

## **LEEDS PRIVATE HIRE GMB - NO TO AGE LIMITS**

Lord Mayor, my name is Bill Chard, Regional Organiser GMB trade union and I am accompanied today by Javaid Akhtar who is chairperson of the Leeds Private Hire Association which is a branch of the GMB we also have Aurangzeb Qabal Secretary and Committee member Akhtar Mohammed.

Private hire drivers in Leeds have joined the GMB in droves, since my first meeting with over 200 of them in February this year over 500 have now joined the GMB. Those drivers have sought to join the GMB because they genuinely feel that they have been battered by raft after raft of local legislation dragging them down with swathes of bureaucratic and damaging over regulation.

Nvq training, Vrq training, English comprehension testing, medical tests, and now the late renewal policy which means that if a driver is a day late in renewing his licence the decision has been made to force the drivers to undertake DSA driving test undertake the English comprehension test (even though they might have been born in the UK from generations of ancestors born in this country and been driving private hire cars in Leeds for the last 20years. This is plainly ridiculous. They must also undertake another CRB check, pay for a group two medical report even though they might have undergone one recently. All of this at a cost of around £200 just because they are a day late renewing their licence. Drivers already have to pay for car plates and the renewal of badges, combined cost another £180, often they have to replace tinted windows when they buy their car at a cost of between £500 and £600.

Of course the single and most contentious issue troubling drivers and the one that has caused the most concern is the current proposal to restrict the age limit on cars because this piece of local legislation will force smaller companies out of business and force drivers on to the dole and out of work.

There are just under 5000 private hire drivers in Leeds working for themselves or in small or medium sized businesses, plus there are also the very large multi million pound firms. We all know that the small to medium sized enterprises are the life blood of any economy the driving force of competitiveness and innovation. The large companies are happy with the proposed new byelaws because they know that its imposition will force many of the smaller companies out of existitance creating a monopoly.

The proposal means that the age of cars that can be used drops from 8 years to 6 unless they pass through the Exceptional Conditions Policy. I will come to this policy, but firstly I should tell you that most councils do not have age restrictions, in Newport

a few weeks ago drivers were so incensed that their council introduced a change of 10 years to 8 that they blocked the city twice

The Department of Transport publish best practise guidelines, I quote "It is perfectly possible for an older vehicle to be in good condition. So the setting of an age limit behind which a local authority will not license vehicles may be arbitrary and inappropriate." It also says that "Licensing requirements which are unduly stringent will restrict the supply of PHV services by putting up the cost of operations or otherwise restricting entry to the trade"

The Exceptional Conditions Policy states that if a car is 6 years old and the driver wishes to continue operating it then that car must be subjected to a two hour test at a cost of £60 to the driver. To pass, the car must be in exceptional condition, the dictionary says exceptional means "very unusual" or "outstandingly good" That effectively means that no cars will pass the test, and what's more it has been designed for that reason.

I ask you on behalf of the 5000 ph drivers in Leeds to squash this proposed flawed and unnecessary legislation.

Keep these people working and off the dole. In this harsh economic climate many people have cut back on taxis and drivers are burdened enough with the other directives that I described, they simply cannot afford any more. They do not trust the Exceptional Conditions Policy.

The principles of an act may be all right when the act is passed, but principles are liable to be undermined by the rules framed under the act; and the rules undermined by directives; and the directives by the whims and fancies of the persons executing them.

Thank you for your time.