



Driver & Vehicle  
Licensing  
Agency

# Future of Vehicle Registration and Licensing Services in Northern Ireland

Public Consultation July 2013

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### **Introduction and proposals**

1. There is a long standing disparity in the level of vehicle registration and licensing services available to motorists in Northern Ireland (NI), compared with the rest of the UK. For example, NI motorists are currently unable to license their vehicles online and have only limited services available at Post Offices. In order to address this, the Department for Transport and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) is proposing changes in the way these services are delivered to NI motorists.

2. The proposal at the heart of this consultation document is to modernise the way vehicle registration and licensing services are delivered in NI and put these on a par with services available to motorists in GB. If adopted, these proposals will ensure that the changing needs of both public and commercial customers in NI are met. More services will be available at the Post Office and there will also be a wider range of electronic services available to NI motorists. The proposals are consistent with the Government's drive to ensure that public services are "Digital by Default" and will save the UK taxpayer £12m every year. The proposals may result in the closure of a network of dedicated offices in NI through which current services are provided.

3. If the proposals are adopted, the following service improvements would be offered to all NI motorists:

- a) Access to electronic vehicle licensing services, which will allow NI motorists to license their vehicle or declare it off the road either online or via an automated telephone service, 24 hours a day, seven days a week
- b) Increased range of transactions available over the counter at around 150 Post Offices throughout NI including:
  - i. Licensing a vehicle when changes need to be made to the vehicle registration certificate, e.g. change of address
  - ii. Relicensing a vehicle when the reminder form is not available
  - iii. Change of taxation class when a vehicle is being relicensed (for example from "Disabled" to a duty paying tax class)
  - iv. Heavy Goods Vehicle relicensing and relicensing for reduced pollution vehicles

- v. Issue of duplicate tax discs
- c) Introduction of a retention service for NI vehicle registration numbers. NI customers will be able to hold a 'personalised' registration number separate from a vehicle for the future assignment to another vehicle.
- d) A telephone service for applications for a duplicate vehicle registration document
- e) The transfer of "personalised" number plates between GB and NI vehicles will be simplified
- f) NI customers will be able to purchase NI and GB personalised registration numbers through a harmonised sales scheme. This will be delivered online and via auctions
- g) The administrative process when vehicles move between GB and NI will be streamlined

#### **New Services for NI Businesses**

- a) Access for NI businesses to the DVLA's fleets relicensing scheme – offering efficiencies to fleet operators through handling transactions and documentation in bulk
- b) A drop off and collect service for businesses who want to transact in bulk will be available at selected Post Office branches
- c) There will be the option of a new, online service for first registrations for dealers who are not part of the Automated First Registration and Licensing system
- d) A retention service for NI cherished number dealers
- e) Access to the same level of service throughout the UK will enable businesses to streamline their own processes so that they do not have to manage the registration and licensing of NI vehicles in a different way to those in GB

4. We believe that these proposals will ensure that NI motorists have access to an equal level of service as motorists in the rest of the UK. The proposals will improve availability, accessibility and end the two-tier system that has been in place since 2004, when the DVLA first introduced online vehicle relicensing. The changes will also ensure that services available to NI motorists do not continue to fall behind those available in GB when improvements are made in the future. For example, the DVLA is currently considering introducing more online vehicle registration services, abolishing the paper tax disc and introducing a direct debit scheme for the payment

of vehicle excise duty. If the proposals outlined in this consultation are adopted, NI motorists will benefit from these future improvements in the same way, and at the same time, as those in GB.

5. The proposed changes will have no impact on the existing NI vehicle registration mark format. The existing unique format for NI vehicles would remain.

### **Background**

6. The Department for Transport is responsible for vehicle registration and licensing throughout the UK.

7. In GB these services are delivered by the DVLA in Swansea and currently through 39 local offices throughout GB. In NI, delivery of these services is outsourced to the Driver and Vehicle Agency (DVA), which has a centre of operations in Coleraine and eight local offices throughout NI. The DVA provides a range of vehicle registration and licensing services to motorists in NI but due to differences in IT systems and business processes, a number of services that are available in GB are not currently available in NI.

8. The Department for Transport wants all NI motorists to have access to the full range of services that are already available to motorists across the rest of the UK. We believe the proposals outlined in this consultation will accomplish this while also achieving significant efficiency savings every year.

9. This consultation seeks your views to help decide the steps to take. This consultation supplements the UK-wide consultation on transforming the way the DVLA delivers its services. That consultation ran from December 2011 to March 2012.

### **The current position in GB**

10. The DVLA has been moving away from its traditional, predominantly paper-based operations to the delivery of secure online and telephone services to improve customers' experiences. The DVLA's online and automated telephone vehicle licensing service allows a vehicle keeper to buy their tax disc or declare that a vehicle is off the road 24 hours a day, seven days a week and every week of the year. This service is very popular - over 52% of vehicle relicensing transactions and 81% of off road notifications are now carried out online or by phone at times to suit the customer's convenience. This includes almost 8,000 people who relicensed their vehicles on Christmas Day last year.

11. Some customers still prefer to carry out their DVLA transactions face to face and the DVLA has recently awarded a new contract to Post Office Limited which saw the introduction of a much wider range of face-to-face vehicle licensing transactions available over the counter at GB Post Office branches.

12. All of these changes will make the DVLA more efficient and by the end of 2013 will result in the closure of the DVLA's 39 local offices in GB. From that point, GB customers' vehicle licensing needs will be satisfied through its digital and telephone services and some 4,000 – 6,000 Post Office branches. Many of the services currently only available at a DVLA local office will be available through one of these alternative channels, making them much more accessible locally than they are now.

13. The DVLA also now offers a centralised processing function for all vehicle and driver services from its headquarters in Swansea. This will include the first registration of a vehicle and other services currently offered exclusively by DVLA local offices. Specialised teams have been established to ensure that the appropriate level of expertise is available to meet customer service targets.

14. The DVLA is also looking to introduce further improvements and extensions to online services to allow a wider range of vehicle registration transactions to be carried out electronically.

### **The current position in NI**

15. NI motorists cannot currently access the facility to license a vehicle or make an off road notification online or by automated telephone service. Although a manual telephone service exists, it has limited capacity. NI motorists can only carry out a vastly reduced range of licensing transactions at NI Post Office branches compared with those in GB, and for those wishing to do so, there is no facility to 'retain' a vehicle registration number for future assignment to another vehicle.

16. Currently, NI motorists can only license their vehicle at the majority of Post Offices if they have the reminder form that is sent when the licence is due to expire. Only 19 Post Offices in NI currently offer the facility to license a vehicle without this reminder form.

17. Other services, including making an off road notification, licensing a vehicle when there has been a change in the vehicle's registration details and requesting a duplicate vehicle registration document, can only be carried out at one of the DVA's local offices or by making a postal application to the DVA's centre in Coleraine.

18. First vehicle registration applications for dealers who are not currently using the Automated First Registration and Licensing system can currently only be dealt with at a DVA local office or by post to the DVA's centre in Coleraine.

### **Impact on DVA Offices and Staff**

19. The introduction of online services, together with an increased range of services delivered through NI Post Office branches, would naturally lead to a declining need for DVA staff to process vehicle transactions in the way they currently

do. If these new services were to be fully established, the DVLA forecasts that over 75% of the transactions currently carried out manually by DVA staff will, in future, be conducted either online or via Post Office branches. If these proposals are adopted, the relatively small number of transactions that would continue to be completed manually would be processed at the DVLA in Swansea. This will take full advantage of the large degree of automation and flexibility that already exists at the DVLA.

20. Regrettably, as with the closure of 39 local offices in GB, there will be a significant impact on the staff that are currently employed in delivering vehicle registration and licensing services in NI. Within the DVA there are currently 324 posts carrying out vehicle registration and licensing work. The majority of these staff work at the DVA's centre in Coleraine. There are also local offices in Coleraine, Armagh, Belfast, Ballymena, Downpatrick, Enniskillen, Londonderry and Omagh.

21. If the delivery of NI vehicle registration and licensing services is centralised at Swansea to enable the service improvements outlined above, these DVA staff would no longer be needed for this work. It is likely that the local offices within NI would close and there would be a significant impact on the DVA's centre in Coleraine. However, we have had to recognise that we are now clearly in a digital world and the way vehicle services are currently delivered and the number of people required to carry on doing so in NI, is unsustainable. When online and automated telephone relicensing services were introduced in GB from 2004, the DVLA was similarly reduced in recognition that online transactions reduce overheads and resources.

22. Discussions have taken place with the Department of Environment Northern Ireland (DoE NI), who employ these staff as part of the NI Civil Service (NICS), about opportunities for redeployment in NI to manage the potential impact on affected DVA staff. The DoE NI position on this matter is as follows:

"DOE NI, in conjunction with the wider NICS Departments, will seek to absorb surplus staff by means of redeployment either to other suitable posts within DOE, insofar as this is possible, or in another Department. However, it is recognised that due to the preponderance of potentially surplus staff in the Coleraine area, the vast majority of whom are in non-mobile grades or have restricted mobility due to working pattern, disability or welfare reasons, that identifying suitable redeployment opportunities may present a significant challenge particularly if the timeframe for completing such moves is short.

In recognition of the importance to staff of job security, DOE (with the full support of DVLA) will use their best endeavours to avoid the need for redundancy and where redundancies are unavoidable, the aim will be to minimise the number of compulsory redundancies."

23. This approach will minimise the impact of this proposal on the individuals concerned. However, this redeployment will result in a net reduction in the total number of posts within the NICS.

24. A series of documents setting out an analysis of the potential impacts of the introduction of these new services in NI, and the potential for these services to be centralised and delivered by the DVLA, have been published alongside this consultation document. The documents include a full Impact Assessment, a Local Economic Impact Assessment, an Equality Analysis and our assessment of how these proposals are screened as required under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. On the basis of these assessments, we believe that the proposals should be implemented as they stand but the option remains to modify the proposals should our understanding of the potential impacts change. For this reason, we would like your views on any of the information contained in these documents.

## **Consultation Questions**

25. We would like your opinions to help inform how NI motorists have access to the best quality vehicle registration and licensing services in the future. Please answer the following questions:

<b>A. Do you have any comments on the proposals outlined in this consultation document or its potential impact?</b>
<b>B. Do you have any other proposals or suggestions which could help improve the delivery of vehicle registration and licensing services for NI motorists, while at the same time reducing costs?</b>

## **How to respond**

26. If you are affected by the changes proposed in this consultation, please consider the questions above. As part of your response we would be interested in receiving any views on the matters included with this document or any of the accompanying analyses. Responses should be made by **Wednesday 11 September 2013**. When responding, it would be helpful if groups could indicate the people and organisations they represent.

27. You can respond in the following ways:

- Online, using the response form at the following link:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/future-of-vehicle-licensing-services-in-northern-ireland>
- By post to Corporate Affairs Directorate, D16, DVLA, Swansea SA6 7JL
- Email to [consultations.CAD@dvla.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:consultations.CAD@dvla.gsi.gov.uk)

28. Please use one of the above contacts to request a copy of the consultation in an alternative format or if you have any questions.



**What happens next?**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>DVLA reply</b></p>	<p>We do not intend to acknowledge receipt of individual responses unless you indicate that you would like an acknowledgement.</p> <p>We may be unable to reply individually to the points you raise as part of your reply.</p> <p>We will aim to publish a summary of responses to the consultation within 90 days of consultation closing. Those who respond to the consultation will be notified when this happens.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Confidentiality of responses</b></p>	<p>We may publish all or some of the comments we receive in response to this consultation. If the DVLA receives a request from any third party for sight of such comments we may be obliged by law (for example under the Freedom of Information Act 2000) to disclose such information.</p> <p>If there are particular reasons why you would not wish your comments to be disclosed or published, please let us know. Although your wishes may not override any statutory obligations to disclose, they will be taken into account as far as possible.</p> <p>If you reply by email, the statements made above override any confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system.</p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Consultation Principles</b></p>	<p>This consultation complies with the Consultation Principles published by the Cabinet Office on 17 July 2012. This replaced the code of practice on consultations. See Annex A for further information.</p>

## **Annex A – The Consultation Principles**

The Consultation Principles are published by the Cabinet Office:

<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/consultation-principles-guidance>

A summary of the Consultation Principles, which can be viewed in full at the above link, is as follows:

- Engagement should begin early in policy development.
- The evidence base for the proposed policy should be made available at an early stage.
- The timeframe for consultation should be proportionate and realistic to allow stakeholders sufficient time for a considered response.
- The amount of time required will depend on the nature and impact of the proposal and may typically vary between two and 12 weeks.
- Information should be presented in an accessible and useful form to stakeholders with a substantial interest in the subject matter.
- The choice of the form of the consultation will depend on the issues under consideration and the available time and resources.
- Information provided should be easy to comprehend, use plain language and clarify the key issues.
- Consideration should be given to more informal ways of engaging that may be appropriate.
- The objectives of the consultation process should be clear.

If you consider that this consultation does not comply with the consultation principles or you have comments about the consultation process please contact:

Tim Ford

Consultation Co-ordinator

Corporate Affairs Directorate

DVLA

Swansea

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