

Transport Committee

Oral evidence: Licensing of taxis and private hire vehicles, HC 1224

Wednesday 14 January 2026

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Members present: Ruth Cadbury (Chair); Steff Aquarone; Dr Scott Arthur; Mrs Elsie Blundell; Jacob Collier; Olly Glover; Alex Mayer; Baggy Shanker; Laurence Turner.

Questions 172–265

Witnesses

[I](#): Lilian Greenwood MP, Minister for Local Transport, Department for Transport; Liz Wilson, Deputy Director for Accessibility, Coaches, Taxis and Community Transport Division, Department for Transport.

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Lilian Greenwood and Liz Wilson.

Q172 **Chair:** Welcome to this morning's evidence session, the final session in our inquiry into the licensing of taxis and private hire vehicles. This morning we will hear from the Minister, Lilian Greenwood, as we examine the Government's plans to introduce national minimum standards as well as other important issues we have heard about throughout this inquiry. Please could I ask you both to introduce yourselves, starting with our Minister?

Lilian Greenwood: I am the Minister for Local Transport.

Liz Wilson: I am Deputy Director of the Department for Transport with responsibility for accessibility, and for taxis and private hire vehicles.

Q173 **Chair:** Excellent; thank you for coming. Many of the laws that underpin taxi and private hire vehicle licensing date back to 1847 with a few slightly more recent adjustments; 1976 was the other main one. Does the Department believe that the legislative framework should be updated or replaced with a new set of legislation that is more fit for modern times?

Lilian Greenwood: Thanks, Chair, I am really glad to be here having this discussion. I want to see the sector better regulated, and the public to have a range of services that they can be confident are safe, accessible, available and affordable, whether that is in a taxi or a private hire vehicle. It is absolutely clear to everyone that the current legislation is archaic and fragmented; I absolutely would not suggest otherwise; and it does not help to achieve the goals that we want. We have a decent functioning taxi and PHV sector despite the legislation rather than because of it. The biggest strain on the regulation has come in the last 10 to 15 years. It is from the change that have been driven by the adoption of new technology, but also the choices that passengers make with an increasingly higher number of PHVs than taxis, and that has implications for the way that we regulate.

The reason for wanting to do more is because a small number of people in the sector played a role in the absolutely awful abuse of girls in our communities. It was a very small number and part of much wider failings in public protection that obviously extended far beyond taxi and PHV licensing, but it was right that those failings in licensing were highlighted and acted on. Much has changed since the Jay and Casey reports which looked at historic failings. Safety has improved; we do not want to demonise the trade or suggest otherwise. Although, in any normal sense of the word, taxis and private hire vehicles are now safe, we cannot be complacent. There is still much that needs to change and our focus is particularly on safety and accessibility.



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If Parliament agrees, the first step in this change is the introduction of national minimum standards. Last week, we started the consultation on changing responsibility for licensing. There is a broad consensus that the legislative framework needs comprehensive reform. That was acknowledged when the last Government asked the Law Commission to look at it. Then, of course, we had the Law Commission report and the task and finish group which the Chair and I are both very familiar with from our previous life on the Committee. There is consensus that it needs to change. There is less consensus about exactly what needs to change and, in many ways, that is why this is a really useful process in helping us to come to a firm view about what that change should look like.

Q174 Chair: In 2014, the Law Commission published the draft taxi and private hire services Bill, which sought to replace the current patchwork of legislation with a single regime for taxis and private hire vehicles. Is the Department inclined to revisit any of that work?

Lilian Greenwood: As we develop our proposals in the future, we absolutely want to draw on the work that the Law Commission and the task and finish group did. Although it is now a little while ago—I think it was 12 years ago—many of the issues that they identified and put forward suggestions around have not changed markedly. We would absolutely want to look at those, alongside the work that the Department has already done, particularly around statutory guidance and best practice.

Q175 Chair: You are not ruling out a fundamental revisit in the law, but that is down the line?

Lilian Greenwood: We certainly want to draw on it. I would be very clear that there is a need for fundamental change to the regulations to put them all in a sensible place. We have the Town Police Clauses Act 1847, the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976), and then we just have a series of sticking plasters really to try to make that legislation fit for purpose. It would be far better to do a comprehensive reform and start—

Chair: We will come back to some of the implications of that hotchpotch through our questions.

Q176 Dr Arthur: Are we going to see that comprehensive review before the next election though? It seems very unlikely.

Lilian Greenwood: This is something that we are absolutely focused on doing. Obviously, there is always competition for what goes into our legislative programme because this Government are ambitious about the things that we want to do. You will have seen in our own Department that we have had an early focus on the rail system and on buses, but I would say this is a particularly high priority for me.

Q177 Dr Arthur: Back to sticking plasters, if you do not mind me using your words. You are consulting on national minimum standards; why not just



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go for absolute standards because that would really raise the bar would it not?

Lilian Greenwood: That is a really important question. There are some areas that I do not think we would actually allow for any variation from. When it comes to safeguarding, safety and accessibility, we want to set standards that it would be hard to improve on. For example, when it comes to safeguarding, we want every local authority to require PHV and taxi drivers to have an enhanced DBS check and to be checked against the adults and children's barring lists. For me, that is a minimum; it is also a maximum. There is no stronger regulation that you could have on that. To just have absolute standards and not allow licensing authorities to have any variation or anything that takes local circumstances into account does not feel like the spirit of devolution. I want to use national minimum standards to raise the bar and to have a much more consistent set of standards across the entire country. I would not necessarily want to rule out that local licensing authorities could have discretion to have additional things that meet their particular issues. An example might be if you know you have a particular issue with air quality, is it reasonable to say we want a higher standard around the vehicles? I am interested in the Committee's views on that.

Q178 **Dr Arthur:** I will come back to that. I am sure you have watched the recordings of our earlier meetings when we debated these issues. You will know that people are shopping around to get cheaper or more relaxed licences. Setting minimum standards is just going to amplify the issue, is it not? People are just going to search for where they can get a licence easiest, and that is not at all in the best interest of consumers, is it? Are you aware of the issues?

Lilian Greenwood: I am absolutely aware of the issues and it is not a good situation. I do not want people to shop around for licences. The idea of introducing national minimum standards is partly because we wanted to act quickly, particularly in response to Baroness Casey's recommendations, and there was an opportune way to do that. We want to be clear that everyone should know that when they take a taxi or PHV, it is going to be safe and accessible. It is about improving the standard everywhere, and that should lead to less inconsistency and less variation in standards across the country. All 263 local authorities tell us as a Department that they require the highest standards for safeguarding. For example, when it comes to disability equality training, only 65% to 67% of local authorities make that a requirement. That is unacceptable. You should know that when you use one of these vehicles, the people who are providing that service know what is appropriate in order to meet the needs of disabled people. That is an example of something that I would be committed to including in the national minimum standards.

In the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, we are taking the power to set national minimum standards. Obviously, we want to consult on what those national minimum standards should be, and some aspects will be controversial. In our written evidence we said that,



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at the moment, only 8% of local authorities require CCTV to be installed in private hire vehicles. There is certainly an argument to say that it protects drivers as well as passengers, but it brings issues around privacy and data protection. There is an opportunity for us to take time to have a debate and a consultation and take different views into account in coming to a consensus about what those national minimum standards should be. Liz, do you want to highlight anything?

Liz Wilson: I would agree. The aim of this is to try to improve consistency and reduce the incentives for out-of-area working because, as the Minister says, our starting point is that we would expect people to be licensing where they intend to work. The more standardised we can make this, there will be a reduction in incentives to do otherwise. Particularly on safeguarding and safety, we want to see a much more consistent position that would eliminate the perceived need or the value in shopping around and looking elsewhere.

Q179 **Dr Arthur:** Realistically, Liz, it is great that you are expecting people to license where they intend to work, but you could mandate that and it would be better for everyone, would it not?

Liz Wilson: There are different options that you could look at on this.

Q180 **Dr Arthur:** That would be best for users, would it not?

Liz Wilson: I do not know that it would be at the moment.

Q181 **Dr Arthur:** Why expect it then?

Liz Wilson: What we think would be better for consumers is for people to license near where they live. The issue is about how you achieve that, and there are different options, one of which is journey restrictions and out-of-area working restrictions. Another is about consistency of standards and enforcement that would remove the incentive and the differentiation. The question for us is, which one of those options is the best one for passengers, for people using the services, for drivers, and for the sector to find that balance?

Q182 **Dr Arthur:** In the letter to us, you said that you would, "Continue to consider absolute standards," but realistically that means you are going to go for minimum standards, will see how that works, and if there are still issues you might come back to absolute standards.

Lilian Greenwood: National minimum standards is what we are introducing in this current legislation to make a very valuable first step in tackling the issues that Baroness Casey identified. Certainly, in our discussions with her, she has been incredibly supportive both of national minimum standards and of us changing the licensing level. Obviously, if that were progressed, we would move from 263 local licensing areas with their own standards to around 70. That, combined with national minimum standards, will lead to much greater consistency. As we have said in the



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earlier discussion, we are looking at comprehensive reform of the whole regulation, so this is not the end of the conversation.

Q183 **Dr Arthur:** I guess you could raise the level of those minimum standards so, by de facto, they would move towards absolute. In terms of the standards, will you be looking at minimum English standards for drivers?

Lilian Greenwood: Yes, that is appropriate. I cannot remember if it is our statutory guidance or best practice guidance but we have already set out that people should have a certain level of English. It is important for communicating with passengers and for understanding safety information. I know local authorities have different ways to assess someone's English. Some local authorities do an English test, some do it more as part of an assessment of someone's English through participating, for example, in disability equality training. I want to look at what is the best way to do that but, in answer to your question, I am pretty clear that English should be a requirement.

Q184 **Dr Arthur:** You are not quite sure what the level of that will be, but there will be a requirement?

Lilian Greenwood: Yes.

Q185 **Dr Arthur:** What about emissions? I guess emissions are also linked to vehicle age and safety. Are you looking at emissions in terms of minimum standards? You mentioned that earlier. Where does that come in?

Lilian Greenwood: As a Government we already set standards for vehicle emissions to protect everyone who uses our roads. With vehicle age there is obviously an issue around vehicle safety, so we require all vehicles on our roads to undergo an MOT. It would not be unreasonable to think that for taxis and PHVs, which are obviously doing a lot more mileage than most vehicles would be doing, and are obviously providing a service to the public, that we might require more frequent MOT tests, particularly for older vehicles. I am not sure that we should have emissions as one of the national minimum standards. Obviously, the significant—

Q186 **Dr Arthur:** Air quality is a huge issue in our towns and cities though, is it not?

Lilian Greenwood: Absolutely.

Q187 **Dr Arthur:** You appear to be a relatively fit and healthy person, but if you had a respiratory problem, it is probably something that is on your mind every day.

Lilian Greenwood: I absolutely agree that emissions are a big issue, particularly in our towns and cities. It is perhaps less of an issue for a taxi and PHV operating in a much more rural area. There is an argument for saying that if you are a licensing authority primarily looking after a city or urban area, that it is reasonable to include a requirement around the vehicles that you are operating. Maybe that would not be so reasonable



or feel so necessary if you are in a much more rural area, but I am open to the—

Q188 Chair: For instance, if there is a ULEZ, you would expect taxis and private hire vehicles to be compliant. That is an obvious example of where there might be an exception to the minimum standards, or whether it does not need to be because it is taken as read. Actually, it is not taken as read because if your vehicle is not compliant, you pay an additional charge. I suppose that is where there might be—

Lilian Greenwood: There would be a very strong incentive for your taxi to comply with the ULEZ regulations.

Chair: Yes, exactly.

Q189 Dr Arthur: I guess local authorities could look at their air quality action plans. That is what we have in Scotland—I do not know what the term is in England—and they could link the taxi emissions to that. In your own road safety plan last week, I am sure you were talking about how technology on newer vehicles is going to be a benefit to us. It makes sense to put an age limit on taxis and we heard of people targeting licences in particular local authorities because they knew they could get their banger—if I can use that phrase—licensed. Should you not be looking at vehicle age? That is a surrogate for emissions as well.

Lilian Greenwood: Yes, and I wondered if that is why some local authorities were putting in a requirement around vehicle age. Where there seems to be a slightly odd way of applying it is that some local authorities seem to have an age for first licensing that does not apply when renewing your licence. Theoretically, and Liz can correct me if I am wrong, there are some local authorities where you would be able to renew your licence with a vehicle of a certain age, but you would not be able to license it for the first time and I am not sure that that makes sense. Liz, do you agree?

Liz Wilson: Yes, that is absolutely right. It is one of the areas of greatest variability, and probably one of the areas that prompts people to look around for where they can license in a different area. There are licensing authorities where it is no older than three years, for example, but you can then license that vehicle for another 10. However, if you came with a five-year-old vehicle, you could not license it.

Dr Arthur: Yes, I see.

Liz Wilson: There is absolutely something for us to consider about how we measure the safety of a vehicle, and we need to make sure that we have a lot of evidence. This is why we want to consult on these standards to gather that evidence, so that passengers know, wherever they are getting on to it, that it is at a base level of safety, and that they can be confident regardless. It seems slightly odd that even in the same area there could be one licensed car that is 10 years old and a four-year-old car that has been refused a licence.



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Lilian Greenwood: The other thing to say, of course, is that the more requirements we put in, the more cost we put into the system. That has consequences, does it not? We know that a lot of people rely on taxis and private hire vehicles, particularly people who perhaps cannot afford a car of their own, or disabled people who would not be able to drive or even use public transport. I do not want to make it unaffordable for them to use taxis and PHVs. We have to keep passengers in mind in all this, as well as other players within the system.

Q190 **Dr Arthur:** It feels like a real race to the bottom, though, the way the industry is working. We heard from drivers about how their wages are really getting hammered down, and if the result of that is we have older, more polluting, and perhaps less safe vehicles on the road, I am sure people would be willing to pay a little more to have a cleaner, safer vehicle to travel in, and I hope they are.

Lilian Greenwood: That is really interesting because obviously my experience of using taxis and PHVs is that a lot of them are modern hybrid vehicles. Actually, on certain apps, when you get your choice of vehicle you get the option to take an electric vehicle rather than not, and it might come at a bit of a price point. The public are already making the choices, and perhaps sometimes it is for us to allow them to make the choice about what is affordable and what their priority is rather than us saying, "This is the service that you have to have."

Q191 **Dr Arthur:** Of course, the consumer is making that choice and other people are breathing in the polluting air. You have already said you will cover training and that will include accessibility, which is fantastic. What about turnaround times for licence applications? Is that likely to be mandated?

Lilian Greenwood: The power that is set out in the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill would give us the ability to put requirements on that. I would be interested in the Committee's view. Obviously, there is a big incentive for local authorities to process licence applications in a timely fashion, particularly if you want people to license with you rather than shopping somewhere else. The impression I get is that part of the reason why people are licensing away from the area where they work is because they know that the turnaround times are quicker. Obviously, there are issues around licence fees as well. One of the potential advantages of moving from 263 licensing authorities to a smaller number is the potential for economies of scale and for them to be more efficient in the way that they offer that.

Q192 **Dr Arthur:** The last question is a quick one. Are there any areas you are going to rule out in terms of minimum standards?

Lilian Greenwood: I do not think so. We are quite open to looking at the views that people want to put forward.

Q193 **Mrs Blundell:** Minister, the Department stated, and you said this morning, that national minimum standards are an important first step to



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tackling some issues that have arisen from out-of-area working. Lots of contributions to our inquiry have suggested that national minimum standards would not be strong enough to do that, especially given that the means of enforcement could still be 200 miles away. If the goal is to disincentivise out-of-area working, could you speak in more detail about how bringing about national minimum standards will achieve this?

Lilian Greenwood: As we have heard, some people are licensing with authorities away from where they intend to work because they can get licensed more quickly and cheaply and start earning money to support their family. By making all local transport authorities responsible for licensing and having national minimum standards, it will reduce the differences between local authority areas which reduces the incentive to license out-of-area. If it is not significantly cheaper or faster and is not sufficiently different from the licensing in your local area, it seems to me that there would be less incentive to do so.

Q194 **Mrs Blundell:** Liz, do you have anything to add in response to that?

Liz Wilson: I agree with what the Minister has just said. I am sure we will come to this, but I do not think your point about enforcement is something that needs to be looked at when we bring in the national minimum standards. We would do that alongside it, but I agree with what the Minister said on the incentives point.

Q195 **Mrs Blundell:** One place where this is happening a lot is Wolverhampton where, in the first half of 2024, over 8,000 licences were issued to new drivers. Do you think that is a problem? Why do you think that has arisen? Minister, I think you have already alluded to some of the reasons. Could you speak a bit more about how Government might resolve that?

Lilian Greenwood: Certainly, I met with Wolverhampton very recently. I cannot remember whether it was just before Christmas or just after.

Liz Wood: It was just before.

Lilian Greenwood: Frankly, it was rather reluctant about the role it had ended up with. I do not think it was ever the intention to become the go-to licensing authority, and it does not have any choice. If someone turns up at Wolverhampton, asks to be licensed and meets the standards, they will be licensed there. There is a bit of a myth that, somehow, they are cowboys; I do not think that is at all fair. I do not think the standards in Wolverhampton are significantly less than anywhere else. Partly as a result of that, and because it has invested significantly in digital systems, it has become very efficient at the process. We know that there is quite a lot of variation in licence fees across the country. I asked the team, and it runs from about £150 to £300, so there is quite a bit of variation.

Q196 **Chair:** Wolverhampton is lower, and its turnaround is quicker.

Lilian Greenwood: It is going to be because it has invested in doing that. It is almost self-fulfilling that, once you have done all that, you are



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going to become faster and more efficient. I do not think it is an ideal situation. We want people to be licensing where they intend to work. That is why we have looked at these short-term measures in terms of national minimum standards and changing the level of the licensing authority, which will help. I do not think they are a panacea; they are not a silver bullet. If we want to tackle the issue of people working away from where they live and operate, there is probably other action that we need to take, but it also brings potential for other unintended consequences.

Q197 Mrs Blundell: Just finally from me on this section: you say that you want them to be licensed locally. It would be helpful to maybe understand the Department's view on giving combined authorities the option of ensuring that drivers' trips start or end within that area. I would be interested to hear maybe from Liz whether that is an option that the Department has looked at.

Liz Wilson: Yes, absolutely. At the moment we are open to all options, and we have heard quite a lot through this evidence and elsewhere about this. I know TfL has talked about this for some time as well. It is not something that we are ruling out at this stage. I know that other witnesses have talked about the potential for empty miles, for that to knock on to the prices, and to the Minister's point about disabled people particularly. Transport for All did a survey where, for at least two-thirds of disabled people, the cost of a taxi was a barrier for them, and we have to be really conscious about anything that might further exacerbate that problem. It is something that we want to look at.

There are other things we could look at about asking people to license within a distance of their home address because most people who license tend to work close to where they live. Lots of the people who are licensing through Wolverhampton and driving elsewhere live close to where they are driving, so we could look at that kind of thing: restricting where you license rather than where you drive. We just want to make sure we have worked out what the unintended consequences might be of any action that we take so that we do not store up a future problem on this.

Q198 Baggy Shanker: Just back to Wolverhampton, and this is probably a question for Liz. The Minister is right: Wolverhampton made out to us when its chief operating officer gave evidence that it is a victim of the current system. To be honest with you, I am not quite as convinced; that is probably a fair way of putting it. It could introduce, for example, a local knowledge test, which would make a significant difference, 96%—

Lilian Greenwood: That would be against our best practice guidance.

Q199 Baggy Shanker: It would not be illegal, would it?

Lilian Greenwood: No, it could do that.

Q200 Baggy Shanker: My point is that it is making out that it is a big problem, but it has many levers that could rectify that problem if it was



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serious about doing it. Do you agree that the excuse that its guidance and the guidance of DfT is the problem, or do you think it could do more to rectify the situation itself, even with current guidance?

Liz Wilson: Could it introduce things that would create a barrier? It probably could. In doing that, though, there would be consequences elsewhere because it would be moving away from best practice guidance, doing things that would impact legitimate local drivers. Could it? Yes. Should it? This is something to be debated by Wolverhampton to work through what it thinks the balance of that is and what the right solution for that would be.

Lilian Greenwood: I rather suspect that the problem would just move somewhere else. When I look at some of the PHVs that are licensed in my local authority area, it is clear that some license with Nottingham City Council, and some with other licensing authorities nearby other than Wolverhampton. It would just end up moving the problem.

Liz Wilson: We have seen that previously. Wolverhampton is the main one but, historically, there have been other licensing authorities that have had a disproportionate number of people licensing with them.

Lilian Greenwood: One thing that is quite interesting if local authorities want to take action to discourage out-of-area licensing is to look at what their own requirements are. We had quite an interesting example in Oldham. It was concerned about the number of its drivers who were licensing out-of-area. It looked at its own requirements and identified some that it decided were not really necessary for ensuring safety and accessibility. After it effectively reduced its requirements, it got more drivers licensing locally without impacting things it had identified as important around safety and accessibility.

Q201 **Baggy Shanker:** Does that not drive lower standards though?

Lilian Greenwood: It is about what the necessary standards are. What is the licensing authority there to do? Clearly, it is about ensuring that the public are safe, have a quality of service, and are not going to face discrimination. To give you one example: there is one local authority that requires that PHV drivers wear shirt and trousers; they are not allowed to drive in jeans or tracksuit bottoms. Is that really a necessary requirement? It is arguable. It is not something that has ever crossed my mind as a rule when I get in a taxi.

Q202 **Chair:** Obviously, in our evidence, lots of different reasons were given for why drivers operate out of area. Some around Wolverhampton are cost and speed of turnaround, although it appears to have challenges around enforcement. Others are around lower standards. Other reasons have been given as well. Obviously, if the whole climate changes in terms of minimum standards that may change, but there are other areas that we will want to look at around the implications and the changes of out-of-area working. Of course, both Oldham and Wolverhampton will not be



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licensed authorities if your proposals go ahead.

Lilian Greenwood: No, absolutely.

Chair: Anyway, Laurence, you want to come in with a supplementary.

Q203 **Laurence Turner:** Thank you, Chair. Good morning. As with previous sessions, I would like to draw the Committee's attention to the fact that I worked for the Minister between 2012 and 2016. Minister, I want to come back to something you said, which is that there is no evidence that Wolverhampton's standards are significantly lower than comparators. We heard from Wolverhampton that, as a matter of policy, it does not go beyond the minimum standards currently recommended by the Department. There is some evidence that other authorities have been unwilling to enforce higher discretionary standards because they fear that drivers in future will simply go to Wolverhampton or to other licensing authorities instead. Statistically, Wolverhampton has one of the lowest rates of wheelchair accessible private hire vehicles licensed by that authority. Is that a concern that the Department shares, that when you have dominant licensing authorities there tends to be a race to the bottom in terms of standards down to that minimum that the Department establishes?

Lilian Greenwood: I do not think it is a good situation that so many drivers are licensing with Wolverhampton. I would not want to give that impression. I get the impression, just from the conversations I have with colleagues who have not looked into taxis and private hire, that perhaps Wolverhampton was being unfairly penalised as being very lax, whereas some things that they do around safeguarding are very good, for example, the daily checks against the national databases. I am concerned about the potential for it to become a race to the bottom because of licensing shopping. That is precisely why we want to introduce the national minimum standards: to race the rising tide to raise all boats and to ensure there is a greater consistency because things like safety, safeguarding and disability equality should be non-negotiable. That is why I want to make sure that those things are the same everywhere, irrespective of where the driver is licensed, or where you are using a taxi or private hire vehicle.

Chair: We are coming on to accessible vehicles in a later question.

Q204 **Alex Mayer:** Minister, you have talked about the fact that the prices to get a licence are different across different authorities. Why does the Department not just set a standard price?

Lilian Greenwood: There are two reasons. Obviously, fees are determined by local authorities in order to be self-funding. I recognise that the cost of operating in a local authority service is not uniform across the country. There will be variations, for example, in wage rates in different places; local authorities will not have exactly the same pay rates in different parts of the country. If I am totally frank, I have observed that when we set a fee in Government there is a tendency for those fees



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to get stuck at a certain level and not be reviewed in a timely way because it then becomes a very political decision. I am slightly nervous about setting national fees. As I say, we might have to do something to compensate areas where they have higher costs. Obviously, you will recognise that pay rates are higher in London, so the cost of providing a taxi licensing service in terms of the people who you employ to do it is going to be higher in London than it would be in Nottingham. Liz, do you want to add to that?

Liz Wilson: Obviously, it was something that the Law Commission looked at and suggested. One thing we would expect, though, is that a more standardised set of requirements that people have to go through might lead to a more standardised cost regime. As the Minister says, the other thing is it is self-funding. It is about enforcement as well, and we would not want to inadvertently find that if costs go up and the price of it does not that you restrict enforcement. It is a decision to be really thought through before we rush into anything, but I absolutely take the point that more consistency would help with the issue that we are facing.

Q205 **Alex Mayer:** Would you consider any form of national band or cap with a bit of local flexibility that takes into account those different wage rates?

Lilian Greenwood: I am open to considering that. The concerns that we have are as Liz and I have set out, but we are certainly not averse to looking at those sorts of ideas.

Q206 **Baggy Shanker:** As the Chair alluded to earlier, the Department is consulting on moving responsibility for taxi and private hire vehicle licensing from licensing authorities to local transport authorities. What do you think will be achieved by doing this?

Lilian Greenwood: There are two things. Obviously, by its nature, if we move from 263 to 70, there will be a greater degree of consistency because there will be fewer licensing authorities each approaching it in its own way. There is the potential for greater efficiency just by making the licensing authority a larger organisation. If we were to tackle issues around out-of-area working or look at different options around that, it is obviously easier if there are larger licensing areas and fewer of them than if you are working from 263. Those are the main advantages I see of moving.

The other obvious thing is that local transport authorities are responsible for local transport plans and for thinking about transport in the round. That is where other aspects of transport are regulated and considered and, therefore, taxis and private hire vehicles would be seen as part of the overall transport provision and network planning. Liz, do you want to add anything?

Liz Wilson: No, but I completely agree with all those points.

Q207 **Alex Mayer:** You were talking before about the fact that one set of standards might be very reasonable in an urban area and a different set



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of standards in a rural area. When we move from 263 to 70, we are going to have much larger areas that cover both urban and rural. How do you square that circle?

Lilian Greenwood: I agree; that is a fair point.

Q208 **Alex Mayer:** How is this going to work in practice? Presumably, these powers pass, for example, to a mayoral strategic authority that set up a taxi licensing committee. Who would have political control of that? Would the directly-elected mayor appoint the chair? How would it work in practice?

Lilian Greenwood: That is an interesting question. It is something that we have talked about because, obviously, TfL is the licensing authority for London. As I understand it, it does not have an elected licensing committee. It decides policy, and then the application of its licensing policy is delegated to officers. In lots of local authorities, the routine issuing of licences where there is no question is already delegated to paid staff, and then perhaps those issues that require a smaller number will go to a licensing committee for decision. Obviously, in a mayoral authority, it would have to look at the appropriate way to do that, and I would imagine it might go down the same route as Transport for London has done.

Q209 **Alex Mayer:** The concept would be that the directly-elected mayor would set the political direction for how licensing would—

Lilian Greenwood: Alongside the combined authority area.

Q210 **Steff Aquarone:** Just very briefly, before we move away from who licenses, and I am sure colleagues will perhaps have even more pertinent questions about who actually enforces, has the Department looked at the possibility of going a step further and exploring a simple national licensing system?

Lilian Greenwood: That is not something that I have had a discussion about.

Liz Wilson: It is a good question on whether it is something that could be looked at nationally. I do not think we have looked at it in a huge amount of detail, but it is something that we could look at again in the round. The general view of this is that taxis and private hire vehicles tend to operate that first mile, last mile in local areas; plugging that through to the local transport authorities feels like the right level for that to be working. I recognise that there are other fit-and-proper-person tests that are done nationally, so it is something that we could test against.

Q211 **Mrs Blundell:** Moving licensing from a local authority to strategic authority level obviously then becomes less local; there is less local knowledge. Surely that is the opposite of what a Government with a devolution agenda should be trying to achieve?



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Lilian Greenwood: Let us not pretend that there is a "nothing is going to change" option here because, in the context of local government reorganisation, there is already going to be change in many places about what the licensing area is. Part of bringing it to a strategic level is just to make it more manageable and sensible for people on the ground, particularly if there are concerns about out-of-area working. If you look at Greater Manchester, obviously there are lots of boundaries between local authorities: you might want people to work in Bolton, but you would not want the same operator to be working in Rochdale, Burnley or wherever it is. There is a logic to actually moving to an authority that more reflects the sorts of journeys that people are taking.

Q212 **Mrs Blundell:** Alongside moving responsibility for licensing, the Department has said it is considering wider reform options on out-of-area working. Can you set out a bit more detail about what other options are being considered? Will these options make enforcement action possible closer to home than it is currently?

Lilian Greenwood: Obviously, there are lots of different options around tackling out-of-area working: for example, that you could only pick up a fare in your area and take it somewhere else, and do another one from wherever you were back into the area. As Liz said earlier, there are some disadvantages of making those sorts of restrictions. Certainly, operators tell us that they think they would not be able to operate in the way that they do if those sorts of requirements were put on.

You can see the problems that arise, particularly when someone is living close to a boundary. You might live just inside Nottinghamshire, but your local taxi firm is in Leicestershire; it is a different local authority. It would be different even if it went to strategic authority level, therefore, you would not be able to use them to perhaps make some of your local journeys. That is a disadvantage. Obviously, you could have a lot more empty mileage: If you do a trip from, I do not know, Nottingham to East Midlands airport, you would not be able to pick someone up from East Midlands airport and come to somewhere that was, for instance, on the way back but outside Nottingham. Then you have quite a lot of journeys where a taxi or private hire vehicle is driving around with nobody in it. It is not earning income and it is using emissions.

Q213 **Chair:** I think it used to happen before 2015 when ABBA was the norm.

Lilian Greenwood: Perhaps we were less worried about carbon emissions, congestion and things. Obviously, one of the other issues is about there being sufficient service availability, particularly when you have major events. When there is a major event happening, particularly in your city or my city, you will get taxi and private hire vehicle drivers coming in to provide a service. What we do not want is people to be in a position where they want to get home often late at night. They want to use a licensed vehicle and there is no availability. That undermines what we are trying to do in terms of providing people with safe transport options. Those are some of the disadvantages of going down that route.



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As Liz said, we also considered the requirement to license close to where you live but without there being restrictions on where you can operate. Liz, do you want to add anything?

Liz Wilson: Yes, that is absolutely right in the pros and cons we are thinking about in terms of the ABBA model. You could also say a proportion of journeys, so that you could create a bit more flexibility, and then you could look at near where you live. Your point about making these things enforceable is really key to our thinking as well. An advantage to checking where someone lives is it is much simpler and easier to do at the point of licence giving—actually checking in on the journeys that every individual is making to make sure they are abiding by the rules. The outcomes we are aiming to achieve are going to be achieved because it is much harder in a journey-restriction environment than it is in a close-to-where-you-live environment or, indeed, if you set the standards at such a level that people just do not license elsewhere because there is no point in doing so. Those things are then easier to enforce.

Q214 **Mrs Blundell:** That is helpful, thank you. From speaking with trade unions and PHV drivers in my constituency, drivers are very open to displaying signage that is related to their local authority, but they often feel restricted by measures that compel them to display one sole operator, as they tell me that this limit is working in a very saturated market. Minister, would the Department envisage local transport authorities adopting powers to require consistent branding or livery so that vehicles are clearly identifiable to passengers? What would a preferred outcome be for local authority signage to be displayed?

Lilian Greenwood: The disadvantage of having local authorities demand a particular sort of branding is precisely because people often work for a number of operators and, therefore, drivers might object to that. Obviously, taxis having a particular livery in their local authority is probably commonplace, but for PHVs if you require a standard livery that makes it clear that something is a private hire vehicle, it opens up the possibility of people treating them like a taxi, if you see what I mean, and approaching the vehicle and asking for a ride which, obviously would not be appropriate because they need to be pre-booked. Those are the disadvantages. I am trying to remember which authority it was that requires them to have signage on the door that says private hire vehicle for pre-booking only. Was it Oldham?

Liz Wilson: Yes.

Lilian Greenwood: I do not have a strong view on that, but those are some of the issues we would want to consider.

Q215 **Baggy Shanker:** On traditional operators versus apps, does the Department believe that the current licensing conditions treat app-based platforms and traditional operators fairly, or does one face looser requirements than the other?



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Lilian Greenwood: The requirements that we put on for licensing of drivers and operators are neutral. I also wonder whether the distinction between app-based operators and traditional operators is still valid. In my own local authority, I have been using DG Cars for donkey's years. Back in the day, you would phone up and book one. Now they have an app that is very similar to other popular apps that might be out there. I am not sure that that distinction is really quite as clear as it once was, but I do not think we require different things of them in general. Liz, do you want to add anything?

Liz Wilson: The licensing regime is consistent on the things that are expected. The market has changed and consumers using apps has become more prevalent. I am sure that has made the market difficult and different for people who are not app-based and there is greater competition. I do not think that is part of the licensing system.

Q216 **Mrs Blundell:** Are working conditions for drivers a concern for the Department and, if so, what plans do you have to address this?

Lilian Greenwood: Obviously, I recognise that in the course of the inquiry, the Committee has heard concerns around working conditions and I know there was evidence that drivers were sleeping in cars or even taking drugs to stay awake. I know that the National Private Hire and Taxi Association submitted further evidence refuting those suggestions. Obviously, I would be extremely concerned if there was evidence of that. I would not expect people to be sleeping in their cab or taking drugs in order to try to keep themselves awake. We want people to be safe drivers. That would be really worrying.

Obviously, I want people to have good working conditions and working conditions that encourage safe practice. Issues around employment status do not generally sit with my Department; they would sit with the Department for Business and Trade, but I would be very happy to look at the suggestions that the Committee has and talk to colleagues across Government about those issues.

Chair: Jacob, you have a specific point that has come up during the inquiry.

Q217 **Jacob Collier:** Yes, it was about safety and distractions. I am sure that you have been in an Uber when a new ride has popped up and it is quite distracting for the driver. In our evidence, Uber said that it did not think that that was a problem but I am sure that we have our own experience of people tapping around on their phone, and it can be quite distracting. When you are thinking about national minimum standards, is that something you are going to consider as part of that, those distractions for drivers that can actually impact on passenger safety?

Chair: It is particularly an issue because they have to quickly decide if they want that ride or not and have to keep looking at their phone and swiping to decide whether to take the next ride while they are finishing



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the ride that you are in.

Lilian Greenwood: Obviously, using a handheld mobile phone while you are driving is clearly illegal. We do not want people to be driving in a distracted fashion. I am sure it has always been the case that you would have radio calls while you were driving. I do not think it is good practice for people to drive and have conversations on the phone generally because we know there is evidence that that is distracting. Certainly, an issue I would be open to looking at is how we protect drivers from distraction while they are undertaking the driving task. That should be their focus and it is an important safety issue. But that is true for all drivers in all settings, not just taxi drivers.

Q218 **Jacob Collier:** You must recognise that there is a difference between the traditional radio calls versus people swiping and audible noise and distraction.

Lilian Greenwood: They are different. There is potential for both to be distracting. This is not just an issue for taxi and private hire drivers; it is also an issue for delivery drivers.

Q219 **Laurence Turner:** Moving on to safeguarding, the Department has stated that the national minimum standards will be focused on safeguarding passengers. Of course, as far away as the Jay report, it has been said that safeguarding in taxi and private hire is a common thread in a number of very high profile and horrifying cases. What specific elements are the Department considering when it comes to safeguarding in the new standards?

Lilian Greenwood: When we look at our provisions or proposals around national minimum standards, our starting point is based on the statutory guidance that the Department already provides and the best practice guidance. When it comes to safeguarding, we expect all drivers to have an Enhanced Disclosure and Barring Service and barred list checks, and all drivers should have training in safeguarding. Those are the important things, so that they are able to play a part in potentially spotting problems. I do not know if there is anything else that we were looking at.

Liz Wilson: Those two things are already pretty widespread, actually. As I say, all licensing authorities tell us that they do DBS checks and 96% tell us that they do safeguarding training already. The other natural one for us to consider is CCTV. That is one of those areas that I am sure the Minister will come to, where there are some finely balanced arguments, but we want to look at that and consider those arguments.

Q220 **Laurence Turner:** Did the publication of the Casey audit last year change or influence the Department's thinking in terms of minimum standards?

Lilian Greenwood: Obviously, I was not the Minister responsible for taxi and private hire at that time, but my instinct is that there was already a recognition of the importance of ensuring that safeguarding was



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incorporated in our standards. Casey gave us further evidence and greater impetus to make sure that these things were in place in a more urgent timeframe, but it did not fundamentally change the approach that we were taking.

Obviously, over the summer, the Department contacted all licensing authorities to ensure that they were applying the national statutory guidance. We were very clear that we would take action against any local authorities that were failing to do so. It has just given us the extra support and encouragement to make sure that this happens and that it happens in a timely fashion.

Q221 Laurence Turner: Yes. It is important that we say that we are talking about a minority of drivers and that drivers themselves are often at risk of assault and abusive behaviour. I wanted to ask about particularly vulnerable passengers, including where there is a cross-departmental element to it. I am thinking particularly about SEND taxi contracts issued by local authorities. The quality of those contracts has been an issue in some areas, including in Birmingham.

Do you see the new standards as an opportunity for looking at safeguarding in these kinds of areas? Are there discussions at this point between the Department for Transport and Department for Education, and other Departments that might have an interest?

Lilian Greenwood: It is a really interesting question. I know there are some operators that particularly focus on providing services for home-to-school transport, for example. Perhaps as a local authority, where you are contracting for those sorts of services, your specifications might be different. You might not want just a taxi provider, you might want someone who has undertaken specific training around SEND.

I do not know whether you would want to incorporate it within the national minimum standards for all taxi and PHV operators, although I can see that there might well be advantages to it. It might be picked up to some degree through mandatory disability equality training. But whether there is a case for having it for all taxi and PHV drivers, or whether local authorities would want to focus that on those they are contracting for specifically that sort of service, I am not sure. I do not know whether you have a view, Liz?

Liz Wilson: Yes. There are some additional requirements already, in that there is a second round of DBS checking. It is a regulated activity, so there are some additional things in place when you are doing SEN driving. In terms of whether the Department has conversations with DfE, we do. As part of my broader portfolio I look at accessibility, so I talk to DfE quite regularly about not just taxi and private hire vehicle but also coach and bus provision. We are talking to it about that.

As the Minister says, there is a question about what the right mechanism is for that and for addressing concerns, and whether that is national



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minimum standards for licensing for everybody, or whether this is a contractual and specific thing that we could look at in detail.

Q222 Laurence Turner: Presumably, we would want to avoid a situation where new national minimums are established for commercial drivers that are then not necessarily reflected in SEND home-to-school contracts, unless there is a very specific justification for doing so.

Liz Wilson: We will take this away and have a proper look at it because it is a very good point, but I think if you are licensed as a taxi and PHV driver you would have to have those requirements anyway, and then anything additional would be through the contracts. We will absolutely take that away and check that.

Q223 Laurence Turner: Finally, what is the Department's view on the idea of making taxi and private hire driving a regulated activity like nursing or being a paramedic?

Lilian Greenwood: That is probably a question for the Home Office really because that sits within its remit. I imagine there are a number of different job occupations it would like to be regulated. It is something I would be open to considering if that was a recommendation from the Committee.

Liz Wilson: We heard evidence from some of your witnesses that that would be a step forward that they would like to see. As the Minister said, the Home Office probably has a lot of people saying that, and we have had conversations with it about some of these kinds of things. It is about the level of discretion that you may or may not want. Some evidence was given from the Institute of Licensing about some absolutes that come in once you are on that regulated list. Deciding if that is proportionate and appropriate in this context is the balance of decision-making that we would want to work through with the Home Office.

Q224 Laurence Turner: Yes. There is a cost element to it as well.

Liz Wilson: Absolutely, yes.

Q225 Alex Mayer: There is currently no statutory definition of what fit and proper means. What would the Department's view be on potentially introducing one for taxi and private hire vehicle drivers?

Lilian Greenwood: The current guidance around what is fit and proper is almost like your family route: would you feel confident to put someone who is close to you in a car with this person at any time of the day or night? That is an easily understandable test, frankly. It is possible to draw up a list of what is fit and proper. It is quite a difficult list to construct because there would always be things that you would miss out. Liz, that is something that we have talked about, is it not?

Liz Wilson: Yes, it is, and that is right. It is this point of discretion. Discretion can go two ways, in that it can be perceived to add risk but also it can give that discretion to think, "That's not on my list, but I'm still



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not comfortable with it." It is about finding that right balance. The national minimum standards will absolutely support this.

What we are looking to do is not necessarily define absolutely but to give a lot more structure around that decision-making. If you do not meet the national minimum standards, you are not a fit and proper person to be able to operate. There will be a level of discretion that sits above that in that definition the Minister is talking about, about the judgment that you make about whether you are comfortable or not.

Q226 Alex Mayer: When we were hearing evidence, at times it seemed to me that words like "arrested", "charged" and "convicted" were being used interchangeably. You could very well, therefore, have a taxi driver who was arrested for something, and a case could take a very long time before it got anywhere near charging, and they would entirely lose their livelihood. Do you have any views on that?

Lilian Greenwood: That is a really difficult judgment. I come from a background of having been a trade union official. It is not unusual for someone who is not arrested, obviously—well, he could be arrested—but who is facing a serious allegation in a workplace to be suspended, but obviously they would be suspended on full pay.

Q227 Alex Mayer: Which is not necessarily possible for a taxi driver.

Lilian Greenwood: If a taxi driver has their licence suspended, in effect, you are taking away their entire livelihood. That is the difficult judgment to be made. Our expectation at the moment is that as a taxi licensing authority you would look at any allegations quickly, but you would want to look at it thoroughly before you took that decision to suspend a licence. Obviously, I am conscious that it is possible for taxi drivers and private hire drivers to be susceptible to false allegations as well, because sometimes people are travelling in their vehicle late at night, they could well have had a drink, they might have an argument about the fare. I can see the possibilities. You want to have a system that protects drivers from unfair allegations but of course protects the travelling public. Speedy decision-making is probably the most important, but it is not an easy judgment. That would be what I would be conscious of.

There has been a suggestion that may have come up in the Committee's discussions in relation to Wolverhampton, which is that it asks someone to surrender their licence when they are facing an allegation. I was concerned that you would not want someone to be able to surrender their licence as a way of then avoiding ending up being identified on the national NR3S system. I have been assured that if someone surrenders their licence, it does not stop the investigation from continuing and the reporting to the NR3S still happening.

That is what I would be concerned about, in the same way that in a workplace you would not want someone to be able to resign to avoid getting a disciplinary outcome, which would then mean they could just go



and work somewhere else, without anyone knowing that there had been a serious concern.

Q228 **Dr Arthur:** I am getting nostalgic thinking back to when I was a councillor and I used to sit on the Committee that interacted with taxi drivers and PUC drivers. We would get advice from the police and what they felt a fit and proper person was. Do you think councils should always follow the advice of police on individuals?

Lilian Greenwood: In making decisions, you want to have the fullest possible information to help you to make those decisions. Clearly, the police can share information on those who might not have a conviction that would result in them appearing on enhanced and barred lists, but that might cause you to apply that fit and proper person test. It is really important. We issued guidance in October of last year to hopefully improve the guidance and data sharing that the police do about concerns, precisely in order to allow licensing authorities to make those decisions with more information available to them. I do not know if there is more to add?

Liz Wilson: Yes, I would agree with that. There is some soft intelligence that can come through the DBS system, and then there is the common law police disclosure engagement. That tends to come when an issue arises and then they are notified, rather than at the point of licensing. It is important that within the bounds of the laws that operate around that data sharing, obviously, that data is shared in a timely manner so that licensing authorities understand what the position is and can take an informed view.

Q229 **Jacob Collier:** Minister, in your letter to us you mentioned in-vehicle CCTV and suggested that that might be in scope for the national minimum standards, but you noted that there are concerns within the sector about that, and you have mentioned them today. In principle, does the Department think that CCTV should be a national requirement or should that be left to local discretion?

Lilian Greenwood: There is an argument that CCTV should be a national requirement because of the potential safety it provides for passengers, but also the potential safety it provides for drivers. However, I know that this is an area that is probably quite contentious. Operators are very concerned about what additional cost it brings in and obviously the impacts that that might have on the price and availability of services. There are concerns that people might have about privacy and their right to privacy. There are concerns about how that data is then stored. The Information Commissioner's Office also expressed some concerns in this regard.

It is quite a difficult area. It will require quite a lot of careful thought and consideration. However, I can absolutely see that there is an argument for doing it, certainly. I met with Rotherham very recently, and it is one of the 8% of local authorities that mandates CCTV. I can absolutely see



why that is the case. It is worth us considering as part of national minimum standards, and it is something on which I would very much welcome the Committee's view.

Q230 Jacob Collier: It will be part of your consultation process. If it is something that the Department decides to go forward with, what support would you put in place for taxi drivers, private hire drivers and operators?

Lilian Greenwood: We would have to put some guidance around what the requirements are, particularly in relation to privacy, GDPR, data collection, data storage and retention. That is some support that would be required, but clearly we would want to engage with the whole sector and ask, "If we made this a requirement, what other support and guidance would you need to ensure that we're dealing with those issues effectively?" As I say, we do not have a firm position on this, it is just something that we absolutely ought to be open to considering.

Q231 Steff Aquarone: Many of these things we have just been discussing are tools that are used to ensure the safeguarding of passengers. The NR3S is another such tool, and quite a few people have written to and spoken to us about the fact that they think access to that should be opened to operators. Does the Department agree?

Lilian Greenwood: Yes. In principle, we agree that the operators could helpfully have access to NR3S.

Q232 Steff Aquarone: Is that in theory, in principle, and therefore only in exceptional circumstances, or is there a role for automation in all this, regardless of who is in charge of licensing and enforcement?

Lilian Greenwood: I'll turn to Liz. I know we have talked about this.

Liz Wilson: There are some constraints around the current NR3S and who can use it and how, because it was designed for licensing authorities. What we agree with is that there is value in that information being available more broadly, and that requires some changes. I know the Committee has heard quite a lot about the idea of a national database of drivers. We see a change for operators accessing it as part of that wider change piece, which we are very interested in doing.

As the Minister says, in principle, the more transparency of information sharing that there can be, the more timely and speedy that can be with operators being able to directly access that. That has to be a positive thing. There are some steps we would need to take to get to that point, but that is one of the things we are thinking through in terms of a wider database.

Q233 Jacob Collier: Coming on to that point about the national database, we have heard from people giving evidence that support the establishment of a national database. The Local Government Association is one of those organisations. What is your view on establishing a national database?



Lilian Greenwood: It is something that we are already exploring with a new national licensing database of all licence holders. Potentially that could be used by operators to check the licensing status of drivers and vehicles when they are working with or for the operator. We already have work under way specifically on that, certainly, we had some available funding in the spending review.

Liz Wilson: Yes. In the spending round we had some funding prioritised for exactly this. In the coming months we are doing discovery work, and then we have money available to start actually building a database. This is absolutely something that we want to explore and are taking active steps to do.

Q234 **Baggy Shanker:** What is the Department's assessment of the current effectiveness of enforcement nationally?

Lilian Greenwood: I suspect it is somewhat variable, not least because obviously under the current arrangements the enforcement can primarily happen on only the taxis and PHVs that are licensed by the authority, rather than just anyone that is operating in the area. When we spoke to Wolverhampton, it said that it was open to—I cannot remember the technical word for it—joint enforcement activities or allowing other people to enforce on its behalf. That is something that in the current setup, where we know that there are lots of taxis that are licensed by Wolverhampton but operating in other areas, seems to me a good thing.

In the longer term we would hope that that was not necessary because we want licensing authorities to be able to enforce on all the taxis and PHVs operating in their area. Should we make comprehensive reform, greater enforcement powers are an absolute must. That is one of the things that we cannot achieve through the changes that we are putting through the English Devolution and Community Empowerment Bill, but it is one of the things that needs further action. Certainly, it is something that the Law Commission had recommended. It advised that authorised officers should have the powers to stop and move licensed vehicles and that they should be able to issue fixed penalty notices.

The problem with the current out-of-area working, or the people who are licensed away from the area where they are operating, is of course that the money provided in order to undertake enforcement activities is in the wrong place. That is fundamentally the issue that we need to try to address.

Q235 **Baggy Shanker:** In the Department's written evidence it was stated that for national minimum standards to be effective, they would need to be accompanied by appropriate enforcement mechanisms. What did you have in mind?

Liz Wilson: Some things the Minister has just talked about: those powers to be able to enforce against drivers in your area whom you have not licensed; the potential for fixed penalty notices for more minor



breaches of licence, which if it was ringfenced could go back into improving the financing of licensing more broadly; the power to stop a vehicle without a police officer there. Those are the kinds of things that we are thinking about. We also hope that if they come alongside national minimum standards, because the standards will be more consistent, it will make it easier for one licensing authority area to enforce against another because there is a commonality of standards: you know what you are enforcing against. Those two things could work well together.

Q236 Baggy Shanker: You touched on resources being a big challenge, and resources in the right place to make sure enforcement is effective. Going back to our friends in Wolverhampton for a second again, they have built up a huge surplus with the fees that they have been getting. They could probably tackle that resource issue by taking on more enforcement officers and sending them around the country.

Lilian Greenwood: It already does that, precisely for those reasons.

Liz Wilson: It has officers in other parts of the country where it has enforcement officers. There is always a discussion about extent—

Q237 Baggy Shanker: It could do a lot more. Other authorities will say they do not see enough of its enforcement officers, yet they have lots of drivers licensed by Wolverhampton.

Lilian Greenwood: Absolutely, but it just underlines that we have ended up with a situation that is not the right outcome that we want. In the short term, absolutely. Certainly, in our conversations, I know Wolverhampton has talked about putting more resources into enforcement in other areas. But it highlights precisely why we want people to be licensed local to where they are working, so that the resources for enforcement match the drivers who are actually operating in the area.

Q238 Baggy Shanker: Does the Department have a plan on how this can be tackled going forward?

Lilian Greenwood: It comes back to the question of what the best set-up is in a more comprehensive reform of the regulations to tackle those issues. As Liz suggested, requiring someone to license close to where they work might avoid some pitfalls of trying to tackle out-of-area working through the ABBA model, but I am very open. I have not reached a fixed view. We know that we need to do it, we know what we want the outcomes to be; we have not reached a fixed view on what the best way is of getting there.

Actually, I want to bring together interested parties to build consensus. Obviously, that is what you have done, and you will bring your recommendations, and that is a really important part of the process. Certainly, we have plans this spring to convene some roundtables to look at what the best mechanisms might be for tackling precisely these issues.



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Q239 **Baggy Shanker:** Finally, regarding some work around setting national standards and national baselines for enforcement standards and requirements, things like data sharing, joint operations, public reporting and access to data: are they the sorts of things that are being looked at?

Lilian Greenwood: Those are precisely the sorts of things that we are considering. Liz, I do not know if you want to add to that? Perhaps I have missed something.

Liz Wilson: The first thing we are looking at through national minimum standards is around the drivers and the safety of the drivers, as you would expect. As part of that and as part of the powers that we are taking, we have the capacity and capability to look at other things around the operator data sharing and all those kinds of things. Those are other things we want to consider. Whether that is through national minimum standards themselves or through other mechanisms is something we want to work through, but those expectations are absolutely the kinds of things that we are thinking about.

Q240 **Chair:** Another aspect of the baseline would be the turnaround time because certainly, many of us have had constituents who are sitting waiting for a decision, and meanwhile they cannot earn money or go for another career if they are going to be struck off.

There is another aspect to enforcement and licensing, particularly relicensing. In London, TfL, the regional authority, makes the decisions and has its own internal processes, which are transparent. There is no councillor involvement, an issue we have covered before. It has been suggested to us that where councillors sitting on licensing committees have a role, they can or could potentially come up with perverse decisions as to who should or should not be a driver or an operator. Going to a regional LTA model, will the role of councillors in that process be considered as part of that?

Lilian Greenwood: It is certainly a conversation and a discussion I had with the Institute of Licensing, and I am sure you heard that. I suppose what we want to do is to make sure that there is consistent decision-making, in line with the national minimum standards and the licensing authorities' own policies. My view would be that the role of the democratically elected councillors is to set out policy, not necessarily to be responsible for the application of it. But the important bit is that whoever is making decisions—whether it is officers or a licensing committee—we give them the structure to make good decisions that are in line with the national minimum standards and the policy they themselves have set out.

Q241 **Olly Glover:** Our inquiry has led us to understand that there is currently some scope for joint enforcement between licensing authorities where there is agreement between them. Does the Department support going further and giving licensing authorities the statutory power to investigate and enforce against any taxi or PHV driver or vehicle operating in their



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area, regardless of which authority issued the licence? That might be one way of dealing with this whole, well, I am tempted to call it the Wolverhampton problem, but I might get in trouble. Well, I have done it now anyway.

Lilian Greenwood: The answer is yes. That was what we were saying in response to Baggy, which is we think that, and that is something that the Law Commission set out. That is something we would want to address in a more comprehensive reform of the regulations.

Q242 **Olly Glover:** Do you think that there might be additional resources or support that would be necessary to improve that capacity?

Lilian Greenwood: Yes. That was the point I was getting at really, which is that if you end up with a lot of out-of-area licensing, then it means that the resources are not in the right place. We need to come up with a solution that deals with that.

Q243 **Olly Glover:** Do you see any other barriers beyond the funds or resources to prevent that more joined up enforcement?

Liz Wilson: Differing standards, because you have to be clear what you are enforcing against. The more consistent the standards, the easier it is to have joint enforcement and nationalised enforcement. Even in a world where there are journey restrictions in place, people can still legitimately drive into another licensing authority area as long as they are coming back, and that could be quite a long way away. There will always be this issue where standards are very different, where even if you had the powers to enforce, are you clear what you are enforcing against? Do you understand that?

The more consistent those standards are, the easier it becomes for anyone to enforce against anybody else, regardless of where we get to on out-of-area working.

Q244 **Steff Aquarone:** Just briefly, to bring that back to my earlier question about a national licensing standard, if enforcement is done locally, it therefore is down to the driver to enter into other jurisdictions or other areas of enforcement but also incumbent on them to know the rules. We have data technology and geofencing, which allows individual pieces of transport furniture to be allowed in some zones and not just yards further down the road. It is quite precise and articulate. Again, I would ask whether there is any further appetite in that context for local enforcement to possibly look at a national licensing system and apply the technology solution more to the local enforcement?

Lilian Greenwood: Obviously, for drivers, they have requirements on them with the area where they have licensed, but you can always drive to areas outside where you are licensed for the reason that Liz just said. You might be licensed in Nottingham but doing a pickup from Heathrow airport or driving someone to the far end of the country, particularly in executive driving. Obviously, you are required to comply with the rules of



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the road and any kind of road signage and the rest of it, but you would not necessarily need to know what the licensing requirement was in another area. I might be missing your point.

- Q245 **Steff Aquarone:** Some problems that we have heard from local areas are really down to quite local specific circumstances. It is quite useful to be able to call on a larger region of private hire vehicles if there is a big event, for instance, but then again, swarming and clustering around opportunity hotspots is probably what has led to issues of drivers sleeping in their cars. To be able to carry out some of that stuff on a very local basis might be an advantage to local enforcement authorities.

Liz Wilson: I am trying to think what that would look like.

Lilian Greenwood: Yes. In your question are you talking about how the enforcement would work in those particular areas, or restricting, or the rules that the driver faces depending on where they go? I am sorry, I am probably not following it.

- Q246 **Steff Aquarone:** No, that is fine. Let us imagine that the local job is more about enforcement and less about licensing. The enforcement authority could then potentially say, "Right, we're actually going to put a red zone around this area here," which means no private hire vehicles are allowed there without a pre-booked job at all. You just cannot go in there with a private hire vehicle. Just for instance, which would be a really articulate way of solving a particular problem in a particular area.

Liz Wilson: Yes, so particularly thinking about things like airports, where we heard evidence of people just being in the area and waiting for a job.

Steff Aquarone: Indeed, yes.

Liz Wilson: Those are the kinds of things that we could think about. The risk in all those things is that you just displace the problem and people hover on the outside of it, do they not?

Steff Aquarone: In that case, of course. I realise that, yes.

Liz Wilson: These are the kinds of things that we would need to work through. But there is something to be considered locally, particularly around those areas where there might be disadvantages to local people as well as the trade, in having people circling around. We do not want lots of empty miles. That is one of the things that we are really considering, and we need to think about all the options for how you avoid that.

Steff Aquarone: Thank you. Sorry for the long-winded question.

Lilian Greenwood: No, no, no. I was trying to make sure I understood what you were getting at.

- Q247 **Chair:** That last issue is a major issue around Heathrow Airport. When the relaxation of out-of-area working came in with the regs in 2015, at



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that point apps were not in major use. Now we have apps. Presumably, it would be much easier nowadays to be able to flag up. You would have the queuing at the airport, or stations or whatever to have to deal with, but it would be possible to get an ABBA pickup now because one could specify that through the apps process. I do not know, let us say Nottingham to Birmingham Airport: a Nottingham driver could probably flag up to passengers at Birmingham Airport, "Anyone wanting to go to Nottingham?" The technology is there, surely?

Lilian Greenwood: Obviously, where you are serving a popular destination where there are likely to be people who are coming in the opposite direction, the apps make it more likely that you would be able to find a fare. That is not always going to be the case. I do not know, Liz, do you want to pick that up?

Liz Wilson: Yes. When the changes happened in 2015, out-of-area working was always possible, but has increased even more because of the app-based technology. It was not necessarily just the 2015 Act that facilitated that. You are right, certainly on the big set-piece places like airports. With the ABBA model, the issue we think about more is things like on boundary areas, with local journeys: someone is going to a supermarket that is a mile and a half over a boundary and then they want to go on to somewhere else, and they cannot. Those things are harder to manage than perhaps the airports.

Chair: Yes, but technology has changed things in the 11 years since then. Okay, we are now going to move on to accessibility.

Q248 **Baggy Shanker:** What is the Department's view of the current effectiveness of enforcement around accessibility legislation and duties?

Lilian Greenwood: Obviously, we want local authorities to enforce where legislation is not being complied with. Frankly, the statistics that we see and the anecdotal evidence we have from guide dog users, for example, about the number of refusals they get, are appalling. We have to assume that enforcement is not working as well as it should, because people should not be having those unacceptable experiences.

Q249 **Baggy Shanker:** Just taking the guide dogs issue and the refusal there, what is the plan to make improvements in that area?

Lilian Greenwood: We want licensing authorities to make sure that they are enforcing around that and that they are making it as easy as possible for people to report when those problems happen. It should not be entirely down to disabled people to have to do that reporting. I cannot remember the technical word for it, but local authorities can deploy mystery shoppers to find where there are problems in existence, and they should take action against drivers and operators who are not complying with the law. It is simply unacceptable that disabled people are experiencing discrimination when they are trying to use an important form of transport.



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Liz Wilson: I would just add to what the Minister said: this is one of the reasons we want disability equality training to be mandated through national minimum standards, because we are seeing something like only two-thirds of people mandating that training. It may be that some drivers just do not know because they have not had the training. That is why the training is so important, so that people know. What we want to see is a reduction in the refusals: part of that is knowledge and part of that is enforcement.

Baggy Shanker: You covered my final question there on the minimum standards around disability.

Q250 **Dr Arthur:** We heard from Transport for All about concerns it has about wheelchair accessible vehicles. Laurence mentioned that in Wolverhampton's gigantic licensing database, wheelchair accessible vehicles are underrepresented. When we had the app operators in, they seemed a little passive about the whole situation. This is a market failure, is it not? Is it perhaps time for the Government to act?

Lilian Greenwood: Obviously, we want there to be sufficient wheelchair accessible vehicles that serve the needs of disabled people who want them. It is fair to highlight the fact that wheelchair accessible vehicles are not necessarily the best accessible vehicles for all disabled people, because the higher step in and quite large area in the cab are not necessarily great for someone who is visually impaired or whatever. But we want there to be sufficient wheelchair accessible vehicles. Making that happen is slightly more difficult.

There are some local authorities that require their entire taxi fleet to be wheelchair accessible, but that might not be necessary or able to be provided everywhere. We know that wheelchair accessible vehicles are expensive to provide. In some places, if you put in a requirement that you want a certain proportion of your taxis to be wheelchair accessible and that you would not license a vehicle if it was not wheelchair accessible, the worry is that that might displace people to decide, "Well, I'm not going to drive a taxi, I'm going to change to driving a PHV," for example.

We need to find what the right mechanisms are. It is probably a bit of a mixture of carrot and stick, to try to ensure that the licensing authorities are able to get the level of wheelchair accessible vehicles they need in order to meet demand. But I am not sure that there is a really easy way to do it.

Q251 **Dr Arthur:** The costs are a bit of a red herring though, are they not? In a building like this we have ramps and elevators because we accept that we want to spend a little more to create that more equal society.

Lilian Greenwood: Sorry, I was not suggesting that we did not think it was worthwhile—

Dr Arthur: Of course, I know.



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Lilian Greenwood: But it requires people to come forward wanting to purchase a wheelchair accessible vehicle and to operate it.

Q252 **Dr Arthur:** We have Uber and Bolt, and they must have thousands and thousands of vehicles across the UK. Laurence talked about the number of vehicles in Wolverhampton, where wheelchair accessible vehicles are underrepresented. There is more licensing authorities can do—perhaps through minimum standards—to ensure that a proportion of their taxi and private hire car fleet are wheelchair accessible, so when someone calls for one, it is there and they can use it, rather than having to plan trips days in advance.

It is about creating that more equal country. There is more the Government could do, because I did not get the feeling that Uber and Bolt were going to act in this area without guidance or perhaps something a bit firmer from the Government.

Lilian Greenwood: Certainly, I would want there to be sufficient provision to meet need. I do not want people to be in a position where they cannot access a vehicle that meets their needs and enables them to do the journeys they want to do. Liz, I do not know if you have anything to add, but I would be very happy to look further at that issue and what action we could take to ensure that we tackle that challenge, although it might bring its own challenges.

Liz Wilson: That is absolutely right. The problem is most acute in private hire vehicles, where there is a much lower percentage of them. It is therefore probably felt most acutely in rural areas; urban areas are probably better served through taxi fleets on this. The mechanisms are complicated and tricky, because there is the opportunity for licensing authorities to think about setting minimum percentages, but if you are not meeting that, does that stop you from being able to have any more private hire vehicles? Could that disproportionately impact other disabled people? There are lots of things to be weighed up, but as the Minister said, we are happy to take it away and think more about what we can do and how we can work with others.

The makeup of the market is difficult because a lot of the drivers own their own vehicles and work for multiple platforms. While that does not mean that operators have no role in it, it is more complicated than it might be if everyone was employed directly by a single operator.

Dr Arthur: It goes back to how some operators are exploiting the way the legislation works, and people who require wheelchair accessible vehicles are paying the price for that. There is this drive to completely drive down costs all the time, and people with disabilities are paying the price. Like I was saying earlier, most people are willing to pay a little extra for a fleet that is better for their community as a whole. It is good that you have committed to looking at this. It is good. Thank you.

Chair: I actually take issue with that because it is understood that



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disabled people should not have to pay more for a service.

Dr Arthur: I mean people as a whole.

Q253 **Chair:** Oh, I see. Right, yes. The challenge is it comes down to the driver-owner or the operator who is going to have to pay the costs of a wheelchair accessible vehicle, because just enforcing or requiring operators is not going to magic more wheelchair accessible vehicles. We know from London, where black cabs and EVs are required to be wheelchair accessible, that they are more expensive: £60,000, £70,000, £80,000, if not more, whereas obviously a saloon car is a lot cheaper. What is happening in London is there does not appear to be any cut in the number of PHVs, but we are seeing a decline in the number of black cabs. It is basic economics.

I am just asking, given the importance of accessibility, will the Department look at other methods to find a way that this cost differential, to provide an essential accessible transport mechanism for people who probably cannot use other forms of public transport, can be explored? The enforcement mechanism is not going to deliver that.

Lilian Greenwood: Certainly, I am very happy to look at that. We very much share the aspiration that we want to ensure that disabled people have the opportunities.

Q254 **Chair:** Particularly wheelchair users.

Lilian Greenwood: Including wheelchair users, absolutely. We will take that away and look at what more we might do and what the options might be.

Q255 **Jacob Collier:** Just on information sharing between the police and licensing authorities, we have heard that it is very different across the country, and it is dependent on the relationship and agreements that licensing authorities have with the police force in their area. There is no official role for the police in the licensing of taxi or private hired drivers.

We have heard from the Institute of Licensing that there have been serious cases where relevant information has not been available to licensing authorities because of concerns and restrictions on the data sharing agreement. Does the Department believe that this kind of information should be put on to a statutory footing; that information sharing should be on a statutory footing, with a clear duty to provide that relevant information within set timescales?

Lilian Greenwood: At the moment, the police have the ability, under the common law police disclosure powers, to inform licensing authorities of relevant information when there is an urgent and pressing need. As part of our look at reforming the sector, we will look at how relevant information is shared with those who need it. That would include the information that is on the existing database, but also information on current licences in respect of PHVs and operators. It might be useful for



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the information held by DVLA to be shared proactively with licensing authorities when that relates to drivers or vehicles.

It sounds like what you are suggesting might require me to have conversations with my colleagues in the Home Office around what would be required. But we want to ensure that when licensing authorities are making their decisions, they have the information they need to make effective decisions that are in the interests of passengers and keeping them safe. If there is more that we can do, I am very open to looking at that. Liz, I do not know if that is something you can talk about, because you have probably had those conversations with colleagues in the Home Office.

Liz Wilson: Yes, we have talked to the Home Office, and we issued guidance in October last year to try to clarify some of this. The information sharing under common law police disclosure is obviously far broader than taxi and PHV drivers, and there is legislation around what can and cannot be shared. With all things, there are interpretations about how much information can be shared. The judgment about whether there is pressing social need and all those things is made by individuals. The more guidance and clarity that there is about that, the more helpful it becomes.

It is important to remember as well that a driver in their normal life could be arrested for something in a totally different part of the country from where they live, work, and are licensed, and so the more consistency there is about how information is shared, the better. A national database would also be helpful, because one of the things police do when they make an arrest is they ask the question, "What is your job?" And an individual will say or not say if they are a taxi driver. If there is a list of all the drivers there and available, that would help just to trigger the process to realise that this is definitely a taxi driver; it has been checked, we therefore know that there is something to share with a licensing authority. They will be able to see where they are licensed as well. The database will have a really important role to play in facilitating this.

Q256 **Jacob Collier:** So you see this as part of that national database?

Liz Wilson: Yes, it would help. It is not a panacea. That individual judgment about what constitutes a pressing social need is something, but just knowing that someone is a taxi driver is the first hurdle to get over, to know that you might need to share information.

Q257 **Alex Mayer:** Do you envisage that the national minimum standards will include measures to change or improve the complaints process?

Lilian Greenwood: We already want local authorities to make it absolutely clear how someone can make a complaint, and that should be clear on the local authority website. They could also require there to be information in vehicles that explains how you can make a complaint. We



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talked earlier in the Committee about CCTV, which obviously can provide really valuable evidence in the case of complaints.

I am not sure that there is more that we think is necessary, but if you think there are other things that we should be doing, please tell us. Obviously, it is also a question about what local authorities, licensing authorities, do with the information that they get. Where they see a pattern of complaints about a particular driver or operator, obviously we would want them to be following that up and looking at what is happening. We might want there to be a requirement for further training, or in some cases it might be that they review the licence in total or take other enforcement action.

Q258 Alex Mayer: Do you think it is clear for passengers at the moment, who have to go away and work out which council website they want to look at, or possibly search for a little sticker in the taxi? We have heard examples and evidence, for example, that perhaps it would be better if there were a national complaints portal. That way it would be very clear that wherever you caught a taxi or got a private hire vehicle in the country, you could complain in the same place and then it would be filtered down to the right person.

Lilian Greenwood: I had not considered setting up a national complaints portal. The underlying point is absolutely right. Obviously, we hope most people using taxis will not have any reason to complain, but if there is a problem, you should know where to complain. I am guessing in lots of cases people's first port of call, particularly for PHVs, will be the operator, for taxis it might be the local authority. It should be really clear to people where they make that complaint. If we need to strengthen things to ensure that people know where to make a complaint and that it is dealt with appropriately, then absolutely we will look at that.

Q259 Alex Mayer: Yes. For your average constituent it is clearly not something you do very often, hopefully never at all, so do they actually know which council it is, particularly if it is near a border? Moving on from that, in your written evidence you said that you were aware, anecdotally, of large operators refusing to provide a driver's PHV licence number after discrimination complaints. What do you think could stop this from happening?

Lilian Greenwood: We need to look at how that can be dealt with. The example that was given to me was where someone had made a booking and then the booking was cancelled. Whereas they could have had the information about which driver it was and what their licence number was at the time of making the booking, once the booking had been cancelled by the driver that information disappeared. That is something that we need to look at, because what I do not want is a position where someone is left without a form of redress and without being able to make that complaint in an effective way. I do not know if you want to add, Liz?



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Liz Wilson: Yes. The examples we have had are things like refusal to take an assistance dog, the journey is cancelled, then it is too late at that point to know what the licence number is and to formalise that complaint. That is not something we would obviously want to see happening, and we must see what mechanisms we would need to improve that transparency. Not all roads lead back to the database, but if there is more information readily available on drivers on the database, that might help with that. That is something else we would want to consider.

Q260 **Alex Mayer:** We have touched on this already, but would you envisage standards having expectations for how quickly licences can be suspended or revoked in a fair manner, both for drivers and passengers?

Lilian Greenwood: Yes. Obviously, you want all complaint processes to be dealt with in a prompt fashion. I am just wondering where we would put that and whether we have anything in our guidance at the moment.

Liz Wilson: We should think about whether it might be appropriate for it to be in the national minimum standards or through some other mechanism. Being clear on our expectations about how quickly decisions are made, as you say, is a good thing for drivers and for passengers. When you become overly absolute, there might be difficult questions that need to be looked at. We would not want to not allow for proper investigation, but there are standards we want people to see, where we are not leaving things for long periods not being addressed.

Q261 **Alex Mayer:** Finally, does the Department think there is any merit in giving independent oversight of the taxi and PHV complaints process? For example, we have traffic commissioners who are rather good at licensing and that kind of thing. Has any consideration been given to giving them some powers in this regard?

Lilian Greenwood: There is an argument for independent oversight. It would be quite a change for traffic commissioners in terms of their current role. But I would be open-minded about looking at that issue around independent oversight and considering where might be the best place for that to sit.

Q262 **Chair:** If there are no other questions from other colleagues, I have a couple. Obviously, we are looking forward to seeing the integrated transport strategy in due course. What can we expect that strategy to say about taxis and private higher vehicles and an integration into local transport networks?

Lilian Greenwood: I do not want to pre-empt the launch of the Integrated National Transport Strategy, but we recognise the importance that taxis and private hire vehicles play, particularly at certain times of day, or as part of integrated journeys, often. A lot of the time, people are using taxis and private hire for maybe some last mile bits, or from home to railway stations or whatever.



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Part of our thinking around moving licensing to transport authority level is around strengthening that ability to see taxi and private hire as part of a wider transport system in the area. They are a really important part of the mix, and they are really important for particular segments of the population, and we want to recognise that.

Q263 Chair: There are opportunities both in planning and design, say, of stations and airports, but also I have seen other jurisdictions where there has been a distinct area for Uber and app-based cabs. At the moment we seem to allow only some kinds of vehicles to pick up and drop off at stations but not private hire vehicles. I am hoping that that can be included when you are looking at that work. Okay, so thank you for that.

The final question is, I know that the timing of the English devolution Bill is not in your gift, Minister, but once that gets royal assent, what sort of timescale are you looking at for a consultation and then any regulational or primary legislation changes in this area, in national minimum standards?

Lilian Greenwood: In terms of national minimum standards, the English Devolution Bill would give us those powers. Part of the very reason for seeking to use the English devolution Bill is in order that we could act promptly on the issues that Baroness Casey raised with us. Without having had this discussion with Liz about the resources available in the team and how quickly we can move, we would want to get this work under way, with a consultation on what those national minimum standards comprise.

We already have work planned for this spring, looking at the whole broader issues around taxi and private hire regulation, and trying to build a consensus about what ways we would deal with the very issues that you as a Committee have been contemplating over the space of this inquiry. That is because we recognise that this issue has been knocking around for a number of years now. It is time that there was action, and we are keen to do that. No, we are not delaying.

Q264 Chair: You have a current consultation going on in terms of the nature of the local authority, what tier of local authority, and that closes in April.

Lilian Greenwood: Probably early April, yes.

Q265 Chair: What most people in the sector and using the sector want to know is when will it be actually different? How many years do they have to wait?

Lilian Greenwood: Hopefully, not very many.

Chair: Okay. Thank you, Minister, for your evidence today. I should have thanked you also for the letter to us on the changes that the Government propose to bring in. Feel free to write to us if there is anything you feel you want to flesh out in terms of the questions today, or anything else you feel that you wanted to answer and we did not ask. We know that



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you have opened a consultation on some issues, and I know that you will consider the evidence that we have gathered in this inquiry when you are considering next steps. Obviously, as you know, we expect to make our recommendations to you in due course. That concludes today's session.