

Guide Dogs response to Bromsgrove District Council “Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Consultation”

16 February 2018

Summary

- 0.1 Guide Dogs provides mobility services to increase the independence of people with sight loss in the UK. Alongside our mobility work we campaign to break down physical and legal barriers to enable people with sight loss to get around on their own terms. Current estimates suggest about 21,140 people with vision impairments are living in Worcestershire of which about 73 are guide dog owners.¹
- 0.2 Taxis and private hire vehicles (PHVs), and the door to door service they provide, are essential to the independence of blind and partially sighted people, who are often unable to drive or use public transport. However, accessing taxis and PHVs can be a major challenge for assistance dog owners: A Guide Dogs survey found that 42% of assistance dog owners were refused by a taxi or PHV driver in a one-year period because of their dog – despite this being a criminal offence under the Equality Act 2010.² Such access refusals can have a significant impact on assistance dog owners’ lives, leading to feelings of anger and embarrassment and a loss of confidence and independence.
- 0.3 To help reduce the number of access refusals, it is important that drivers know their legal obligations and how to best offer assistance to their customers with vision impairments, including those travelling with a guide dog. This can be best ensured through training. We therefore welcome the suggestion that all drivers have to undertake disability awareness training before receiving their licence. To strengthen this further, we recommend changing disability awareness training to disability equality training.

Key recommendations: We recommend that all drivers undertake disability equality training when obtaining their licence.

¹ Royal National Institute for Blind People [research](#); Guide Dogs data

² Guide Dogs, [Hail Storm: The experiences of assistance dog owners when trying to use taxis and private hire vehicles](#) 2016.

1. Disability equality training

- 1.1. Drivers who refuse to carry an assistance dog are committing a criminal offence under the Equality Act 2010. The consequences of delayed travel combined with the emotional impact of facing discrimination and confrontation when trying to carry out everyday activities take a significant toll on assistance dog owners.
- 1.2. Apart from feelings of anger and embarrassment, refusals can undermine the independence that assistance dogs bring to their owners. Assistance dog owners also reported that the stress of refusals has had a detrimental impact on their mental health and on whether they feel able to leave the house.³ This also has a negative impact on their ability to access work and other opportunities. As guide dog owners report:
 - 1.2.1. “Each refusal is crushing, confidence shattering, rejecting, and traumatic. I always feel that I don't want to go out after - but work dictates I must.” Guide dog owner, Stevenage
 - 1.2.2. “I was left on my own at the side of the road in the dark. I am deaf and unable to phone for help and it made me feel very vulnerable. It makes me feel afraid to go out.” Assistance dog owner
 - 1.2.3. “I was very upset, it was dark, raining and 10pm at night. I was scared. I avoid evening invites, as I worry about getting home. I lose out on the chance of socialising with friends, which is bad, as I have no family.” Guide dog owner, Rochester
 - 1.2.4. “I used to have a very tough two-hour commute to work. The taxi part of the journey was the shortest bit travel wise, but it always ended up being the bit that held me up the most because I was having to spend time facing drivers who wouldn't take me with my dog. ... It's good that my contract was flexi hours otherwise I'm sure I would have been sacked for being late all the time – it happened so often.” Guide dog owner, Daventry

³ Guide Dogs, Hail Storm, 2016

- 1.3. A Guide Dogs survey found that many taxi and PHV drivers are unaware of their legal obligations and the impact refusals have on assistance dog owners.⁴ The best way to address this is through disability equality training for all taxi and PHV drivers.
- 1.4. We welcome the proposition that all drivers will have to undertake disability awareness training before obtaining their licence. Disability awareness training has proven helpful to increase non-disabled people's understanding of individual disabilities. However, it does not focus on the greater social issues that affect disabled people and what is needed to make services more inclusive.
- 1.5. This is explored by disability equality training, which focuses on the concept of people being disabled by society's barriers and attitudes. It highlights the role an organisation and individuals play in removing these barriers, while also including awareness elements such as customer care, etiquette and appropriate communication. It thereby helps people understand disability from both a human rights and equality perspective.⁵
- 1.6. Many of the positive experiences disabled people report when using taxis and PHVs come about following disability equality training.⁶ Councils that have introduced disability equality training report positive results with fewer refusals and drivers feeling more confident in assisting passengers with disabilities.
- 1.7. To enable taxi and PHV drivers to deliver the best and most inclusive service possible, we therefore recommend that all drivers undertake disability equality training. This will ensure they are knowledgeable on disability issues, have discussed barriers in their service and how to overcome them, and are informed about their legal obligations.

For more information please contact Guide Dogs Public Affairs Manager Chris Theobald on chris.theobald@guidedogs.org.uk or 0118 983 8162.

⁴ Guide Dogs, [Access All Areas](#), 2015.

⁵ For more information on disability equality training and the social model of disability see http://www.un.org/disabilities/documents/egms/2015/Kenji_Kuno_Change.pdf

⁶ Minutes of Guide Dogs focus group, Nottingham, Wales, August 2015.