

This leaflet is to help you and explains what kind of service and assistance you can expect when travelling by taxi or minicab in Watford.

Type of vehicle you may hire

Each local council in England and Wales sets the standards for what type of vehicles can become licensed taxis or minicabs.

In Watford there is no requirement for all taxis to be of one design, such as a London style taxi. This is because some passengers find it easier to use a saloon car and a large vehicle can be difficult for them to access. In order to offer as much choice as possible, Watford currently allows a mixed fleet for taxi licensing.

However, under the Equality Act 2010, all drivers must make reasonable adjustments to the service they provide. This means they must have a helpful approach to offering their services and to make sure they do not put disabled people at a disadvantage or treat them differently to any other passenger.

For taxis and minicabs, reasonable adjustments may include:

- The driver guiding or helping you into the vehicle. This should include assisting you from your pick up point rather than the driver waiting in the vehicle or tooting a horn
- The driver approaching you at a rank to ask if you need assistance. This would not be classed as touting.
- The driver helping you to get out of the vehicle at your destination and giving guidance for where to go next. If you request further assistance in to a building or to the door of a building the driver should offer this.
- the taxi or minicab firm having a WBC recognised standard of Disability Awareness Training for drivers
- Not making any charge for loading or unloading a wheelchair – the meter should start when the journey starts
- Charging a lower rate for a larger vehicle if a passenger is unable to use a smaller car (for example, a wheelchair user)
- Charging a saloon car rate for a larger vehicle if a passenger has no choice in vehicle size (for example, where a person must travel seated in their wheelchair).

Assistance Dogs

Drivers of licensed taxis and minicabs must allow you to travel with any registered assistance dog free of charge. It is a criminal offence to refuse to carry an assistance dog and a driver can be prosecuted for refusing or for

charging extra to carry the dog. It is important that the dog can be identified as an assistance dog, so owners of assistance dogs should carry the dog's identification papers). In cases where a person is refused a journey it is the council who prosecutes the driver for a criminal offence.

A driver may be able to get an exemption certificate for carrying assistance dogs. Certificates are only issued on medical grounds and if a driver has an exemption certificate, it must be displayed in the vehicle. Drivers with exemption certificates do not have to carry assistance dogs.

Complaining about poor service from taxis and minicabs

We understand that making a complaint is not always easy to do. Some passengers feel that they may be prevented from travelling again if they complain about a driver or company.

However, it is important that any poor standards are reported so that we can improve service to all passengers.

You should make your complaint to Watford Borough Council licensing department who deal with taxi and minicab licensing within Watford. If you are unsure about where the vehicle was licensed, you can still call Watford and we will help you to identify the vehicle where possible.

Help for making a complaint

When you make a complaint about a taxi or minicab, you will need some of the following facts to trace the driver:

- The vehicle's registration number. This will be on the back and front of the car on the number plate.
- The taxi or minicab licence number which is on a small, rectangular shaped plate on the back of the car.
- The taxi drivers badge number – which you can get from their badge, by asking the driver or from the minicab firm.
- Take note of the details of the journey including the date, time, place/location of where the driver picked you up and dropped you off.

It is a condition of a driver's licence that they must offer passenger's a receipt after every journey. The receipt must contain the following details: Date; Fare they charged you; Driver's badge number

You should not have to ask for a receipt. If you do, you should report this to the licensing department. A driver's badge number is a four digit number and

should match with the number on his identification badge. If possible make sure the driver is giving the correct details.

From 1st October 2016 all badges will be printed to include a Braille overlay with the driver's number.

What can the council do?

The council is responsible for ensuring that businesses comply with the law. Where a business does not comply the council can take action by prosecuting offenders for criminal offences.

The council also has a general duty to ensure that businesses are treating people equally in line with the Equalities Act 2010. Most offences in the Equalities Act 2010 are not criminal offences. The one exception to this is the law concerning the carrying of assistance dogs.

Where the council can take action, we will. Where we are unable to take direct action, i.e. in civil matters, we will assist you to find support to take your case further if you want to do this.

Whistle-blowing Scheme

Because we understand that making a formal complaint can sometimes be a stressful experience, where customers would rather not do this, we have introduced a separate whistle-blowing scheme.

Making a complaint through the whistle-blowing scheme can be completely anonymous. Complaints received in this way will still be investigated as far as possible.

It may be that independent evidence is available that allows us to take action even when you do not provide a formal complaint. Even if we cannot take formal action, your reports help us to build a picture of the character and behaviour of drivers. This is essential when making future decisions about suitability for a licence.

To use the whistle-blowing scheme, go to www.watford.gov.uk and look for Taxi Licensing

Checklist

Use this checklist to make sure you are being treated fairly

No extended wait or purpose built vehicle sent unless you have requested this – do not put up with being told that a driver must be found to carry your assistance dog. All vehicles can do this.

No extra charge for a specialist vehicle – all customers should pay the same rate for the same vehicle.

Meter starts when the journey starts, not when you are being assisted in to the vehicle.

Driver has made sure you are safe and secure – this is his legal responsibility

Meter is starting from the correct rate – ask to see the tariff chart to make sure a higher rate is not being used

No soiling charge for an assistance dog that sheds some fur

When booking a minicab, ask for a quote from the company and do not agree a fare that is higher than the tariff would allow – this is especially important for wheelchair users who have to travel in a purpose built vehicle

Make sure you know which type of vehicle you are booking, hackney carriage or private hire vehicle (minicab).