

TAXI NEWS FROM AROUND THE UK

TAXI DRIVER APPLICATION FORMS IN BRAILLE

Local councils are required to be more inclusive when it comes to printing leaflets and letters and in many areas council documents are available in a number of different languages. But has Portsmouth City council taken things a bit too far? They are issuing taxi driver licence applications in Braille! Surely being able to see is a requirement for taxi driving! The forms are available on the Council's website in large print or in audio format too.

The licensing authority told reporters: "Obviously, a taxi driver would not need the Braille version, but they might find a foreign language version helpful. The form is also for employers to fill in - they could need a Braille version." If an applicant cannot fill the form in using English, then perhaps taxi driving is not the best choice as a job!

ENGLISH SPEAKING DRIVERS IN SOUTHAMPTON

Meanwhile a few miles further along the south coast, some of Southampton's taxi drivers are displaying St George's and Union Flag stickers proclaiming they were "English-speaking" drivers. This came about because some passengers complained passengers about the standard of spoken English of some of the taxi drivers in the city. Any person wishing to become a taxi driver in Southampton must hold a British driving licence, pass a medical, undergo a criminal record check and complete a "knowledge" test of Southampton.

So far around a dozen of the licensed hackney drivers have the stickers in the city which has 267 licensed taxis, along with 550 ph vehicles. Clive Johnson, chairman of Radio Taxis and the Southampton Trade Association, said: "These signs are not racial. They are a protest to the council, saying please make sure new drivers actually have command of the English language. There are few guys going out there who cannot speak English and just bluff it. It doesn't matter if they are Polish, Russian, French, Spanish, if they can't communicate to passengers we have to take that as problem."

However some of the trade reps feel the stickers "have racist undertones" and want the drivers to remove them. Chairman of the Southampton cab section of Unite, Perry McMillan, said: "Surely all drivers speak English. If they don't, what's going on? We just hope that licensing officers can investigate this and satisfy the trade that this isn't the case."

Ian Hall, chairman of the Southampton Hackney Association, half of whose 126 members are from an Asian background, told the Daily Echo: "I don't think drivers should have these stickers in the back of their cars, because I think it's racist. If drivers have got these stickers, they need to take them down."

A council spokesman said: "We will of course look into any complaints or concerns from members of public. People should contact the council and let us know if they see signs and stickers being used in taxis, particularly if they find them offensive."

WHEELCHAIR TAXI HOT-LINE LAUNCHED IN WORTHING

Another report from the south coast – this time from the town of Worthing. Every June, a convoy of London's wheelchair accessible taxis take war veterans to Worthing. The annual outing is organised by The London Taxi Benevolent Association for War Disabled. But for the wheelchair user residents of Worthing it is not always an easy task to get a wheelchair accessible taxi. So a new hot line had been launched to help in response to complaints from disabled residents by the Worthing Taxi Association. Worthing Borough Council were being receiving more complaints despite an increase in the number of wheelchair-accessible taxis licensed in the borough.

The special hot-line number, 01903 230302 is manned every day from 7am to midnight for people needing a wheelchair-accessible taxi.



CHELTENHAM RACECOURSE DISABLED SET DOWN

Moving away from the sea to the beautiful Cotswolds, comes a report of problems which may face wheelchair users at this year's Gold Cup between 16th and 19th March at Cheltenham. This time it could prove could prove problematic for taxi drivers wishing to set down disabled wheelchair users, as the racecourse has decided that it cannot allow taxis to drop off people directly outside the main entrance because it will cause traffic gridlock. Disabled wheelchair users will have to be pushed up a hill to the entrance. Borough councillor Barbara Driver, a member of Cheltenham Disability Forum, told reporters: "I think it's outrageous really. There must be some special provision for disabled people who come by taxi. I understand those with blue badges will be able to park, but a lot of people will choose taxis for the convenience or because they have no choice. It seems very short-sighted not to let people be dropped off outside the door."

Thousands go to the Gold Cup each year, with more than 65,000 visitors expected this year. Racecourse spokesman Andy Clifton said it was simply a question of practicality. "The situation is that there is no way we can allow taxis to come right up to the main entrance because they will not be able to turn around," he said. "We have got tens of thousands of people visiting and if the roads were to become blocked it would cause a real problem. The taxi drop-off point is no more than 100 yards away from the entrance. If



there are any disabled taxi customers who need help, there will be plenty of racegoers more than willing to assist."

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