly in the City Centre, already exceeds EU safe limits so it's important that we all work together for our cleaner air.

We receive regular complaints from the public about taxi drivers who sit in their stationary vehicles idling their engines. Idling engines create a noticeable impact on surrounding air quality. Not only does it affect others around your car, but it also puts your own health at risk as in-car air pollution is often higher because of the reduced

We would ask you to consider that you have a key role to play in reducing unnecessary pollution by switching off your engine whilst waiting for customers, taking a break or even when in standstill traffic. Fuel consumption of an idling-vehicle is about half a litre per hour so by switching off you will be saving money to!