

**SOLIHULL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH  
COUNCIL**

Licensing Team, Central Depot Moat Lane,  
Solihull, B91 2LW

[www.solihull.gov.uk](http://www.solihull.gov.uk)

Telephone: 0121 704 6830

Email: [licensing@solihull.gov.uk](mailto:licensing@solihull.gov.uk)



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# Hackney Carriage & Private Hire Applicant Handbook

This booklet is intended to assist you with preparing for the Suitability Assessment, but should also be used as a reference guide for if you are successfully granted a licence. The advice and guidance provided is by no means an exhaustive list and we make regular updates to our procedures and requirements so please check our website on a regular basis, and read any documentation that we send you.

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## **Pre-Assessment Information**

Please ensure you arrive at least 15 minutes before the assessment is due to start. You will be here for approximately 1 ½ hours in total. If you turn up late for your appointment you will not be allowed to sit the assessment and you will have to rebook at your own cost. If you need to cancel or rearrange your assessment you must give at least 24 hours notice otherwise you will have to pay for a further assessment. You must bring some photo ID with you. You may also bring a bottle of water with you. Please note that the SMBC Central Depot is strictly no smoking.

When you arrive for the assessment, there will be 15 minutes of question time before the official start.

The assessment will involve a mix of verbal, written and multiple choice questions and is split into these subjects:

- Communication
- Highway Code
- Vehicle Maintenance
- Conditions/Enforcement/Legislation/ Customer Service

There will be 40 questions to answer, and you must get at least 35 correct in order to pass. You will be given 45 minutes; you will not be allowed to leave the room before the end of the test.

We will contact you by telephone with your results as soon as possible after you have sat the assessment. Please do not contact us as we will not be able to help you until all the papers have been marked.

You may sit the assessment a maximum of 3 times (a retest fee is payable); if you fail all three times your application will be cancelled. If you wish to reapply, the you may do this after your application is cancelled.

You must ensure your mobile phone is switched off during the assessment. Cheating, or attempting to cheat will be taken very seriously. Anyone caught cheating will be instantly disqualified and asked to leave the room. Cheating is defined as talking to someone else, looking at someone else's paper, using unauthorised materials, breach of the above rules or any other behaviour which is deemed inappropriate.

You need to complete your application within 3 months of submitting it. If you do not, your application will be cancelled, and you will need to start the process again from scratch. We will carry over your Disability Awareness and Blue Lamp Trust Certificates (provided they are dated within 12 months), but you will need to undergo a further medical examination.

## **Highway Code**

As part of your assessment you will be asked a number of questions relating to the Highway Code. In order for you to prepare for this we advise that you revise through a recent copy of the DSA Theory Test book. You may want a friend to help you with this when preparing for your assessment.

Please note that it is important that you revise/research before you attend for your assessment.

## **Customer Service & Avoiding Complaints**

We often get complaints about drivers' attitudes towards customers and/or bad service.

This does not reflect well on you, your operator or Solihull Council and we take it very seriously. Good customer service can be defined as:

**“Providing a quality service that meets the customer needs and keeps them coming back.”**

So, here are a few tips to help you achieve good customer service and avoid complaints:

### **Avoid fare disputes**

We do get complaints about fare disputes, so make sure the customer knows what they need to pay and be ready to explain the fare structure to them. Explain that if you make extra stops to pick up or drop off friends it will cost more. Make sure they have enough money to pay you; if necessary offer to take them to a cash machine. You are entitled to ask for the fare (or a proportion of it) up front, but they are not obliged to give it to you. If they still dispute the fare call your operator and get them to advise the customer of the cost. Also make sure you go the most direct route, do not unnecessarily prolong journeys – this is an offence for Hackney Carriage drivers. If the customer has a specific route they want to take then you should advise them that it may cost more.

### **Allegations of inappropriate behaviour**

We have received complaints from females claiming to have been touched or had indecent propositions from drivers. Be very careful about this, it may be wise to ask single females to sit in the rear of the vehicle. Be mindful of what you say to customers too, often things can be misinterpreted and this can cause complaints. The police may get involved and it all gets very complicated, so you should take the appropriate steps to avoid it happening in the first place.

## **Friendliness**

It doesn't cost anything to be polite and courteous, but can mean a lot to the customer.

## **Eye contact**

Look at your customer and address them directly, this shows them you are listening to them and are interested in them.

## **Be attentive**

Listen carefully to what the customer is saying, and ask for clarification if you're unsure. Clear communication is important so that both parties understand exactly what is going on and there is no room for misunderstandings. This will hopefully alleviate the possibility of any problems or complaints.

## **Patience**

Don't rush your customer. You will be meeting people from lots of different backgrounds and you need to be sensitive to their individual needs. You will need extra patience with the elderly or disabled as they will not be able to move or get into and out of your vehicle with as much ease as everyone else, offer a helping hand. Everyone deserves to be treated with respect, it is always good to remember to treat people as you would wish to be treated yourself.

## **Have a warm and approachable manner**

Always remember the customer is paying for a service, and all the things we have mentioned go towards making a better experience for the customer. Assisting with luggage, opening doors etc. may make the difference between the customer choosing you again or going elsewhere.

As you can see from everything we have listed, good customer service is mostly common sense and treating people as you would like to be treated yourself. Avoiding complaints about you is also about using your common sense and behaving in an appropriate manner at all times. It may also lead to you receiving a tip!

## **Appearance and personal hygiene**

You may well be the first person a visitor to Solihull meets, especially if you pick up from the airport or railway station. It is really important to give a good impression and hopefully the passengers will remember you for the right reasons. You should dress in clean tidy clothes and look smart. A lot of operators have their own dress codes which they expect you to comply with, and Solihull MBC will always encourage operators to improve their standards.

We will not generally get involved with any disputes between you and your operator if you do not like their rules.

As a taxi driver, it is important to maintain a high standard of personal hygiene too. Passengers do not want to sit in a vehicle with someone who has not bothered to wash properly and smells unpleasant or wears grubby clothing. Take pride in your appearance. If we receive a complaint about you, or your appearance, we will call you in and advise you to smarten yourself up.

Also make sure your vehicle is clean and tidy too. Nobody wants to sit in a car filled with sweet wrappers, crisp packets etc. It is not acceptable and not what the customer pays for. If we receive a complaint about the cleanliness of your vehicle we will inspect it and we may suspend the vehicle until it is cleaned to an acceptable standard.

## **Enforcement**

### **Complaints**

Once your licence has been issued, you will be expected to comply with your conditions at all times. If a complaint is made to the Licensing Team, either by a passenger or member of the public, you will be called to the office to discuss the circumstances with a Licensing Officer.

Some common complaints are concerned with standards of driving, not knowing how to get to a particular destination and improper conduct.

As a licensed driver you are an ambassador for Solihull Council and your conduct reflects not only on yourself, but your Operator and the Council as well. You will be expected to deal with passengers and other members of the public in a friendly and courteous manner, and provide a straightforward and safe journey to the required destination.

Any complaints will be fully investigated by a Licensing Enforcement Officer and, if they are substantiated, there are several courses of action which may be taken:-

- Officer Caution or verbal/written warning – you will be required to sign a formal warning which will stay on your file.
- Suspension – this can be for any length of time. Your badge & plates will be taken off you and your Operator informed that you cannot work until the suspension period is over.
- Hearing before the Licensing Sub Committee – the Committee may issue a strict warning or a suspension period, but they also have the power to hand out a probationary period or even revoke your licence if they feel it necessary.
- Prosecution – a report will be prepared and your case will be referred for hearing at the Magistrates Court

It is in your own best interests to ensure that you fully understand and comply with your conditions and behave in a civil and courteous manner at all times, in this way you will help avoid any cause for complaint and the need to be called in to the Licensing Office.

### **Licensing Sub-Committee**

Should a complaint be deemed of a serious nature you may be placed before the Licensing Sub-Committee who will decide if you are a fit and proper person to hold a licence.

You will be required to attend the meeting; you may bring a friend or legal adviser if you wish, and discuss the circumstances with the committee Members. You should also bring your badge and plates in case a decision is made to suspend or revoke your licence/s. These will need to be handed in to the Officer on duty, or brought in to the office within 21 days.

The Licensing Sub-Committee have many options when dealing with drivers, it is impossible to say what a 'usual' penalty would be as each case is individual and is dealt with entirely on its own merits. The committee may simply issue a strict warning as to future conduct, or hand out a period of suspension. However, they have the power to revoke the licence and/or decide on some other suitable penalty.

Any appearance before the Licensing Sub-Committee is held on your file and may have an impact on any future applications you may wish to make.

### **Suspension**

If your licence is suspended, either by a Licensing Officer under delegated powers or by the Licensing Sub-Committee, you will be unable to work until the suspension period is complete and your badge and plate have been returned to you.

### **Plying for Hire**

Private Hire drivers are only permitted to pick up pre-booked passengers following a call from their Operator. They **CANNOT** and **MUST NOT** pick up off the street without booking – if they do they commit the offence of plying for hire, as well as having no insurance, as Private Hire insurance is only valid for pre-booked journeys and so will be declared void in these circumstances.

Plying for Hire, also known as 'mousing' or 'pirating', is a serious offence which may result in court proceedings and, if you are convicted, will result in the suspension of your licence for a period of up to 6 months. A court appearance may result in large fines and the imposition of penalty points on your DVLA licence for the no insurance offence. In some cases this has led to disqualification from driving due to totting up, with the associated implications on future insurance premiums.

Be wary of hanging around outside a destination once you have dropped off your passengers, particularly outside places like hotels, stations or around prominent venues in Birmingham and other town centres e.g. Broad Street. There is no reason to wait around once your passengers have left your vehicle and by doing so it could look like you are waiting to pick up passengers who haven't pre-booked, and could lead to allegations of plying for hire.

Although they can be flagged down and can pick up passengers off the street, it is possible for Hackney Carriage Drivers to ply for hire as well. The licence only permits them to pick up in their own district so, for example, if a hackney carriage takes a fare from Solihull town centre into Birmingham, this is ok, but on the way back he cannot pick up another fare in Birmingham – he must wait until he is back within the Solihull boundary.



Plying for Hire is illegal and unsafe, and the penalties far outweigh any preconceived ideas you may have about making quick money. Other local authorities can and will take action against drivers found plying for hire in their area.

## **Driver safety**

As a hackney carriage or private driver you will be dealing with strangers, often in isolated places and whilst carrying cash. If you work at night you are likely to have to deal with people who have drunk too much alcohol, so you may be more at risk of violence. This is why it is really important that you think about your safety as a lone worker. Here are a few things to think about that can help you stay safe:

- If you can, drop off cash during your shift so that you carry as little in your car as you can. If you can't, keep your cash hidden from view in a secure box.
- Installing a CCTV camera may lead to reduced threats and violence against drivers. Cameras can be bought or rented, and costs may be offset by a reduced insurance premium. If you are thinking of fitting a CCTV system into your vehicle you must speak to the licensing office first as you will need to gain our approval. Please do your homework in relation to rights to the footage and what the requirements are in law, i.e. signage in the vehicle to highlight the presence of CCTV to passengers etc. and make sure you are aware of requirements under the Data Protection Act. You are not allowed access to the recordings and you need to register with the Information Commissioner. Our guidance on CCTV in vehicles is available on request.
- Fitting a convex mirror is a simple and cheap option that gives you a full view of what the passengers in the rear of the vehicle are doing.

### **Carry with you the following:**

- A spare key, in case an assailant throws your keys away
- A fully charged mobile phone
- A note pad and pen to record incidents
- An emergency card with your name, date of birth, blood group, allergies and a contact number for emergencies

### **Staying Safe**

- Make sure you are not tired; don't work long hours – you need to be alert at all times.
- Trust your instinct – you have the right to refuse a passenger if you think they may present risk and let your operator know.
- You may wish to control passenger access to the front seat. Only open the windows enough to speak to people without them being able to reach in.
- Communication with the passenger is important. Be polite and pleasant.
- Be ready to explain the fare structure to a passenger. Many violent incidents arise from fare disputes.
- Make eye contact with the passenger when they get in the car. This helps to establish a relationship with the passenger. It also gives them the message that you could identify them later down the line if necessary.

- Ask your passenger(s) if they have a preferred route. If not, explain the route you plan to take and if you are aware of any delays such as road works etc. explain that you are going to take another route and that it may cost more. Check that they are happy with your decision.
- If you can, try and drop off passengers in a lit up area. Try to avoid driving into cul-de-sacs, if appropriate, but if you do have to, position your vehicle so that you can drive out quickly if you need to. Brightly lit areas are usually covered by CCTV.
- If you are a Private Hire driver make sure you only ever take booked jobs. This means your operator will have details of the passengers and this will help identify them. If you pick up un-booked jobs you have no chance of identifying the attackers and you are also breaking the law, which might jeopardise your licence with Solihull MBC. Think very carefully about what you are doing.

### **Operators**

- Use your radio to tell your operator where you are going. This will mean the controller has the information, and the passenger will know they do. Alert the controller of any changes to the expected route along the way.
- Have a pre-arranged code word that you can use if a passenger becomes threatening, so that you can call for help without making the passenger suspicious. A lot of operators already have something in place; make sure you are aware what the process is, just in case you need to call for help.
- Some control rooms have GPS (Global Positioning System) which is a space-based system that provides location & time information, and can track the progress of all vehicles. Drivers have a silent button which can activate in an emergency, which flags up their vehicle on the controller's screen.

### **If you feel threatened**

- Try to stay calm. Take slow, deep breaths – this may help to lessen your anxiety.
- Be aware of your actions and how they may be seen by others.
- If you have a purpose built taxi or a saloon car with a screen you are likely to be safer staying in your vehicle rather than getting out.
- Do not attempt to run after a passenger who owes you their fare. Your safety is more important than the money.

### **If you are attacked**

- Do not try to fight back – it is most likely to make the violence worse for you.
- Use your horn and lights to attract attention – get back in your car if you have stepped outside and lock the doors.
- Contact your operator or call 999 to get help.

## **After an incident**

- Gather as much information about the person as you can e.g. their clothes, accent. Use the notebook we suggested you carry to write down everything about the incident as soon as possible – a description of the passenger, height, size, clothing, colour, what they said and did.
- If you do not call them at the time, report all violent incidents to the Police. Be prepared to make a witness statement. It may take time, but it may prevent the violence in the future – for you and other drivers.
- When sentencing offenders, courts have been advised to take particularly seriously assaults against people who are providing a public service, especially those who are vulnerable because they work alone at night.

## **Private hire/hackney carriage specific laws & regulations**

When working, or using a vehicle for private hire or hackney carriage, you need to be aware of the laws and regulations that are specific to work within these trades, and which are different from the day to day requirements of normal domestic motoring.

### **Seat belts**

- A Hackney Carriage driver is exempt from wearing a seatbelt whilst in his Hackney Carriage vehicle, whether there are passengers on board or not.
- This is **not** the case if you are a Private Hire Driver. As a Private Hire driver the only time you are exempt from wearing a seat belt is when you actually have fare-paying passengers (customers) in the vehicle - at all other times (including when you are carrying family and friends) you **MUST** wear your seat belt.
- All your passengers should wear their seat belts and you should get into the habit of asking your passengers to buckle up. **NEVER** carry more passengers than you are licensed to carry, this is illegal and unsafe. A child travelling on an adult's knee counts as 1 passenger, even if it leaves an empty seat in the vehicle.
- If you are convicted of failing to wear a seatbelt, you could face a fine of up to £500.

### **Child seats**

As a journey in a Hackney Carriage or Private Hire Vehicle is an irregular journey, it would be unreasonable to expect drivers to provide the correct child seat for young passengers.

Therefore, you **MUST** follow these guidelines:

- Under 3s must travel in the rear only, unrestrained (no seat belt).
- Children three years or older can travel without a child's car seat but they must wear an adult seat belt and only travel in the rear of the vehicle.
- Children aged 12 and over may travel in the front seat provided they wear the adult seat belt.
- As the driver of the vehicle it is your responsibility to ensure all child passengers are travelling with the correct restraints – either a child safety seat (if available) **OR** in the rear of the vehicle using the adult seat belt.
- As a driver if you are convicted of failing to ensure a child passenger is correctly restrained, you may face a fine of up to £500 and in addition your insurance could be affected.

## Tyres

- For Private Hire/Hackney Carriage use, all tyres, including the spare, must have a minimum tread depth of 2mm.

## Smoking

- Smoking is not permitted in a Private Hire or Hackney Carriage vehicle **at any time**. Under the Health Act 2006, it is a criminal offence for anyone to smoke in a Private Hire/Hackney Carriage vehicle **at any time**. Even when you are not working, it is still illegal to smoke in your vehicle.
- Anyone who is caught doing so will incur a £50 Fixed Penalty. If the fine is paid within 14 days it will be reduced to £30.
- You **must** display No Smoking signs inside your vehicle in the passenger compartment. Failure to do so will incur a £200 Fixed Penalty.
- If a passenger attempts to smoke, politely advise them that the law places you under a duty to prevent them from smoking. If you fail to do so, you could face a fine of up to £2500 on conviction in a Court.
- Smoking is not permitted at any time in your Operator's offices; this applies to staff, visitors and drivers.

## How to Licence a Vehicle

Once you have been granted a Private Hire or Hackney Carriage Driver's licence and been issued with a badge, you may then licence a vehicle for use as a Private Hire or Hackney Carriage Vehicle.

The vehicle must comply with the following conditions:

- Be capable of carrying at least 4 but no more than 8 passengers
- Be a mid-range saloon or MPV type vehicle (in the case of private hire) or a London-style or Council approved purpose-built Hackney Carriage, capable of carrying passengers in a safe and comfortable manner
- Have an engine size of at least 1500cc
- Have a minimum of 4 opening doors
- Have seats, floor covering and roof linings maintained in a clean condition and be free of tears and cuts

PLEASE NOTE: SOLIHULL COUNCIL WILL NOT LICENCE ANY CATEGORY WRITE-OFFS (PLEASE SEE BASIC VEHICLE MAINTENANCE SECTION).

Although Solihull Council does not currently impose an age restrictions on the vehicle, it will be subject to stringent mechanical checks by our authorised testers in addition to normal MOT requirements. You should also check with the Operator you intend to work for, as they may impose restrictions.

There are 5 authorised garages in the borough that carry out vehicle tests on our behalf. You should book the test directly with your chosen garage (contact details are available on our website). **All** vehicles will need to undergo the test, regardless of age.

The vehicle should be steam cleaned, be in good mechanical condition, the bodywork clean and free of rust and dents. All fittings should be secure; the interior should be in good order, clean and free of unsightly marks. The seating upholstery should be in a good, clean condition.

The vehicle jack and spare wheel must be permanently marked with the vehicle registration number.

The radio must be securely fitted within the vehicle. There should be no trailing wires that may affect the control pedals.

Any appointment made with a garage and subsequently not kept, or a vehicle arriving late for test may incur an additional charge.

The test will be carried out on payment of the fee to the garage and, if your vehicle passes, you will be issued with a set of pass papers which will be **valid for 10 working days**. Retest fees are at the discretion of the garage.

All four wheels must be of the same design including alloy wheel centre discs. Vehicles without alloys must have wheel trims fitted. All wheel trims must be matching and securely fixed.

You should not display any signs, notices, advertisements or devices on, in, or from the vehicle, apart from the following:

- A notice that indicates membership of the A.A.,R.A.C., or other similar motoring organisations
- The notice required by law that informs passengers that it is an offence to smoke
- The name and logo of the Operator, as well as the driver code (in the case of Private Hire) which all must be displayed when working
- The rear and interior licence plates issued by the Council

In order to apply for vehicle licence, you will need the following paperwork:

- Application form (available from our website)
- Log Book (or green slip if you have only just purchased the vehicle)
- MOT
- Supplementary Garage Papers (dated within 10 working days)
- Original Insurance (can also be emailed to us direct from the insurance company)
- Licence fee
- M1 Certificate (Purpose built hackney carriages only)

You will be issued with two plates – a large one to be displayed on the rear outside of the vehicle, and a smaller plate to be displayed internally. You will also be issued with a paper licence which (in the case of private hire) should be given to your chosen operator base. The expiry of your plate will be the same as the expiry of your MOT.

We also issue further guidelines from time to time regarding minimum expectations on vehicles, so you should keep checking our website on a regular basis.



## **Basic Vehicle Maintenance**

All licensed drivers should know the basics of car maintenance. Such knowledge can save you money and help transport your passengers in a safe and comfortable manner.

### **Maintaining Vehicle Tyres**

It is vital that you check your car tyres regularly, for wear, cracking, bulging, pressure or objects caught in the tread. Not only are defective tyres highly dangerous but if found by the police you will be subject to a Fixed Penalty Fine of £60 and 3 points on your DVLA driving licence. If you are found with more than one defective tyre you may be dealt with by the Courts. The legal road limit for tyres is 1.6mm but for Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Vehicles the legal limit is **2mm**.

### **Tyre Pressure**

Correct tyre pressure can help to extend the life of your tyre, improve vehicle safety and maintain fuel efficiency. The manufacturer of your vehicle specifies the suitable pressure, and it is your responsibility to make sure that the pressure is checked and corrected on a regular basis.

- You should aim to check tyre pressure, including the spare, once a week.
- Correct tyre pressure results in optimised braking, good grip and handling and optimum fuel efficiency.
- Under-inflated tyres have increased rolling resistance that require more fuel to maintain the same speed and can also over heat. This in affect will shorten the life of the tyres and increase the risk of tyre failure.
- High tyre pressure will cause diminished grip, reduce stability in braking and cornering and increase the risk of impact tyre damage.
- Always check you tyre pressure when the tyres are cold.
- Get into the habit of rotating your tyres every 5000 miles. This will ensure even wear on your tyres.

The correct tyre pressure for your particular car will be listed in the owner's manual and/or on a small plate mounted on the car. The correct tyre pressure will relate to the load the car is carrying. The higher the load, the higher the tyre pressure.

If you don't own a pressure gauge then the easiest way to check tyre pressure is by using a digital air dispenser found at most petrol stations and are very easy to use.

Prolonged under-inflation causes excessive flexing, deterioration of the casing and rapid wear of the tread shoulders. The vehicle will also consume more fuel and will have less grip, and need longer braking distance. There will also be an increased risk of the tyre rupturing.

Over-inflation results in an uncomfortable ride, a reduced area of contact with the road, accelerated wear on the tread centre and can make the tyre more susceptible to impact damage.

Changing the Tyre In the event of a puncture, make sure you have the correct tools to change your tyre. You should have a jack, wheel-brace, screwdriver and a key for the locking nuts. If you do not have a spare wheel you should carry a tyre sealant. If you carry a space saver spare, remember this is only a temp tyre and comes with a maximum speed restriction of 50MPH.

Correctly inflated tyres provide good safety, less wear on the tyre tread and better fuel consumption.

### **Checking the engine oil**

Oil lubricates, cleans and cools your car's engine. If not enough oil is present then the engine is at serious risk of damage. The amount of oil an engine uses depends on:

- The type of engine
- The amount of wear
- How the car is driven.

You should check the engine oil level on a regular basis and top up as necessary. Never add too much oil, as this will create excess pressure that could damage the engine seals and gaskets, and cause oil leaks.

To check the engine oil levels:

- Make sure the engine is cold and the car is on level ground.
- Remove the dipstick and wipe it clean with a cloth. Reinsert it fully, pull it out again and check that the oil mark is between the Maximum and Minimum marks.
- If the oil is below the Minimum mark then you may need to add more oil. If you are constantly topping up the oil then check for oil leaks or take your car to a competent mechanic.
- If the oil does need topping up then you should ensure that the correct oil is used. Your owner's manual should give you full instructions on how to top up the oil and what type of engine oil to use. If you are ever in doubt then you should seek the services of a competent mechanic for further advice and guidance.
- You should change the oil at regular intervals and check your owner's handbook for the manufacture's recommendations. 'Taxi's' tend to do a lot of miles and therefore may require a much shorter servicing period than that specified by the manufacture's.

## Checking the engine coolant

Engine coolant helps remove excess heat from your car's engine. It is a mixture of water and anti-freeze. If coolant levels are too low your car's engine can overheat causing the engine some serious damage and be an expensive repair. Check your coolant levels daily or before a long journey.

- Your owner's manual will show you where to locate the engine coolant reservoir. Check that the coolant level is between the Min and Max marks when the engine is cool or lukewarm. If below the Min mark you will need to top up the fluid. If you are topping up the fluid level on a regular basis then check for leaks or seek the services of a competent mechanic.
- Never undo the engine coolant filler cap while the engine is hot. Serious scalding could result from hot fluid under high pressure escaping from the radiator. Place a cloth over the cap and unscrew it slowly. This will allow any pressure to escape.
- Fill the reservoir to the Max mark. Replace the cap.
- Never add cold water to an overheated engine, let it cool for a while first.
- Never overfill the reservoir. The system will blow the excess water out as soon as it warms up.

If any of the coolant gets on your skin or on your car's bodywork wash it off immediately. It can be poisonous and can damage the paintwork to your car.

## Checking shock absorbers

To check your car's shock absorbers are in good working order push down on each corner of the car and then release. If the car settles into its normal position after 1-2 bounces then the shock absorbers are in good working order. If it takes longer to settle or if the shock absorbers are hard to push down then it is likely that your shock absorbers are worn out and will need replacing.

## Maintaining brake fluid levels

When you press on the brake pedal you are actually pushing against a plunger which forces brake fluid through a series of tubes and hoses to the braking unit at each wheel. So if you have no brake fluid you will have no brakes!

- The brake fluid levels should be checked regularly. You should consult your user manual to identify the brake fluid reservoir and how to check it. If the fluid is below the 'MIN' level then this may be a sign of either brake fluid leak or worn brake pads and you should seek the services of a competent mechanic and have it checked.

- Brake fluid is very toxic. Keep it away from hands and eyes, and avoid spilling it on the ground. Dispose of empty containers carefully. Be especially careful not to spill brake fluid on your car's paint as it will damage the paintwork.
- Never allow water to get into the braking system.

## **Checking your brakes**

The car's braking system is complex and you should visually check them on a regular basis or get them checked by a competent mechanic.

For drivers, the best ways to check your brakes is as follows:-

- When driving be aware of how the braking system feels. If the brake pedal lacks firmness or goes almost to the floor before engaging, the system should be checked by a competent mechanic.
- Shaking or vibration in the pedal or steering wheel may indicate that the brake discs are in need of replacement or resurfacing. A squealing sound from the brake pads may be a sign that the pads are wearing thin.
- If you experience a grinding noise coming from your brakes i.e. metal onto metal then this is a sign of a serious brake problem and you will probably need to replace both your brake discs and brake pads.
- To check the handbrake is in good working order, park the vehicle on an incline and put the handbrake on. If after applying the handbrake the vehicle is still not secure, then the handbrake needs to be checked by a competent mechanic.

## **Bodywork/Paint**

### Keeping your paint finish in good condition

You should always keep your vehicle clean and tidy. Choose good quality cleaning products to keep your car's interior and exterior like new. There are good quality waxes and polishes on the market today. The wax and polish compounds are far more sophisticated both in terms of protection, fading, the look of the finish, and the ease of application.

## **Engine**

### Check your Belts

At the front of your engine there will be a series of rubber drive belts that loop around various pulleys, driving everything from the alternator, power steering to the a/c compressor. Rubber perishes more in conditions like those found in a hot operating engine bay. Check the tension of the belts on a regular basis and check for wear, cracks and fraying of the belt. It is essential that you change your timing belt at the right interval and should refer to your vehicle handbook for

guidance. Failure to change the timing belt can lead to serious damage to the engine and costly repairs.

## **Car Battery**

You should always keep your battery well maintained especially in the winter. Most batteries now require minimum maintenance. Always check that the battery is securely fixed and that the battery terminals are secure and are free from corrosion. Any replacement batteries fitted should be of the correct size and ampere. Incorrect batteries can result in damage to the car's electrical system and be a potential fire risk. Batteries should be fitted by a competent mechanic.

Disconnecting and reconnecting your battery -If you are going to do any work on your car involving the electrical system, disconnect the battery first. Always disconnect the negative/ground terminal first and then the positive connector.

Why negative then positive? If you disconnect the positive side of the battery first, the negative side is still connected to the entire car. If anything conductive lands or touches the positive battery terminal with any other metal part of the car, it will create an electrical short and a risk of fire.

When you are reconnecting the battery always connect the positive terminal first followed by the negative terminal.

## **Lights**

Ensure that all your, headlamps, indicators, brake lights, reflectors and any other lights fitted are all working correctly.

If you are a competent person and can change your own bulbs then carry the right spares with you and ensure that you have the right tools to carry out the job. Some of the new cars now have complex lighting systems and can only be dealt with by main dealers. You need to ensure that you have the right provisions in place in the event of a bulb failure.

Most headlight bulbs now are filled with halogen and have special coatings on the outside of the glass. If you pick the bulb up by the glass with your fingers, you will leave trace amounts of oil and grease on the glass. When the bulb is used, that area of the glass will get hotter than the rest and it will eventually cause the bulb to crack. When changing headlight bulbs, only hold the metal bulb holder at the base, or if you have to touch the glass make sure you're wearing clean gloves.

Bulbs come in all shapes and sizes. Bulbs can be of differing wattage, fittings and color. Ensure that you are carrying the right bulb for your car. Make sure that your lights are properly adjusted to prevent dazzling other road users.

When you indicate one way and the blinker flashes quicker than when you indicate the other way, it means that one of the bulbs has malfunctioned.

## Window tints

If new/existing drivers are licensing a Hackney Carriage/Private Hire Vehicles for the first time with SMBC, all glazing shall comply with 'Construction and Use Regulation 32' with regards to the level of tints. A minimum light transmission value of **20%** shall be maintained in all windows. Except the front windscreen which shall have a minimum light transmission value of **70%**. Any **additional** tinted/smoked glass fitted to any of the windows either by the manufacturer or darkened by a tint specialist will not be accepted.

If you are looking to buy a vehicle for taxi/private hire uses ensure that no additional tints have been fitted to the front windows and that **all** other glass on the vehicle is of same shade/tint. If there is a difference in the shade/tint when comparing the front glass to the back glass then that can only mean that the vehicle has tints/privacy glass and we will not license that vehicle.

## Write-offs

All vehicles should have no damage affecting the structural safety of the vehicle. Any vehicle written off for insurances purposes will not be licensed, regardless of category.

Category A – The vehicle must be scrapped and no parts or components can be sold other than for scrap. Category A vehicles are normally severely damaged, totally burnt-out, flood damaged or a shell that has been stripped out. These types of vehicles also have no serviceable parts. DVLA will require a Notification of Destruction.

Category B – The vehicle must not be used again or resold but non-structural and roadworthy parts and components may be recovered for use in other vehicles. It will have been damaged beyond economical repair, usually with major structural damage. The DVLA will require Notification of Destruction but parts can be removed and sold on.

Category C - The vehicle is repairable but the parts and labour would exceed the book value of the car. Amateur and professional mechanics could use second hand parts to repair these vehicles at much lower prices than the list costs for parts and labour. It can be sold for repair but must have VIC (Vehicle Identity Check) inspection before returning to the road.

Category D– The vehicle is economically repairable but other factors are involved that cause the insurer to declare the vehicle to be a write off. The damage may be minimal damage and probably not structurally damaged. These vehicles are often stolen and recovered after a claim has been paid out. It may be a vehicle where parts are difficult to obtain so a quick repair is unlikely. Category D vehicles do not need a VIC inspection to return back onto the road. However notification will appear on any Vehicle History Data Check.

Unrecorded Write-off – The vehicle damage was not reported to the insurer because the driver was uninsured or it is not known who caused the damaged. Not an official category and simply means that the driver possibly only had third party insurance. DVLA will not

know in these types of cases so it will not be recorded and will not show up on any Vehicle History Check.

*It is in your interest that when purchasing any vehicles you carry out a full HPI check from a reputable source. The HPI check will highlight any issues or problems concerning the vehicle.*

## **Warning Displays**

### Warning Lights

Make sure that you understand the meaning of all warning displays on the vehicle instrument panel. Do not ignore warning signs, they could indicate a dangerous fault developing.

- When you turn the ignition key, warning lights will be illuminated but will go out when the engine starts (except the handbrake warning light). If they do not, or if they come on while you are driving, stop and investigate the problem, as you could have a serious fault.
- If the charge warning light comes on while you are driving, it may mean that the battery isn't charging. This should also be checked as soon as possible to avoid loss of power to lights and other electrical systems.

## **Dash/Instrument warning lights**



### The Check Engine Light.

Every new car now comes with an on board diagnostics system (ECU). This is a fault registering system connected to sensors all over the car, engine, fuel and emissions system. When the 'check engine' light comes on, it can mean many things. There are hundreds of fault codes and they can be read by a handheld diagnostic reader. The reader can be plugged in to the port which is normally located under the dash on the front driver's side. The reader can identify the fault code and an accurate diagnostic can be made.

### The Electrical Fault Light.



This warning light may be different in other cars but normally it looks like a picture of a battery. You'll see it come on and go off when you start your engine as part of the cars self-test system, but if this light comes on and stays on, then it shows that the electrical charging system may have a fault. The car has an alternator that charges the 12v car battery used to start the car and supply power to the electrical system. If the alternator becomes faulty or the drive belt is loose or snaps, then it will not be able to charge the battery correctly. The longer you drive, the more your car will use up the remaining power in the battery and eventually the engine will cut out.

### Brake Warning Light 1



Most cars nowadays have a brake warning light on the dash. Its purpose is to alert you that something is wrong in the braking system somewhere. If it comes on, check your owner's manual to find out its meaning. The brake warning light doesn't have a standard meaning; it could be used for multiple purposes. For example, the same light may be used to show that the hand brake (parking brake for the Americans amongst you) is on. If that's the case and you're driving, you ought to have noticed the smell of burning brake dust by now. The light can also indicate that the fluid in the master cylinder is low.



### Brake Warning Light 2



If you've got an ABS-equipped car, you also have a second light - the ABS light. If it comes on, get it seen to as soon as possible. It means the ABS computer has diagnosed that something is amiss in the system. It could be something as simple as dirt in one of the sensors, or something as costly as an entire ABS unit replacement. It's important to note that this light normally comes on when you start the car and then switches off a few seconds later. If it blinks, flashes or in any other way draws your attention to itself, then take note. It's not doing that just to please itself. Compared to a steady light, a blinking ABS light normally indicates something more serious. In some cases it could be as bad as not having any brakes at all.

### Coolant Warning Light



This is normally the coolant level warning light. If this comes on it means that the level of coolant in your radiator is low and needs topping up. **DO NOT OPEN THE RADIATOR CAP WHEN THE ENGINE IS HOT!** The coolant system is pressurised and it could easily release pressure and spray you with boiling coolant. Top up the system when the engine is cold with water or coolant. The coolant mixture behaves as antifreeze in winter and a coolant in the summer as well as a corrosion-inhibitor to stop your engine rusting from the inside out.

### Oil Warning Light



Typically this light will come on if your oil pressure is too low. Low oil pressure is serious and if you continue to drive with this light on, your engine will develop a serious fault. Low oil pressure can be caused by a failed oil pump, a blocked oil filter or by low oil levels - for example if your engine is burning oil. Either way, you need to get it fixed, and fast. Low oil pressure can lead to an expensive repair bill if ignored.

### Service Warning Light



The service engine light simply means that your vehicle is now due for a service. The service could be either an interim service or a full service depending on the age and mileage of the car. The service should be carried out in accordance to the manufacturer's recommendation and by a professional garage. Servicing your vehicle at regular intervals can prolong the life of your car, reduce expensive repair bills and also benefit the environment.

## Quick daily check guide

If you carry out the following quick check on your vehicle it may prevent you from breaking down, or put you in any danger. You should perform the following checks before you start work.

- **Tyres** - check that the tyres are all in good order and have a minimum tread depth of 2mm. Check for cuts and bulges on the tyre walls and ensure that all the tyres are at the correct pressure.
- **Spare Wheel** – Ensure you have a good spare or a space saver wheel. Ensure that it has the correct tyre pressure. If your vehicle was manufactured without a spare wheel, ensure that you have an adequate tyre seal/puncture repellent kit.
- **Jack** – Ensure that you have the correct jack/wheel-brace for your vehicle. The jack must be lubricated and kept in good working order. If you have alloy wheels fitted to the car make sure you have the locking nut in the car.
- **Lights** - check all lights, indicators and brake lights are working.
- **Windscreen/Glass** – check that the windscreen/glass is clean. Ensure that the windscreen is free from cracks and that you do not have anything within the swipe of the wipers that obstructs your field of view.
- **Radio/PDA** – ensure that the radio/PDA is securely fixed and does not interfere with any of the controls of the vehicle or cause any obstruction in the field of view of the driver.
- **Seat Belts** – Ensure your seat, seat belt, head restraint and mirrors are adjusted correctly before you drive.
- **Emissions** – Exhaust emissions **MUST NOT** exceed prescribed levels.
- **Water** - check the levels of your engine coolant and windscreen washer fluid.
- **Wipers** - check the condition of the blades and that they are fully operational.
- **Power Steering** – Check that the steering is operating correctly and check the power steering fluid level.
- **Obstruction** – ensure that you do not have any wires trailing on the floor that may affect the controls of the vehicle.
- **Fuel** - check that you have enough fuel or have enough to get you to a petrol station.
- **Horn** – check that it is working
- **Number Plates** – must be kept clean and be easily read.
- **Yourself** - make sure you are in good health to drive the vehicle. Ensure that you are not tired or under the influence of any alcohol, drugs or medication.

Always take special care that lights, brakes, steering, exhaust system, seat belts, demisters, wipers and washers are all working. Also extra attention needs to be paid if the vehicle is heavily loaded and ensure that items of luggage are securely stowed, especially when using roof racks and roof boxes (which need approval from the Council).

## **Vehicle & Driver Conditions**

When you are issued with a driver or vehicle licence you will receive a set of conditions attached to that licence. As a licensed driver you need to read, understand and comply with them all. If you are unsure about any of the conditions you need to contact the Licensing Office and we will explain them to you.

Licensing Officers have to frequently issue Officer Cautions to licensed drivers for breaching licensing conditions that they should know already. The most common breaches include:

### **Not wearing a badge**

You must wear your badge in a prominent position at all times whilst working. The law requires you to wear your badge therefore if you don't it is a prosecutable offence. It is not acceptable to hang it from your mirror, air vent or to store it in your central console or glove compartment. If you are stopped whilst on duty without your badge, you will be suspended until you have gone home to fetch it.

### **Not displaying the plates properly**

The large plate has to be securely fixed to the rear exterior of the vehicle. This can be done in a number of ways including using the bracket provided by the Council, industrial Velcro, industrial magnets or screwing the plate into the bodywork or bumper. String is not a secure way to attach a plate. The important thing is that the plate is secure so it won't fall off whilst you are driving. The small plate needs to be put on the inside of the windscreen on the passenger side in the holder we provide.

### **Not informing us of convictions, cautions or points**

It is very important that you inform us of any convictions, cautions or points within 7 days as failure to do so may result in your licence being suspended. You will be asked to bring in your DVLA Driving Licence on your renewal and complete a DBS check every 3 years. Points and penalties will show up on your Driving Licence and convictions and cautions on your DBS check and we are regularly informed by the Police of any incidents involving licensed drivers.

### **Not telling us about a change of address**

You must notify us of a change of address within 7 days by phone, email, letter or in person. From time to time we write out to drivers to inform them of important news such as major changes in legislation or to give important information about our service. We would send the letter to the address you provide and it is your responsibility to ensure we always have your current address. We also send out reminders for your badge and plate renewals so if we do not have your current address you will not receive these letters and may miss vital information that could affect your livelihood. We also need to know if you change your mobile phone number so please inform us straight away so that we can always get in touch with you.

## **Not telling us about an accident**

You must inform us when your licensed vehicle is involved in an accident. You need to tell us within 72 hours and must book an appointment with a Licensing Officer to inspect your damaged vehicle. If the Officer decides your vehicle is not suitable to be used as a Private Hire or Hackney Carriage they will issue a suspension notice and take the plates from you. If your vehicle cannot be driven then you must produce an engineers report or clear photos and we will then issue a suspension notice providing you have brought the plates into the Licensing Office. Once your vehicle is repaired you will need to arrange another inspection with an Officer who will lift the suspension and return your plates if the work has been carried out to a satisfactory level.

If you are found to be in breach of your licensing conditions you can expect one of the following actions to be taken against you:

- **Verbal/written warning**
- **Officer caution**

This will stay on your file. If you accumulate several officer cautions you are likely to go before our Licensing Sub-Committee (LSC) who will decide whether you are a fit and proper person to hold a licence. The LSC are made up of several elected members.

- **Suspension of licence**

This can be for any length of time and can be your badge or plates or both. Your operator will be informed that you have been suspended.

- **LSC hearing**

At committee they can do a number of things;

Issue a strict warning

Suspend your licence(s)

Put you on a probationary period e.g. 6 months, and if there are licensing breaches during that 6 month period they may suspend/revoke your licence(s)

Revoke your licence(s) (see below)

- **Licence revoked**

If your licence is revoked by LSC or a Licensing Officer you will have to wait 6 months before you can apply again. When you do make an application after 6 months you will be put before the LSC who will decide whether you are a fit and proper person to hold a licence with Solihull MBC.

- **Prosecution**

## **Main differences between Private Hire and Hackney Carriage**

Private Hire Vehicles in Solihull are generally family sized cars and multi-purpose vehicles (MPVs) which:

- Cannot be hailed in the street
- Cannot use taxi ranks
- Must be pre-booked through a licensed operator
- Have a yellow plate securely attached to the rear of the vehicle and a small yellow plate displayed on the inside of the windscreen on the passenger side

If a passenger gets into a Private Hire car without pre-booking (i.e. if they stop it or find it in the street) they are not covered by insurance.

Hackney Carriage Vehicles in Solihull are either a London style cab or purpose built vehicle which:

- Can be hailed from the street
- Can operate from taxi ranks
- Can be pre-booked if you wish
- Must have a meter and a fare table displayed
- Have a separate compartment for passengers to travel in
- Have a white plate securely attached to the rear of the vehicle and a small white plate displayed inside the vehicle

## **After you have been granted your Licence**

### **Operators**

You must let us know when you have found work with an operator and tell us what call sign/driver code you have been allocated. You must also tell us if you change operators so that we can update our system.

Most operators have their own rules/regulations and code of conduct – we encourage this as it helps increase and maintain high standards within the trade. If there is something that your operator imposes that you don't agree with, you should take it up with them in the first instance, unless you believe it to be unlawful – in which case you should speak to us.

If you are not registered with an operator, you should hand your badge in to the licensing office for safe keeping.

### **Accidents**

If you have had an accident in your vehicle (even if it is just a minor one), you must report it (by telephone) to the licensing office within 72 hours (to allow for us being closed over the weekend), and we will arrange an appointment for you to have your vehicle inspected.

### **Renewals**

We will inform you when your licence is due for renewal, but you should not rely on this. Make a note of your renewal date on your calendar or smart phone to act as a reminder. For badge renewals, you must obtain your medical certificate before renewing your badge, and if you want to preserve your expiry date, your medical certificate should be dated no more than 1 month before. We suggest you book ahead with the approved doctor and don't leave it until the last minute as you will not be allowed to renew your licence without a valid medical certificate, and once your licence has expired, it cannot be renewed. You will also need to ensure you renew your DBS disclosure every three years – please check our website for guidance on how to do it.

We run a drop-in service during our advertised opening hours, but if you want to see an officer for a specific reason, you should always telephone first to make an appointment. Such reasons might include:

- Vehicle inspection (or re-inspection)
- To make a complaint
- To inform us about a conviction/penalty points
- To ask about a specific medical condition or discuss any other factor that may influence the validity of your licence
- Any other reason

Licensing officers undertake regular enforcement exercises and patrols in and around Solihull town centre and other areas of the borough, particularly for the purposes of detecting vehicle defects, plying for hire offences, inappropriate parking, unacceptable conduct and Hackney Carriage rank offences. These exercises are often done in conjunction with partner agencies such as:

- Police
- Fire Service
- Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs
- VOSA
- Department of Work and Pensions
- Environmental Health
- Trading Standards

Hackney Carriages and Private Hire vehicles may only be driven by a person with the appropriate licence and insurance. There is case law that states that once a vehicle is licensed, regardless of whether the plate is displayed or not, it may only be driven by a licensed driver. Therefore, family members are not permitted to drive, unless they have the appropriate licence. If they do so, not only are they committing an offence, but you will be as well, by allowing them to drive.