

Rt Hon Patrick McLoughlin MP
Secretary of State
Department for Transport
Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
LONDON
SW1P 4DR



15 October 2014

Dear Secretary of State

Taxi licensing deregulation – Deregulation Bill

I am writing as Chair of the Licensing Committee at Crawley Borough Council to raise my authority's concerns at the proposals to deregulate elements of taxi licensing included within the Deregulation Bill.

We are concerned in particular about clause 10 of the Bill, which would enable anyone to drive a private hire vehicle (PHV) when it is 'off-duty', and clause 12, which would enable taxi firms to sub-contract bookings to other firms where they are unable to fulfil them themselves.

Most private hire vehicles have permanent and very visible branding, and we do not believe that people will be able to identify when a car is off duty. We believe that clause 10 would increase the risk of individuals or gangs using private hire vehicles to exploit passengers, and particularly vulnerable children.

Currently, anyone using a minicab can travel safe in the knowledge that the only person legally allowed to drive the car will have been through a rigorous council vetting process, including criminal records and medical history checks. We pride ourselves at Crawley Borough Council that we do everything to ensure only people with a clean record are entrusted with the transport of our residents. We also believe that our residents should expect nothing less than that standard.

New government proposals within the Deregulation Bill, set to return to the House of Lords next month, will mean minicab licence holders will be able to allow other people to drive their vehicle when they are off-duty without any of those checks being carried out.

Professor Alexis Jay's recent report into the dreadful abuse perpetuated against children in Rotherham highlighted the role played by PHVs in ferrying children to places where they were abused. In light of that case, the right response is to focus on ensuring that existing controls around taxi licences are applied as rigorously as possible, rather than introducing a deregulatory measure that is not wanted by taxi driver associations and which would create a new opportunity to exploit users of private hire vehicles. This authority firmly believes that only people who have been vetted and licensed by the local council should be able to drive private hire vehicles.

For similar reasons, my authority is opposed to the proposal to allow minicab firms to sub-contract bookings outside the district in which they are made. Passengers place a significant

level of trust in a company when they get into one of their cars, and we therefore believe they have a right to know which company's car they are getting into. As it stands, clause 12 would not ensure this, and we therefore believe it should be withdrawn.

Local government is supportive of the approach of deregulating where possible. But deregulatory measures should always be offset against the potential reduction in the protection that regulation provides, and in this instance we believe the increased risk outweighs the potential benefits. Accordingly, I would therefore ask that Government withdraws these proposals.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Michael Jones
Chair of the Licensing Committee, Crawley Borough Council