

Lancaster City Council

Position statement

**Use of safety screens/ partitions in licensed vehicles
(hackney carriages and private hire)**

Safety screens in licensed vehicles have been available for a number of years, these generally tend to be hard plastic screens and should already have safety certification to the relevant EU standard and or third party independent safety product documentation. These products had generally been developed to protect drivers from threats, attacks and injury from passengers.

The coronavirus pandemic has brought additional concerns regarding driver and passenger safety, namely the potential for droplet contamination by the virus. Several new screens/ partition products have very quickly appeared on the market as a response to concerns.

In terms of screens partitions designed as a result of the pandemic there is often a lack of information about safety testing or certification (both in terms of the individual product and or its ability to prevent/ reduce transmission of the virus) and therefore the Council does not have full or adequate information to make an informed decision re approval of such products.

The decision to install a safety screen/ partition during the current pandemic will be a matter for the vehicle owner/ driver and supplier to consider. Consideration should be given to the guidance detailed below

The Council will not accept liability in circumstances in which a screen/partition causes injury to a passenger or driver

If you wish to install a screen or partition, please consider the following guidance

The screen / partition should:

- Not interfere with or compromise any operating or safety features in the vehicle (including airbags, handbrake, gearstick) or the vehicle type approval
- Not be made of materials that will increase the fire risk in the vehicle
- Be transparent enough so as not to interfere with the safe use of the vehicle. And to enable the driver and passengers to see each other , and remain clear of scratches, clouding or stickers which would impede the drivers or passengers visibility
- Be adequately and safely secured and not interfere with the safety including access and egress of the driver or passengers or become easily detached during normal use
- Be adequately disinfected between bookings and at the start and end of the working day

Vehicle Owners/ drivers should:

- Inform insurers about the intention to fit such a device and ensure their insurance will not be invalidated as a result
- Fit/ install screens at your own responsibility and in accordance with the manufacturers specifications and recommendations
- Understand that this may be a temporary measure and that authorised officers of the Council reserve the right to require their removal with reasonable notice
- Be aware depending on the type fitted (full front/back partition or driver only) the front passenger seat in the vehicle may be unusable
- Be aware that the Council will be sympathetic to drivers who choose not to carry the maximum number of passengers that the licence permits , where the reason for refusal is based on social distancing or other pandemic requirements

The Licensing team will respond to complaints from passengers, drivers or vehicle owners regarding the safety of individual products. Where the licensing officer has any concerns, they will speak to the vehicle owner and may require the removal of the screen / partition or other appropriate action . Any such request will be confirmed in writing together with the reasons for the request. The consequences of failure to comply with the request may result in a formal review of the vehicle licence, and or suspension/ revocation of the vehicle licence.

There is currently no Government guidance in relation to the use of screens/partitions in licensed vehicles, a letter from the Department for Transport dated the 13 May 2020 makes it clear that they currently consider this to be a matter for Local Authorities. The City Council is aware that the Local Government Association is contacting Local Authorities in an attempt to try and support some uniformity of approach regarding this matter.

The City Council will have due regard to any relevant information that may be published in the future and may amend its position accordingly.

It remains a licensed driver/ vehicle owners' decision as to whether to work as a licensed driver during the pandemic. Any person who choses to work should have full regard to published guidance. Specific updates regarding local taxi information is available at <http://www.lancaster.gov.uk/sites/business/licences-and-permissions/taxi-and-private-hire>

18 May 2020