



SENIOR TRAFFIC COMMISSIONER

Statutory Document No. 9

CASE MANAGEMENT

This document is issued pursuant to section 4C of the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981 (as amended). Representative organisations have been consulted in accordance with that provision.

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Senior Traffic Commissioner

GUIDANCE

1. The Senior Traffic Commissioner for Great Britain issues the following Guidance under section 4C(1) of the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981 (“1981 Act”) and by reference to section 1(2) of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act 1995 (“1995 Act”) as to the way in which the Senior Traffic Commissioner believes that traffic commissioners should interpret the law in relation to case management.

Basis of Guidance

2. This Guidance may be subject to decisions of the higher courts and to subsequent legislation. The Senior Traffic Commissioner has extracted the following principles and examples from existing legislation and case law and applies it to both operator licence and vocational driver cases. As such the Senior Traffic Commissioner has deliberately adopted the generic terms: ‘party’ or ‘parties’ and ‘hearings’.

Legislation and Case Law

3. The responsibility for taking action under the relevant legislation is vested in the individual traffic commissioner dealing with a case. That responsibility cannot properly be fettered, and the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981 and the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act 1995 both make it clear that a presiding commissioner may hold such an inquiry as he or she thinks necessary for the proper exercise of his or her functions.¹ Similarly a traffic commissioner may call applicants *for* or holders *of* a vocational entitlement to a driver conduct hearing where they can consider whether the conduct of the driver calls into question their fitness to hold or obtain a vocational entitlement².
4. Whilst there is a strong argument in favour of consistency of approach this should not be mistaken for uniformity of decisions and consistency must not be pursued at the expense of the merits of individual cases. Traffic commissioners act as a single person tribunal. They therefore exercise their discretion with regard to the principle of proportionality as enshrined in British, European and human rights law.³ The independence and impartiality of traffic commissioners is guaranteed as part of the obligations on the State.⁴
5. *“The role of any traffic commissioner is essentially a judicial one, but a public inquiry is an inquiry and a traffic commissioner has a public duty, as regulator, to inquire carefully and diligently. It is a pro-active role, although the traffic commissioner must always be careful to maintain an open mind until the conclusion of evidence and submissions, and must never assume the role of*

¹ [2011/060 Nolan Transport & Others](#): *While the strict rules of evidence do not apply before the traffic commissioner...the ‘relevance test’ for the admissibility of evidence remains important.* See also [2012/037 F & M Refrigerated Transport Ltd](#) *we accept, of course, that hearsay evidence is admissible before traffic commissioners but there are difficulties in assessing it and dangers in coming to conclusions based on it.* The Upper Tribunal indicated that weight might be placed on a contemporaneous note

² For further assistance see Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Vocational Driver Conduct

³ Human Rights Act 1998 and the legal Framework Document signed by the Minister and the Senior Traffic Commissioner, See also the Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions Introduction and the Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on the Principles of Decision Making & the Concept of Proportionality

⁴ [Al-Le Logistics Limited and Others \[2010\] EWHC 134 \(Admin\)](#) paragraph 92, [2011/060 Nolan Transport & Others](#), and [2000/065 A M Richardson trading as D J Travel Consultants v DETR](#)

prosecutor. Nevertheless, the duty of the traffic commissioner will often involve ascertaining the true facts, which means exploring and testing the evidence, and resisting so far as practicable those witnesses who attempt to pull the wool over his or her eyes".⁵ The combination of an inquisitorial function⁶ with a judicial process requires fairness and objectivity.⁷ Traffic commissioners will also be alive to the master/servant relationship existing between some of the witnesses and parties to proceedings.

6. Whilst witnesses do not give evidence to the presiding traffic commissioner under oath, they are nevertheless under an obligation to tell the truth and not to mislead the traffic commissioner in any way. The presiding traffic commissioner and clerk should ensure that there is a proper note of the oral evidence and representations. Witnesses should be aware that where there are concerns that they might not have told the truth or where they might have produced false documents, either to the Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA) or to the traffic commissioner, that the presiding commissioner will cause full enquiry to be made by DVSA and where necessary the police. In the event that the witness is found to have lied to the traffic commissioner or DVSA, or to have produced false documents, the matter will be referred to the police with a request that they be prosecuted for conspiracy to pervert the course of justice. Witnesses should note that there have been previous instances of such prosecutions and that the courts have imposed terms of imprisonment. However, the obligations go further than simply telling the truth. As the Upper Tribunal has stressed, the Office of the Traffic Commissioner cannot proactively oversee every detail of the many thousands of operator's licences which are in existence. The regulatory regime relies to a very significant degree upon the integrity and honesty of those who hold operator's licences and CPC qualifications to proactively keep the traffic commissioner informed of any change in circumstances.⁸
7. Any interlocutory decision (i.e. a decision which is ancillary to the actual final decision, but which is so closely linked to that final decision so that it cannot be considered 'procedural' or merely administrative) must also meet these requirements as it might impact on the fairness of the final disposal of a case. In reaching those ancillary decisions the traffic commissioner must also act in the interests of justice.⁹ They are therefore judicial functions.¹⁰ Like any tribunal, traffic commissioners must comply with the Article 6 right to a fair hearing in deciding issues of civil law. The jurisdiction of traffic commissioners includes granting applications, curtailment of authorisation, suspension of licences to operate, revocation of licences to operate and personal disqualification of operators and directors, as well as taking action against transport managers who do not work to the requisite standard. Traffic commissioners also consider the conduct of drivers who hold or apply for licences to drive large goods and passenger-carrying vehicles.¹¹ In considering those PSV operators who fail to operate in accordance with registered timetables traffic commissioners are

⁵ [2011/025 Asset 2 Asset Ltd](#). A similar approach was adopted in [2014/077 Leedale Ltd](#)

⁶ Witnesses are not required to swear an oath or to make a formal affirmation. Cases such as [R v Abdul Majid \[2009\] EWCA Crim 2563](#), [R v Mehrban \[2001\] EWCA Crim 2627](#), and [R v Naaem Saddiq \[2010\] EWCA Crim 1962](#) illustrate that the primary consideration is what binds the conscience of the individual.

⁷ [2012/036 Patrick O'Keefe trading as O'Keefe Building](#)

⁸ [2014/053 & 54 Carmel Coaches Ltd, Anthony Grove Hazell & Michael James Hazell](#)

⁹ [Al-Le Logistics Limited and Others \[2010\] EWHC 134 \(Admin\)](#) paragraph 100 and by way of example: [2012/014 ATEC Scaffolding \(Preston\) Ltd](#)

¹⁰ [2011/028 Heart of Wales Bus & Coach Co Ltd & Clayton Francis Jones](#)

¹¹ See Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Vocational Driver Conduct

required to follow a correct judicial approach¹² which might also result in the imposition of financial penalties and/or the restriction of current and/or future registrations.

8. The jurisdiction is often described as a practical one. The legislation is concerned with road safety and fair competition¹³ but traffic commissioners must have regard to the decisions of the higher courts and the principle of proportionality in deciding what is commensurate with the circumstances of each individual case.¹⁴ Where there has been non-compliance, traffic commissioners must have regard to the potential impact on an operator and/or driver of any regulatory action and make an assessment of the operator and/or driver as at the date of the decision. Case management plays an important part in ensuring the traffic commissioner has all the necessary evidence available to inform that final decision.¹⁵
9. Case management may, for instance, involve providing time to consider and prepare evidence, to seek representation and providing an interpreter when required.¹⁶ Traffic commissioners should be careful about the language used in communicating case management decisions and must explain the use of technical terms such as ‘adjourn’ or ‘reconvene’.¹⁷ Any request to record the hearing or send live text based communications during the hearing must be referred to the presiding traffic commissioner for directions to be issued on a case by case basis. Where a traffic commissioner has reserved their decision any further evidence or documentation received thereafter must be referred to the traffic commissioner who will then decide if it is necessary to reconvene the public inquiry and/or driver conduct hearing.
10. There is no requirement on traffic commissioners to engage with applicants, operators or drivers prior to or during proceedings except within the protections allowed at a public inquiry or a driver conduct hearing. Traffic commissioners should be wary of being drawn into any process of consultation prior to taking statutory action, in view of their wider duty to the public at large and to the fairness of proceedings.

Interim Licences and Variations

11. Authority to operate on an interim basis is only available to applicants for a goods vehicle operator’s licence and is at the discretion of the traffic commissioner.

¹² [2009/030 Pilkington Accrington Ltd trading as King Travel](#)

¹³ By way of example, in [Cleansing Service Group Ltd v VOSA \[2006\] EWHC 662](#), Sullivan J adopted the ordinary and natural meaning in construing provisions relating to the exceptions. He observed that as the regulation was required to protect public safety Parliament would have decided the limits placed upon the exceptions with some care

¹⁴ [2002/217 Bryan Haulage \(No 2\)](#), [Muck It Limited and Others v Secretary of State for Transport \[2005\] EWCA Civ 1124](#) and [Crompton trading as David Crompton Haulage v Department for Transport North West Area \[2003\] EWCA Civ 64](#), [2009/225 Priority Freight Limited and Paul Williams](#) and Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on the Principles of Decision Making

¹⁵ In the absence of full argument and without reference to the existing body of case law, the decision in [2022/040 RAM Logistics Ltd](#) appears to be largely dependent on its facts. However, it was conceded that as a specialist regulator, a traffic commissioner is qualified to comment on the adequacy of records. Perceived defects should be highlighted so that a party has opportunity to address these grounds in submissions and evidence. That of course relies on operators and their representatives to ensure that the documents are provided well in advance of the hearing. There is no basis to attempt to argue that a traffic commissioner is not permitted to request the production of documentation without there being an evidential basis

¹⁶ Including the Welsh Language Act 1993, [2015/040 Tacsí Gwynedd Ltd](#)

¹⁷ [2006/111 Kent Coach Travel Ltd](#)

- 12.** An operator's licence is defined under Section 58 of the 1995 Act¹⁸ as having the meaning given in Section 2(1) of the Act - a licence which authorises the use of a goods vehicle on a public road for the carriage of goods:-
- for hire or reward; or
 - for or in connection with any trade or business carried on by the operator.¹⁹
- 13.** Section 24(2) states that an interim licence is an operator's licence. A traffic commissioner therefore needs prima facie to be satisfied that the requirements of effective and stable establishment, professional competence, financial standing²⁰ and good repute have been considered before interim authority is issued for a standard licence. As a matter of consistency this has been interpreted to include fitness and the availability of finance for a restricted licence.
- 14.** A traffic commissioner may issue an interim licence/variation in the same terms as those applied for or in different terms in respect of:
- the number of vehicles authorised;
 - different motor vehicles specified;
 - weight restrictions on the vehicle(s) and/or trailer(s);
 - that no trailers are authorised to be used;
 - that all vehicle to be used must be specified;
 - the maximum number of vehicles and/or trailers whose relevant weight exceeds a specified weight;
 - in respect of licences for heavy goods vehicles, fewer places are specified as operating centres;
 - in respect of licences for heavy goods vehicles, conditions which restrict the use of an operating centre.
- 15.** Only the traffic commissioner may take account of any undertakings given when reaching a decision on interim authority. However, where further evidence is required to support a finding, the traffic commissioner, or staff acting on their behalf, should consider allowing a time limited interim to that effect.²¹ Section 24(6) allows an applicant to request an interim licence with a specified termination. Section 25(4) mirrors that provision in respect of variation applications. An interim licence might be appropriate for cases where time is required²² to demonstrate:
- attendance at training to demonstrate fitness to ensure compliance with operator licence requirements;
 - the availability of finance, and time is required to produce evidence to complete an averaging exercise²³;
 - that the nominated CPC holder is due to undertake continuous professional development²⁴;

¹⁸ Regulation (EC) 1071/2009 and Regulation (EC) 1072/2009

¹⁹ See Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Impounding

²⁰ 1984/V2 Michael John Mortimer

²¹ See Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Delegations

²² [2011/050 A Tucker & Son Ltd](#). An applicant for an interim operator's licences can specify an earlier termination date by written request to the traffic commissioner under Section 24(6). For interim variations an applicant is able to specify an earlier termination date by written request to the traffic commissioner under Section 25(4)

²³ See Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Finance

²⁴ See Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Transport Managers

- in respect of licences for heavy goods vehicles, to allow additional time to respond to or lodge opposition to a proposed Operating Centre.
- 16.** Where there is prima facie evidence that the licence requirements appear to be met, a traffic commissioner might consider granting a time limited interim to allow the applicant time to obtain evidence which confirms that substantive grant is required, for instance:
- where evidence of appropriate training is required for the requirements of fitness or to exercise effective and continuous management, an initial period of 3 months depending on whether the applicant has already identified and booked a course;
 - where an applicant has only provided an opening balance or closing balance which demonstrates access to sufficient funds, a period of 4 months in order to allow time for funds to clear in accounts and original bank statements to be provided;
 - in respect of licences for heavy goods vehicles, where additional time is required to respond to or lodge an opposition to a proposed operating centre a period of 6 months.
- 17.** When a time limited interim is granted, the applicant is responsible for ensuring that they comply with the terms of grant prior to the expiry of any time periods. An applicant should therefore actively manage any dates and request an extension, when appropriate, whilst remembering that the grant and any extension is always at the discretion of the traffic commissioner. If the period of time on the interim expires before substantive grant, then the interim will expire, and the applicant will then no longer have authority to operate under the interim licence.
- 18.** A full licence can have no effect before the interim licence terminates. Sections 24(8) and 25(6) provide that a decision to refuse an interim licence/variation cannot be appealed. The interim licence/variation terminates when any of the following occur:
- the date on which the full licence comes into force, or the traffic commissioner takes action to revoke the interim licence under section 26 and/or 27 as appropriate;
 - the time at which the application is withdrawn;
 - the date on which the application is finally disposed, or such earlier date as is specified;
 - in the case of a time-limited interim, at the termination of the period allowed or the date on which the full licence comes into force or there is action to revoke the interim licence under section 26 and/or 27, as appropriate.
- 19.** An application is finally disposed of at the earliest date by which the application and any appeal to the Upper Tribunal arising out of the application have been determined, or any time for bringing such an appeal has expired, or the date on which the application or appeal is withdrawn.

Listing of Cases

- 20.** The listing of cases for hearing can often be complicated and will inevitably require an estimation of how long a case will require.²⁵ Other factors might also impact on listing such as the availability of a traffic commissioner and/or tribunal room. Traffic commissioners have a number of different judicially related tasks where the administration and interests of justice require an individual traffic commissioner to devote time, for instance to submissions so that new businesses can start operating or to the preparation of written decisions where parties may be anxious to learn the outcome of a hearing. Generally, whilst the interests of justice must be considered, there are no specific time requirements for the listing of cases, although impounding hearings must take place within 28 days of the receipt of the application²⁶ (subject to the power of the traffic commissioner to extend this period²⁷). In the uncommon event of a party objecting to a particular traffic commissioner hearing the case, the reasons must be put in writing and the individual traffic commissioner will respond with reasons for their determination and must be allowed opportunity to respond.²⁸
- 21.** Where there are obvious issues in common, it would clearly be unsatisfactory for the traffic commissioner(s) to come to what might be seen as inconsistent conclusions. The Upper Tribunal has indicated that it is perfectly proper to list related cases together.²⁹ This also applies where there is the possibility of conflicting evidence so that a driver's conduct hearing might be held at the same time as an operator's inquiry.³⁰ Where a traffic commissioner makes this type of listing decision, the reasons should be recorded for future reference.³¹
- 22.** The effect of concurrent criminal proceedings needs to be considered carefully by a traffic commissioner. The Court of Appeal has considered the potential impact of regulatory proceedings on the fairness of other proceedings:

“When assessing the weight of the considerations... the intrinsic importance of the disciplinary process is clearly a very significant but not an overriding factor; it will also be necessary to evaluate the degree of public importance of the case under consideration, the seriousness of the allegation of professional incompetence and/or professional misconduct, and the urgency of their resolution in the disciplinary context. Thus, for example, allegations of dishonesty or other professional malpractice which, if proved, would be likely to lead to the striking off of a member, must clearly weigh

²⁵ [2016/050 Lorraine Baldwin, Andrew Skelton and Wayne Baldwin](#)

²⁶ Regulation 11 of the Goods Vehicles (Enforcement Powers) Regulations 2001 as amended by the Goods Vehicles (Enforcement Powers) (Amendment) Regulations 2009, and regulation 12 of the Public Service Vehicle (Enforcement Powers) Regulations 2009.

²⁷ Regulation 23 of the Goods Vehicles (Enforcement Powers) Regulations 2001 as amended, and regulation 25 of the Public Service Vehicles (Enforcement Powers) Regulations 2009.

²⁸ For guidance see the Upper Tribunal approach in [2014/072 Ian Russel Nicholas trading as Wigan Container Services](#) and [2023/602 & 2023/623 Central Haulage Ltd & Others](#). An allegation of bias is a serious matter and should not be made lightly. In this case the Tribunal noted with approval the decision of the traffic commissioner to refer the case herself. The maker of any such allegation needs to prove more than that the traffic commissioner came to the wrong conclusion and must specifically show that the traffic commissioner was prejudiced and/or predisposed to find against the party irrespective of the evidence. For that reason no complaint can be considered until after the final appeal.

²⁹ [2001/041 Tate Fuel Oils Ltd, 2009/240 A M Kydd trading as Sandy Kydd Road Transport, 2010/030-32 Canalside UK Ltd & Lewis Robly Horn trading as LR Horn](#), Stay Decision Jarson Ltd trading as Rob Jones Tractor Hire

³⁰ [2001/068 Dukes Transport \(Craigavon\) Ltd](#), and [2002/025 H J Lea Oakes Ltd](#)

³¹ [2012/014 ATEC Scaffolding \(Preston\) Ltd](#)

*heavily or perhaps even overwhelmingly on the institute's side of the scale".*³²

23. Traffic commissioners, however, must also consider road safety, which lies at the heart of the legislation. There may be an urgent public interest in resolving the issues before criminal proceedings.³³ Traffic commissioners can face a difficult decision in which advocates are expected to assist the tribunal. If the traffic commissioner decides to proceed in advance of criminal proceedings steps should be taken to protect the fairness of those proceedings. If the traffic commissioner decides to wait it may, in the end, prove impossible to deal with other aspects of the hearing fairly, in advance of the evidence, which is to be given at the criminal trial. The inevitable consequence is delay, which carries with it other issues such as witness memory and the need for a more up to date assessment of compliance.
24. Where a traffic commissioner concludes that a hearing must await the outcome of criminal proceedings it is important that steps are taken to keep the delay to a minimum. It is acceptable for a traffic commissioner to inform the Crown Prosecution Service or Procurator Fiscal, the relevant courts pending a regulatory hearing and ask for regular information about the progress of the criminal proceedings. Where the traffic commissioner decides that a hearing must await the conclusion of the criminal case steps should be taken to ensure that the traffic commissioner's hearing is resumed as soon as possible thereafter.³⁴
25. In deciding where to hold a hearing traffic commissioners will wish to ensure that the objects of the legislation are met so that relevant information might be taken into account and the fairness of proceedings ensured (allowing a party the opportunity to test the evidence). There may be other factors, including Welsh language compliance³⁵ which also needs to be taken into account.³⁶ In some cases³⁷ evidence might be heard in closed session (i.e. in private) so that regulatory action is not delayed but the risk of prejudice to future proceedings is minimised.

Adjournments

26. *"The decision whether to grant an adjournment does not depend upon a mechanical exercise of comparing previous delays in other cases with the delay in the instant application. It is not possible or desirable to identify hard and fast rules as to when an adjournment should or should not be granted. The guiding principle must be that (traffic commissioners) should fully examine the circumstances leading to applications for delay, the reasons for those applications and the consequences to (the parties). Ultimately, they must decide*

³² R v. Institute of Chartered Accountants in England & Wales and Others, ex parte Brindle and Others (1994 BCC 297) at 310

³³ [2004/255 Martin Oliver](#)

³⁴ [2006/149 A & C Nowell Ltd](#), [2010/049 Aspey Trucks Ltd](#)

³⁵ One of the key principles of the Welsh Language Act 1993 and the Welsh Language (Measure) 2011 is that in the administration of justice in Wales, the English and Welsh languages should be treated on the basis of equality.

³⁶ [2001/056 Surrey County Council v Paul Williams trading as Garden Materials Landscaping](#) regarding a traffic commissioner's inspection of the relevant site.

³⁷ Regulation 7 of the Public Service Vehicles (Traffic Commissioners: Publication and Inquiries) Regulations 1986, only allows traffic commissioners to restrict attendance so far as the inquiry relates to the financial position, whereas the discretion is wider in goods cases.

*what is fair in the light of all those circumstances. The court will only interfere with the exercise of ...discretion ... in cases where it is plain that a refusal will cause substantial unfairness to one of the parties”.*³⁸

- 27.** The traffic commissioner is entitled to expect that the party called to the hearing will submit any application for an adjournment. The traffic commissioner is unlikely to consider an application from another person who claims to have the requisite authority to speak on its behalf³⁹ unless the party called to the hearing has previously sought permission from the traffic commissioner.⁴⁰ In considering a request for an adjournment, the purpose of the adjournment should be clear as the traffic commissioner will properly be concerned with the potential impact on road safety.⁴¹ An adjournment may have to be balanced against the age of the case but the pressure to get a case to a hearing can lead to a far greater delay than a limited adjournment if justice cannot be done. Traffic commissioners have been urged to think very carefully when asked to adjourn stale cases.⁴² There may be occasions when the adjournment is simply a device to postpone the impact of a decision and the correct course may be to refuse. There may also be other cases where a relatively short adjournment of a hearing will avoid a real risk of a much greater delay if it later appears either during the hearing or on appeal that the interests of justice and fairness require an adjournment.⁴³
- 28.** A traffic commissioner is entitled to take into account the alleged conduct of the operator and/or driver in relation to any DVSA or police investigations.⁴⁴ Any tribunal will be concerned so as to ensure fairness, for example, where an interpreter is required⁴⁵ or so that all the relevant documentation is available to the parties so that they can properly answer all matters that may be addressed to it/them in respect of the possible conduct. The situation might well change in the course of a hearing and there is therefore a need to be aware of the requirement to keep a request for an adjournment under constant review.⁴⁶
- 29.** There is a considerable public interest in hearings taking place on the date set and so hearings should not be adjourned unless there is a good and compelling reason to do so. In considering the competing interests of the parties, traffic commissioners should examine the likely consequences of the proposed adjournment and its likely length. The reason that the adjournment is required should be examined and if it arises through the fault of the party seeking the adjournment, that is a factor against granting the adjournment, carrying weight in accordance with the gravity of the fault. Parties who wait until the last moment to apply for an adjournment will justifiably arouse suspicion as to their motives.⁴⁷ The reason for the adjournment should also relate to the party called to the hearing and not a third party.⁴⁸ The administration of an effective and efficient

³⁸ Per Lord Bingham in [R v Hereford Magistrates \[1998\] QB 110](#)

³⁹ [2020/021 EBF International Ltd](#)

⁴⁰ See below paragraphs on Representation

⁴¹ As per the Upper Tribunal in the stay decision in Patrick O’Keefe trading as O’Keefe Building

⁴² [2008/413 Al-Le Logistics Ltd and Others](#), for an example see [2013/066 VST Building & Maintenance Ltd](#)

⁴³ [2024/1087 Hard Concrete Ltd and Jatinder Singh Dhillon](#) – the suggestion that an adjournment might be granted to save up in order to obtain legal advice appears to be entirely limited to the facts of this case. The impact on the availability of finance was not considered.

⁴⁴ [2010/064 JWF \(UK\) Ltd](#)

⁴⁵ [2013/062 Sukhvir Kaur trading as Major Cars, 2017/002 Mohammed Akbar trading as Choudhury Transport](#)

⁴⁶ [Al-Le Logistics Limited and Others \[2010\] EWHC 134 \(Admin\)](#) paragraph 48

⁴⁷ [2013/066 VST Building & Maintenance Ltd](#)

⁴⁸ [NT/2014/079 Melvin Murray trading as Melvin Murray Transport v DOENI](#)

system will bring about great benefits to users of the traffic commissioners' tribunals.⁴⁹

- 30.** Requests for adjournments on medical grounds should be supported by medical evidence which states if and why a party cannot attend a hearing.⁵⁰ A court is not automatically bound by a medical certificate and may exercise its discretion to disregard a certificate⁵¹, which it finds unsatisfactory and in particular where:
- the certificate indicates that the party is unfit to work⁵² (rather than to attend the hearing);
 - the nature of the ailment (e.g. a broken arm) does not appear to be capable of preventing attendance at a hearing;
 - the party is certified as suffering from stress/anxiety/depression and there is no indication of the party recovering within a realistic timetable⁵³.
- 31.** Any material application for an adjournment which is supported by relevant evidence requires a decision and must be referred to a traffic commissioner.⁵⁴ The decision whether to adjourn must be communicated to the party⁵⁵ but where there is a tight turnaround, or the party does not receive a decision prior to the hearing they are advised to check that the application was correctly received and confirmation as to whether it has been granted. If the traffic commissioner accepts that a party's absence from the hearing is not the fault of that party the general rule is to not proceed in absence unless there is a compelling reason to proceed.⁵⁶ If the traffic commissioner does not believe the explanation, reasons should be given.⁵⁷ Where an operator and/or driver has opportunity to engage in a professional and cooperative way but fails to do so then repeated avoidance may result in the loss of that operator licence⁵⁸ (or vocational licence).
- 32.** Section 54(4) of the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981 and schedule 4 of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Regulations 1995 set out the provisions relating to the giving of notice of a public inquiry. The date, time and place may be varied, but, if so, the full notice period may have to be recalculated. An irregularity, however, in the notice can be cured and the hearing can proceed if the traffic commissioner is satisfied that no injustice or inconvenience will be caused.⁵⁹ Where the operator has been properly alerted to the hearing date and fails to attend, in the absence of medical evidence⁶⁰ or a good reason, then the traffic commissioner is entitled to proceed in absence.⁶¹ There are no legislative provisions regarding the period of notice that must be given to a vocational

⁴⁹ [Aravinthan Visvaratnam v Brent Magistrates' Court \[2009\] EWHC 3017 \(Admin\)](#)

⁵⁰ [2012/013 Russet Red Ltd](#), [2010/024 Hedley Simcock](#), Stay Decision in 2013/010 Barrie Mark Boyes, 2015/029 Daniel Stephen Price trading as Danny Price Haulage, 2022/572 Walsall Builders and Timber Merchants Ltd and Kamran Aftab

⁵¹ *R v Ealing Magistrates' Court (ex parte Burgess)* (2001) 165 J.P 82

⁵² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/fit-note-guidance-for-employers-and-line-managers>

⁵³ See *R v Daniel Jarvis* for an example of the approach taken by the District Judge

⁵⁴ [2000/002 Griffpack Ltd](#)

⁵⁵ [2005/110 G DEM Ltd](#)

⁵⁶ *R (on the application of M) v Burnley, Pendle and Rossendale Magistrates' Court [2009] EWHC 2874*, [2004/362 Britannia Hotels Ltd & Alexander Langsam trading as Britannia Airport Hotel](#)

⁵⁷ [2006/192 Stephen P Shirley](#)

⁵⁸ [2010/064 JWF \(UK\) Ltd](#)

⁵⁹ [2009/524 Ocean Transport Ltd](#) – a public inquiry will not be treated as adjourned for the purposes of paragraph 1(6) where the original hearing has to be rescheduled but did not commence

⁶⁰ [2011/023 Taj the Grocer Ltd](#)

⁶¹ [2010/069 John Francis Donnelly](#), [2015/077 Hurley G & B Ltd](#)

licence holder or applicant when being called to a driver conduct hearing but the traffic commissioner will wish to ensure the fairness of those proceedings.

- 33.** In line with most tribunals there is a rebuttable presumption that a hearing will proceed as listed even in the absence of parties⁶² provided that: the traffic commissioner is satisfied that the party has been given the required notice, has been served with sufficient evidence, and that there are no other factors where the interests of justice require an adjournment.

Notice

- 34.** The Office of the Traffic Commissioner produces publications which contain details of all applications during a given period.⁶³ Inspection of licence applications only can be requested under the provisions of Regulation 9 of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Regulations 1995 or regulation 4 of the Public Service Vehicles (Operators' Licences) Regulations 1995. Where full notice has not been provided it might still be possible to see the operator. At times it may be appropriate for an operator to be seen without the full notice period having expired and in cases where all parties called have waived their right to notice. Section 27 of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act 1985 and regulation 9 of the Public Service Vehicles (Operators' Licences) Regulations 1995 require notice of the grounds upon which the traffic commissioner might take action, with time to make representations.⁶⁴ The party must first have the opportunity to present a case and there is no scope for the equivalent of an interim injunction based on a one-sided view of the evidence.⁶⁵ This does not prevent a traffic commissioner from considering preliminary matters such as interim authority⁶⁶ without a full hearing. A preliminary or case management hearing can be beneficial in narrowing or crystallising the issues⁶⁷ and are seen by the Upper Tribunal as helpful and pragmatic.⁶⁸ Where a party is called to a preliminary hearing⁶⁹ to resolve a particular matter the Human Rights Act 1998 still applies.

- 35.** Driver conduct hearings are public hearings. Decisions are a matter of public record⁷⁰ and copies may be requested from the office of the relevant traffic commissioner.

Disclosure

- 36.** A traffic commissioner is required to give notice in writing of what action might be in contemplation. A notice must state the grounds on which the traffic commissioner is considering that action and invite the party to make

⁶² [2009/524 Ocean Transport Ltd](#) approved the decision of the traffic commissioner who had waited for nearly an hour before proceeding with a public inquiry when the operator had not been in contact with the Office of the Traffic Commissioner at all, [2018/033 A Bro's Halal Meat Ltd](#)

⁶³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/traffic-commissioner-applications-and-decisions>

⁶⁴ [2019/004 Thomas Malcolm](#) – there will be no breach of natural justice when the party is given a reasonable opportunity to make representations and they chose not to take it up

⁶⁵ [2006/487 D & H Travel Ltd](#)

⁶⁶ Only available under section 24 Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act 1985

⁶⁷ [2003/300 Andrews \(Sheffield\) Ltd](#)

⁶⁸ 2020/064 Manzoor Hussain Shah

⁶⁹ It was previously custom to refer to these hearings as 'In Chambers' but because of the connotations from other jurisdictions that these hearings are not in public that term is no longer to be used.

⁷⁰ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/regulatory-decisions-made-about-the-conduct-of-professional-drivers>

representations.⁷¹ The party should know the case it has to meet but there is no obligation to set all of this out in the call-up letter, it can equally be communicated through disclosure of reports.⁷² *“It would be impracticable for a traffic commissioner to be expected to disclose everything which that commissioner has ever seen. The traffic commissioner’s staff should identify the evidence which is to be considered at the hearing”* to ensure that the party is given proper notice so that the party can prepare for the hearing.⁷³ Where it emerges that the evidence has not been disclosed the traffic commissioner should order an adjournment to allow time for preparation.⁷⁴ This may impact on the conduct of hearings where a party chooses not to attend.⁷⁵ The length of the adjournment will depend on the particular case. The deliberate tactic of waiting to see what evidence the traffic commissioner has before making admissions or representations has been deprecated and may impact on repute.⁷⁶ Where material evidence comes to light following the conclusion of a hearing and is relevant to the decision making process, the potentially impacted party should be given an opportunity to comment.⁷⁷ That might be in written submissions or at a reconvened hearing⁷⁸, depending on the evidence itself.

37. Call-up letters are not to be viewed as pleadings. The essential requirement is one of fairness but there should be no doubt as to the issues being raised. Some matters are so obviously relevant that they can be included without further justification; others are so obviously irrelevant that they must be excluded. In between there are two categories that require more care:

- 1) material the relevance of which only becomes apparent when some explanation is given;
- 2) material where a decision on whether or not it is relevant requires further investigation in the course of the hearing.

A call-up letter may have to be drafted with these distinctions in mind.⁷⁹

38. *“In a fluid jurisdiction such as this, where operators continue to operate after the preparation of initial evidence and a call-up letter, it is entirely appropriate that there be scope for raising additional matters, subject to ensuring that an operator has proper notice”*.⁸⁰ Where new issues emerge during the hearing that have not been raised in the call-up letter this is not fatal to the fairness of the proceedings as long as the relevant party is given time to consider those issues and any new material. It may not be necessary to adjourn to another date.⁸¹ The position is essentially one of fairness and the Upper Tribunal has held that there is no unfairness in circumstances where it is abundantly clear to the parties what the issues are in the case, despite any omission in the call-up letter.⁸² Once a traffic commissioner has received answers which suggest a relevant line of enquiry then it is legitimate for the traffic commissioner to pursue the issue because it raises

⁷¹ [2001/072 Alan R Brooks](#)

⁷² [2010/025 Skip It \(Kent\) Ltd and Others](#)

⁷³ [2001/039 BKG Transport Ltd](#), [2001/072 Alan R Brooks](#), [2017/038 J & K Environmental Ltd and Liliana Manole](#)

⁷⁴ [2000/005 Marilyn Williams trading as Cled Williams Coaches](#), [2005/357 John Bayne & Sons Ltd](#)

⁷⁵ [2011/056 Tubular Solutions UK Ltd](#)

⁷⁶ [2006/313 David Lloyd](#), see Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Good Repute and Fitness

⁷⁷ [2021/029 Zeeshan Aurangzeb](#)

⁷⁸ [2021/045 West Midlands Machinery Services Ltd](#)

⁷⁹ [2007/104 S Lloyd trading as London Skips](#)

⁸⁰ [2011/359 Paul Coleman trading as Coach UK Travel](#)

⁸¹ [2001/072 Alan R Brooks](#), [2009/516 Farooq Ahmed & Haroon Ahmed](#)

⁸² [2016/013 SNE Hire & Sale Ltd](#)

the question of whether the traffic commissioner should have jurisdiction over the party in the future. The traffic commissioner will consider whether there needs to be a full adjournment to allow time to consider the new material and fresh notification sent to clarify which matters are at issue.⁸³

39. In line with the useful guidance from the Senior President of Tribunals in May 2013, there is no obligation on the traffic commissioner to provide a transcript of the audio recording of a tribunal hearing: “*where a recording of a hearing has been made and a copy is requested, it is for the judge to decide whether the reasons for the request are sufficient to justify its release and to ensure that the restrictions on its use are understood*”.⁸⁴ A party can apply for a copy of the transcript at their own expense but this may be subject to redaction of any sensitive material.⁸⁵

Representation

40. The traffic commissioner is entitled to expect that the operator, applicant and/or driver will attend a hearing. Where a company or other corporate body is called to a hearing a director is expected to attend. If the traffic commissioner cannot be satisfied that the person before them has the requisite authority to speak on its behalf and to make binding undertakings, then the traffic commissioner is entitled to ask for authority to be produced⁸⁶ or to find that the company is not present.⁸⁷ The company or other corporate body should therefore seek permission from the traffic commissioner to substitute a director before any hearing.
41. As indicated above, a traffic commissioner has a wide discretion as to the manner in which s/he conducts a hearing. Any person entitled or permitted to appear may do so on his or her own behalf⁸⁸ or can be represented by counsel (barrister) and/or a solicitor. There is no provision for free representation before a traffic commissioner’s tribunal. If a party wishes to be represented, then that it is a matter for the party. There are no active costs provisions in relation to public inquiries or driver conduct hearings to pay for attendance or representation so those costs must be borne by the relevant party.
42. Legally qualified representatives with rights of audience⁸⁹ conferred upon them are authorised and regulated⁹⁰ to carry out reserved legal activities. Advocates are reminded of their professional duties not only to their client but also to the tribunal. It is particularly important for representatives to be alive to any potential conflict of interest. A legal representative of an employer is under a professional obligation to communicate any relevant information. If they were to attempt to also represent an employee there is a risk of a conflict of interest. If a conflict were to arise in that situation it would be difficult to envisage the representatives

⁸³ [2006/405 Transclara Ltd](#)

⁸⁴ See also for guidance the Practice Direction issued by the Lord Chief Justice dated 14th February 2014 on Access to Audio Recordings of Proceedings.

⁸⁵ Third parties can request copies of decisions via the Traffic Commissioner Information Access Team - tcfoi@otc.gov.uk

⁸⁶ Upper Tribunal stay decision in Eurofast (Europe) Ltd

⁸⁷ [2020/021 EBF International Ltd](#)

⁸⁸ [Barton v Wright Hassall LLP \[2018\] UKSC 12](#) – the Supreme Court recognised that when a party is not represented this might justify some allowances when making case management decisions and conducting hearings even if this will not necessarily justify applying a lower standard of compliance with rules and orders

⁸⁹ The exercise of a right of audience is a reserved legal activity, within the meaning of section 12 of the Legal Services Act 2007, and allows the qualified person to appear before and address a court, including a statutory inquiry within the meaning of section 16(1) of the Tribunals and Inquiries Act 1992

⁹⁰ Solicitors Regulation Authority, Bar Standards Board, Law Society of Scotland and Faculty of Advocates

being able to continue to act for either party. It is the representative's responsibility to ensure that they meet the outcomes of their regulating body's rules and guidance. Whilst operators may not be blamed for acting on legal advice⁹¹ traffic commissioners are entitled to infer that a party has received proper legal advice from a legally qualified representative.⁹²

43. Other potential representatives such as transport consultants have historically been allowed to appear before traffic commissioners. The approach of the courts has crystallised: litigants have a right to reasonable assistance, however, the person assisting⁹³ has no right of audience unless granted by the court. This type of application is considered on a case-by-case basis⁹⁴ but leave for a "McKenzie Friend" to address the court is only granted in exceptional circumstances.⁹⁵ Whilst traffic commissioners have previously allowed unqualified advocates to appear before them, this is always at the discretion of the presiding traffic commissioner. As with the courts an unqualified representative must first seek permission to appear from a traffic commissioner. The courts require McKenzie Friends to produce a curriculum vitae or other statement setting out relevant experience and confirmation that they have no interest in the case and understand the duty of confidentiality. In appropriate cases traffic commissioners may refuse to hear representatives other than from counsel or solicitors.⁹⁶ This distinction is based on the fact that unlike that of other representatives the conduct of counsel and solicitors is regulated in England and Wales by the Bar Standards Board or the Solicitors Regulation Authority and in Scotland by the Law Society of Scotland or the Faculty of Advocates, and therefore the submissions from counsel and solicitors carry more weight than those from other representatives.⁹⁷ Transport consultants and representatives who are not counsel or solicitors are nevertheless expected to display a degree of competence and openness with the tribunal⁹⁸ and if they fail in that regard it is open to the traffic commissioner to indicate that the person will not be acceptable to act as an advocate at public inquiry in the future.⁹⁹
44. The Upper Tribunal has warned against tying in the provision of a transport manager with a consultancy service.¹⁰⁰ Nor can they expect to be permitted to act as both an advocate and a witness in the same proceedings.¹⁰¹ Union representatives often appear to assist vocational drivers and traffic commissioners; whilst they may have limited experience of this type of hearing they are expected to demonstrate the same level of openness. In every case a

⁹¹ [2002/022 S Garforth trading as Ainsdale Transport](#)

⁹² [2012/036 Patrick O'Keefe trading as O'Keefe Building](#)

⁹³ Referred to as a McKenzie Friend following the case of *McKenzie v McKenzie* [1970] 3 All ER 1034

⁹⁴ [Practice Guidance \(McKenzie Friends: Civil and Family Courts\) \[2010\] 1 WLR 1881](#)

⁹⁵ [R v Conaghan & Others \[2017\] EWCA Crim 597](#)

⁹⁶ The senior judiciary has identified the risks to litigants from unregulated and uninsured individuals of varying and generally unverifiable competence who seek to carry out the equivalent of reserved activities. Recommendations have been brought forward by the judicial working group chaired by Asplin J with the purpose of protecting parties from unregulated representatives. The proposals seek to clarify the courts' ability to refuse unqualified individuals to act as McKenzie friends. The proposals are similar to existing traffic commissioner powers to consider a right of audience on a case-by-case basis and specifically refer to poor quality assistance and allow a bar to the individual from acting in this capacity in future.

⁹⁷ [2005/385 K Grant](#), see also [2013/040 Southwaterstreet Ltd trading as S W Transport and Thomas McKinney](#)

⁹⁸ [2006/252 Alec Hayden trading as Trans Consult](#), [2014/063 Pilkington Asbestos Services Ltd & Others](#)

⁹⁹ [2006/252 Alec Hayden trading as Trans Consult](#)

¹⁰⁰ [2012/013 Russet Red Ltd](#), see also [2014/046 Marshland Logistics Ltd & John McGuinness](#) on the quality of audits

¹⁰¹ [2010/001 Denise & Peter Walsh trading as Walsh Skip Hire](#)

representative is expected to clearly identify whether they are legally qualified and to correct any possible misapprehension.¹⁰²

45. Paragraph 3(5) of Schedule 4 of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Regulations 1995 gives the traffic commissioner discretion to allow any person to appear at a hearing and if s/he does so, that person may be permitted to be represented by counsel or solicitor, including DVSA. That representative may participate and make submissions to the degree permitted by the presiding traffic commissioner and that kind of assistance should generally be encouraged.¹⁰³ The provisions relating to PSV licences are less specific but general comments from the then Transport Tribunal in respect of hearings make it clear that representation on behalf of DVSA has the effect of making the traffic commissioner and indeed the Upper Tribunal better able to understand the issues and that assistance of this sort is generally to be encouraged. More recent case law suggests that DVSA may take an active role, but this does not preclude the traffic commissioner from acting as ‘devil’s advocate’ and even where DVSA is represented, the inquiry remains an inquiry with a duty on the traffic commissioner to inquire.¹⁰⁴ The extent to which assistance is required is a matter for the traffic commissioner in the individual case¹⁰⁵, not another party. Traffic commissioners have successfully adopted a practice in some cases where the advocate representing DVSA suggests areas or topics, which might be put to an operator’s witness. There is a risk that this might become too artificial and in some cases the traffic commissioner has allowed direct cross-examination, similar to other inquisitorial processes.¹⁰⁶ It is for the traffic commissioner to decide what is most appropriate, in the interests of justice.
46. In the case of any representative, where they cease to act for an operator, applicant and/or driver during the course of proceedings, they should notify the relevant Office of the Traffic Commissioner immediately. Failure to do so may result in unnecessary adjournments where a party has not been informed of a hearing or relevant evidence. A failure to inform the traffic commissioner is not only discourteous but may result in legal representatives being reported to their professional body or a direction that the particular transport consultant may no longer act in that or all traffic areas. Similarly where representatives no longer act they are expected to pass any papers served on behalf of the traffic commissioner to their former client as soon as is reasonably practicable.
47. The Upper Tribunal has indicated its view about the late service of documents by parties to proceedings: bundles must be *served sufficiently far in advance of a public inquiry to enable them to be considered and assessed*.¹⁰⁷ The Upper Tribunal is clear that simply leaving a bundle of documents to the traffic commissioner is not acceptable; they should be scheduled or indexed. The Upper Tribunal went as far as to describe it as the advocate’s *duty* to introduce them properly and any *which may contradict what a witness is saying must be put to the witness*. The service of documents is a matter of professional conduct. The call-up letter normally requests documents to be served in advance of the hearing

¹⁰² There are various criminal offences covering impersonation of a solicitor, attempts to carry out a reserved legal activity when not entitled and willfully pretending to be a person with a right of audience.

¹⁰³ [2001/049 Norbert Dentressangle UK Ltd](#)

¹⁰⁴ [2011/025 Asset 2 Asset Ltd](#)

¹⁰⁵ [2001/068 Dukes Transport \(Graigavon\) Ltd](#)

¹⁰⁶ Interested persons may cross examine witnesses during an inquest.

¹⁰⁷ [2011/060 Nolan Transport & Others](#) paragraphs 101-102

date and, having given notice, if documents are not produced the traffic commissioner may proceed to make a direction.¹⁰⁸

48. In deciding on an application for an adjournment based on an advocate's unavailability the practice of the higher courts is that "counsel's convenience" will rarely be the sole basis for granting an adjournment. The above public interest must be balanced against a party's right to representation by an advocate of choice. The interests of justice may be equally served by the instruction of one of the number of alternative advocates who appear before a traffic commissioner.
49. The majority of hearings before traffic commissioners are inquisitorial in nature with parties present in order to assist a traffic commissioner in reaching a determination.¹⁰⁹ Impounding hearings, however, are adversarial and therefore both parties are likely to be represented.

*Location of Public Inquiries and Driver Conduct Hearings*¹¹⁰

50. One of the great strengths of the traffic commissioner system is the "intimate knowledge of their areas".¹¹¹ Section 54 of the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981 allows a traffic commissioner to hold a hearing at any place that the traffic commissioner considers convenient. Paragraph 1(2) of Schedule 4 of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Regulations 1995 allows discretion for the traffic commissioner to vary the location of a hearing. Whilst there may be a public interest argument for local justice there are few other formal considerations beyond the attendance of witnesses.¹¹² In environmental public inquiry cases it will usually be necessary for the traffic commissioner to conduct a site visit of the actual premises in question, which may also influence the choice of location.¹¹³
51. The legislation is silent on the location of driver conduct hearings; whilst on most occasions it will be appropriate to call the vocational licence holder or applicant to the relevant Traffic Area Office, there will be cases where it may be appropriate to convene the hearing elsewhere, for instance where there are a number of cases where the drivers and applicants live in the same locality. Alternatively, traffic commissioners may decide to hold hearings virtually where a fair hearing can be achieved. That decision remains a matter for the presiding traffic commissioner who will balance the cost of travel and venue against the interests of justice, which include the need to ensure a fair hearing.

Attendance of Witnesses and Hearsay

52. As suggested above, the traffic commissioner has a wide discretion as to the witnesses and evidence which he or she may call. The Upper Tribunal has consistently stressed the advantage for traffic commissioners in seeing and

¹⁰⁸ [2012/005 A N D Haulage Ltd](#), The Upper Tribunal, whilst urging caution, did not criticise a decision to suspend a licence pending receipt of financial evidence where an operator might be *dragging his or her feet* or there are real concerns as to road safety. Section 54(5) of the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981 as prescribed in the Public Service Vehicles (Traffic Commissioners: Publication and Inquiries) Regulations 1986 allows traffic commissioners to make a costs order, on notice of up to £125 in respect of a party who is found to have been frivolous, vexatious, improper or unreasonable in their conduct at an inquiry.

¹⁰⁹ [NT/2021/523 NI Truck Rentals Ltd](#), See Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Principles of Decision Making

¹¹⁰ See Annex 3 on Virtual and Hybrid Hearings

¹¹¹ [2010/067 Pemberton Transport Ltd & Lynne Walker](#)

¹¹² [2004/364 Pallas Transport Ltd](#)

¹¹³ [2001/056 Surrey County Council v Paul Williams trading as Garden Materials Landscaping](#)

hearing from witnesses¹¹⁴ but subject to the above Statutory Guidance on disclosure, a traffic commissioner is entitled to take hearsay evidence into account.¹¹⁵ The Upper Tribunal recognises that the steps, which a traffic commissioner can expect a party to take, must be proportionate to the importance of the point at issue. Ideally the person should be called to give evidence, or, at the very least should have made a statement, exhibiting for instance any file note that he or she made at the time.¹¹⁶ As with other courts and tribunals where physical attendance is increasingly avoided, traffic commissioners will need to exercise their professional judgement and skills.

- 53.** In preparing a case for hearing staff may look at the response to any investigation to determine whether, for instance, a particular DVSA examiner is in fact required. Traffic commissioners will be aware of the pitfalls of hearsay evidence and in particular from unreported conversations.¹¹⁷ Hearsay evidence can be difficult to assess as the traffic commissioner cannot see and judge the demeanour of the person giving the primary account. It may also be difficult to clarify matters or to seek further information. The non-attendance of a witness may reduce the weight which can be attached to the evidence but does not render it inadmissible. Where hearsay evidence is offered there should be ‘sensible steps’ to ensure that it presents a full, fair and reliable picture. Where a witness is called the parties should be permitted to put relevant questions to that witness.¹¹⁸
- 54.** If a serious point of conflict arises it is incumbent on the party to raise it so that the traffic commissioner can then decide whether to adjourn to enable the witness to attend.¹¹⁹ The party must be able to show real prejudice if the witness does not attend and it may be that the traffic commissioner chooses to proceed on the basis of edited evidence which is largely or wholly accepted.¹²⁰ The traffic commissioner should be alive to the significance of evidence and may proactively decide to adjourn a case to secure the attendance of a witness (such as a DVSA examiner), even where that evidence is agreed, where the interests of justice require it.¹²¹ Where additional material comes to light after the hearing, it is likely that the presiding commissioner will either reconvene the hearing or give the opportunity to comment in writing before reaching a decision.¹²²

Hearings ‘In Private’ or ‘Closed Session’

- 55.** Paragraph 2(2) of Schedule 4 of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Regulations 1995 and the general discretions referred to above give a traffic commissioner power to exclude certain persons from proceedings. Hearings or parts of hearings where the public and others are excluded used to be referred to as ‘in camera’. The courts in general have moved away from using Latin terms and traffic commissioners now refer to them as ‘in private’ or a ‘closed session’.

¹¹⁴ NT/2017/042 Mark Lyons v Driver & Vehicle Agency and Department for Infrastructure, [2013/066 VST Building & Maintenance Ltd](#)

¹¹⁵ [2014/073 Skyway Travel \(UK\) Ltd](#), [Fazal Karim Ali](#), [Farmida Akhtar](#), [2017/038 J & K Environmental Services Limited & Liliana Manole](#)

¹¹⁶ [2012/037 F & M Refrigerated Transport Ltd](#)

¹¹⁷ [NT/2017/016 Damien Toner](#)

¹¹⁸ [2014/043 Lee Mayfield trading as LDF Recycling](#)

¹¹⁹ [2001/053 Marilyn Williams trading as Cled Williams Coaches](#)

¹²⁰ [2003/147 W C Hockin \(Transport\) Ltd](#)

¹²¹ [2010/025 Skip It \(Kent\) Ltd and Others](#)

¹²² [2013/022 David James Root trading as Orange Coach Travel](#), see also [2013/040 Southwaterstreet Ltd trading as S W Transport and Thomas McKinney](#), which makes clear the obligations on the party to draw relevant matters to the attention of the presiding commissioner.

Any hearing will usually be open to the public unless the case involves evidence where the traffic commissioner is of the opinion that the interests of justice demand that all or part of the proceedings should be heard in private such as financial and/or commercially sensitive information. In addition, legislation requires traffic commissioners to process personal data (within the meaning of the Data Protection Act 2018). The processing¹²³ of personal data¹²⁴ should be only what is required for the lawful exercise of the traffic commissioner's functions. Regulation 7 of the Public Service Vehicles (Traffic Commissioners: Publication and Inquiries) Regulations 1986 only allows traffic commissioners to restrict attendance at a PSV inquiry when considering the financial position of any person.

Stay of Decisions

- 56.** Traffic commissioners have discretion to direct that certain decisions, usually relating to suspension or revocation of an operator's licence, shall not take effect until an appeal is lodged and dealt with by the Upper Tribunal (previously the Transport Tribunal).¹²⁵ The relevant provisions are to be found at section 29 of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act 1995 and section 50 of the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981 (as substituted by section 31 of the Transport Act 1985). Commissioners should be careful to note that Section 50(7) of the 1981 Act enables a traffic commissioner to withdraw a stay at any time. However, commissioners should carefully consider the implications of such a direction. There is no similar provision in the 1995 Act.
- 57.** The Transport Tribunal indicated that any application for a stay, which is supported by new material that was not before the presiding traffic commissioner at the time of a public inquiry, should only be considered if it could not have been obtained, with reasonable diligence, for use at the public inquiry.¹²⁶ The previous approach risked the impression of an unfettered right of appeal but, where an appeal is without merit and therefore bound to fail, the Upper Tribunal has upheld a decision to refuse a stay on the basis that allowing an operator to continue to operate pending the hearing *would mislead other operators into thinking that responding to reasonable requests and providing evidence of finance is not considered to be particularly important*.¹²⁷ The Upper Tribunal has gone on to say that: *the prospects of a successful appeal are an important factor in considering whether or not to grant a stay. The reason is that if the prospects of success appear to be good the refusal of a stay may mean that the appellant is put out of business before the merits of the appeal can be tested. On the other hand if the prospects of success are poor the grant of a stay may simply enable an operator to postpone the inevitable, in circumstances where public safety and/or fair competition are put at risk*.¹²⁸ If it is clear that no grounds have been advanced which might lead to the conclusion that the traffic commissioner was plainly wrong

¹²³ "Processing" is defined, under Article 4 of the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679, as including "collection, recording, organisation, structuring, storage, adaptation or alteration, retrieval, consultation, use, disclosure by transmission, dissemination or otherwise making available, alignment or combination, restriction, erasure or destruction".

¹²⁴ "Personal data" is defined under the General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 as "any information relating to an identified or identifiable natural person ...; an identifiable natural person is one who can be identified, directly or indirectly, in particular by reference to an identifier ... or to one or more factors specific to the ... identity of that natural person".

¹²⁵ See Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Appeals

¹²⁶ [2002/040 Thames Materials Ltd](#)

¹²⁷ Upper Tribunal stay decision in Tubular Solutions UK Ltd, see also John Heath trading as John Heath Transport

¹²⁸ Upper Tribunal stay decision in Truckit 24/7 Ltd

then the conclusion will be that the appeal is likely to fail. In those circumstances other factors, especially safety and fair competition, are likely to carry greater weight.¹²⁹

- 58.** Where a traffic commissioner's decision is due to come into effect very shortly after a stay has been refused, it will be appropriate for a traffic commissioner to consider whether to defer the coming into effect of his or her decision.¹³⁰ The party will need to decide whether they wish to appeal. In relevant cases, even where a stay is refused, deferred application of a decision may enable a further application to be lodged with the Upper Tribunal. Rule 20(A) of the Tribunal Procedure (Upper Tribunal) Rules 2008 as amended, states that a traffic commissioner has 7 days to supply a copy of a decision relating to a stay to the Upper Tribunal. In practice the timescale may be much shorter.
- 59.** There are no specific provisions for a stay in relation to vocational drivers. If a driver lodges a complaint in the Magistrates' or Sheriff Court by way of appeal, then any stay application must in the first instance be directed to them and not the traffic commissioner. A right of appeal is provided by section 119 of the Road Traffic Act 1988. There is no equivalent power in the Road Traffic Act 1988 to that provided for by section 29(2) of the Goods Vehicle (Licensing of Operators) Act 1995 to stay decisions pending appeal but the Magistrates' or Sheriff are given power to make "such order as it thinks fit...on any appeal" in section 119(3).¹³¹

Active Case Management

- 60.** The Upper Tribunal has made clear that the public inquiry process cannot function where a party fails to adhere to the process and timescales as determined by the traffic commissioner but substitutes his/her own timeframe for the submission of evidence and the determination of matters. *In this day and age, and especially in the essentially inquisitorial framework of the public inquiry system, there is in our view a clear duty on operators to help the traffic commissioner deal with cases fairly and justly – and to avoid delay, so far as compatible with the proper consideration of the material issues. The modern trend is to expect parties to tribunal proceedings (and, by analogy, operators) to co-operate generally. This will be especially important, and in the interests of the compliant operator, if it emerges that their operation is under scrutiny by DVSA or the traffic commissioner. A wise operator will take whatever steps are required to ensure that he takes advantage of every opportunity to submit relevant and helpful evidence before, and not after, matters come to a head, and well before a traffic commissioner sits down to make his or her final decisions.*¹³²
- 61.** There are no formal rules of procedure which govern proceedings before a traffic commissioner; consequently, there are no specific powers related to failures to comply with directions. An unfortunate practice has developed whereby parties and/or their representatives ignore the given timetable for compliance. A failure to comply with the timetable given may result in the traffic commissioner being unable to hear the case that day and, for instance, an application being put back

¹²⁹ Upper Tribunal stay decisions in Wendy Dina Kerr

¹³⁰ 2019/003 IWMS Waste Collection Dot Com Ltd – a traffic commissioner can consider whether to grant a stay even after their decision has taken effect

¹³¹ An appeal falls within the civil jurisdiction.

¹³² [2010/043 Stephen Mcvinnie trading as Knight Rider](#)

into the list for another day. However, it should not be used as a device to avoid an adverse finding. The Upper Tribunal declined to criticise a traffic commissioner for suspending a licence pending receipt of appropriate financial evidence.¹³³ The Upper Tribunal observed that this type of order might be a *“powerful spur to rapid action on the part of an operator who may, up to that point, have appeared to be dragging his or her feet. We can also see how it can provide a measure of protection to the public in cases where it appears, on paper, that there are real concerns as to road safety”*. However, the Upper Tribunal urged caution and that the power should be used sparingly and on occasions in which it is essential in order to achieve a just result. Traffic commissioners should ask:

- (i) is it necessary to compel the party to do something?
- (ii) is the threat to road safety so serious that suspension pending action on the part of the party is essential?
- (iii) is suspension to prompt the party to do something proportionate to the situation?

Alternatively, it may be appropriate to proceed to hear the case and to draw adverse inferences from the failure to comply with directions.

- 62.** In certain circumstances, during the course of a public inquiry it may be appropriate for the traffic commissioner to indicate that it is no longer necessary to consider a particular issue raised in the call-up letter, for instance the recent availability of financial evidence or the recent employment of a transport manager may incline the traffic commissioner to indicate that there is no need to be addressed on the matter. Whilst this type of indication has frequently been found to be useful in tribunals across the jurisdictions traffic commissioners are advised to exercise caution. Often the nature of a case can change as the various witnesses give evidence during the course of the inquiry and if the traffic commissioner has given such an indication too early it can then be difficult to explain to the operator that the matter is once again under consideration. That said, the Upper Tribunal has indicated that whilst maintaining a fair and objective approach it is *“far better that a traffic commissioner be open about their concerns and suspicions, rather than for the first suggestion of something contentious to appear in a written decision sometime later. Nor does a traffic commissioner have to meekly accept everything that they are told without probing and testing, and it is often necessary for the traffic commissioner to put the contrary point of view (sometimes more than once) and to highlight the evidence that undermines the assertion being put forward. This allows a witness to have a chance of responding”*.¹³⁴
- 63.** The higher courts are clear that the more serious the allegation the more cogent the evidence should be in order to base a finding. The same can be said for the structure of a hearing. Traffic commissioners should seek to minimise any potential for confusion or doubt as to what action might still be under consideration but should be careful to avoid the perception that they have already reached a conclusion.¹³⁵ An early neutral evaluation may identify the *possibility* of revocation (without prejudging the conclusion of any proceedings) and

¹³³ [2012/005 A N D Haulage Ltd](#)

¹³⁴ [2014/013 MM Telford Ltd & RMT Transport Ltd](#)

¹³⁵ In [2003/350 Al Madina Transport Ltd](#) the Transport Tribunal highlighted the difference between an indication that the traffic commissioner ‘cannot exclude the possibility’ and where the traffic commissioner is ‘minded to revoke’.

therefore the need to ensure that proceedings are properly structured. There will therefore be occasions when a traffic commissioner needs to be explicit that particular action is still very much in contemplation.¹³⁶

¹³⁶ [2016/007 W Meikle trading as MBS Transport](#)

DIRECTIONS

Basis of Directions

64. The Senior Traffic Commissioner for Great Britain issues the following Directions to traffic commissioners under section 4C(1) of the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981 (as amended) and by reference to section 1(2) of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act 1995. These Directions are addressed to the traffic commissioners in respect of the approach to be taken by staff acting on behalf of individual traffic commissioners and dictate the operation of delegated functions in relation to case management. The Upper Tribunal has held that a traffic commissioner will not be wrong in law if they follow lawful directions given by the Senior Traffic Commissioner.¹³⁷

Interim Licences / Variations

65. Authority to operate on an interim basis is only available to applicants for a goods vehicle operator's licence. There is no absolute right to operate under interim authority. The application process makes clear an interim licence/variation can only be granted where the application is complete, and all supporting documents have been supplied.
66. The exact wording of the legislation suggests a discretion and the higher courts have been reluctant to intervene to restrict this. For instance, a traffic commissioner may allow an interim licence for fewer vehicles than the total authority sought. A commentary to the preceding 1968 Act indicates that the equivalent provision was to enable grants on a temporary or trial basis and that interim licences would not normally be granted until the period for representations on environmental grounds had expired. It goes on to refer to special reasons why the applicant needs a licence earlier than the statutory timetable or where there may be unavoidable delays in processing the application. The example given is where accounts are provided as evidence of financial standing or possibly more on point where objections and/or representations have been lodged and need to be considered.
67. It therefore follows that any applicant for an interim licence needs to satisfy the traffic commissioner that they meet the requirements and provide any supporting documentation to show the need to operate is urgent and unforeseen. The applicant will also need to demonstrate that the rights of statutory objectors etc. will not be undermined by the grant of interim authority.
68. Only time limited interim licences can be granted under delegated powers and only where all mandatory requirements such as effective and stable establishment, good repute, financial standing and professional competence appear to be met. The criteria set out in Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on the Delegation of Authority¹³⁸ needs to also be satisfied which includes, but not limited to, making sure all decisions are recorded with appropriate reasons. The Statutory Guidance above provides examples of where an interim licence might be appropriate.

¹³⁷ [2023/511 Morgan J Ltd](#)

¹³⁸ Annex 2, section 2c or 2d and Annex 5

69. Where interim requests cannot be granted under current delegations the application must be referred to a traffic commissioner who may require to be satisfied as to the reasons for allowing the applicant to enter the industry early or increase authority ahead of the full application process (e.g. the award of a new contract or the need to increase vehicle/fleet size for commercial reasons and the like). Where interim authority has previously been refused by a traffic commissioner any resubmission should in the normal course be made to the same traffic commissioner and only where there has been a material difference in the application from the first submission.
70. It is a condition of the licence that traffic commissioners are informed of any material changes within 28 days. This includes any changes to the mandatory requirements for a standard licence as set out in section 13A of the 1995 Act; whilst those changes may not attract a fee it is important that the operator is given an opportunity to apply for a period of grace.¹³⁹ This may then require submission to the traffic commissioner for a decision on the time to be allowed, within the maximums allowed under section 27(3AA) of the 1995 Act.

Late Payment of Fees

71. The provision to accept a late fee is contained within section 45(5) of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act 1995 and section 52(2E) of the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981. These provisions give traffic commissioners discretion to determine that a licence does not terminate at the time when the fee is due by and not paid but continues in force if a fee is received or has been received after the due date but only on a finding that there have been exceptional circumstances. Non-receipt of the fee request, forgetting to pay by the required date or overlooking the need to pay do not amount to exceptional circumstances which would allow a traffic commissioner to accept late payment.¹⁴⁰ There is no legal requirement for a reminder to be sent.¹⁴¹ An applicant cannot ask for a late payment to be accepted on the basis that they have not received a reminder.¹⁴² Similarly, where the late payment is due to mere oversight, more is required before exceptional circumstances may properly be found.¹⁴³ The obligation is on the operator to pay the fee on time and to monitor the expiry date.¹⁴⁴
72. The Upper Tribunal has identified two considerations for traffic commissioners when deciding whether an explanation could amount to 'exceptional circumstances'.¹⁴⁵ Each case is different and will therefore turn on its own facts, if reliance is to be placed on earlier decisions it will be important to ensure that the relevant facts are sufficiently similar. In addition, the main dictionary definition of 'exceptional' is 'unusual'. The question is to first consider whether the

¹³⁹ See Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Repute & Fitness, Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Finance, Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Operating Centres Stable Establishments and Service of Documents, and Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Principles of Decision Making

¹⁴⁰ [2014/020 Seamus Joseph Patterson trading as Patterson Plant](#)

¹⁴¹ [2008/569 David Collingwood trading as Construction & Demolition Services](#), [2009/492 Clemente Fanciulli trading as P B Haulage](#)

¹⁴² [2013/017 Francis Edward Walter Cattle](#) which corrects [2013/058 & 075 Patrick Ward trading as Allshires Landscapes and Overbrook Recovery Services Ltd](#)

¹⁴³ [2001/062 T S G Smith trading as Western International](#), [2010/018 Horsebox Mobile Repair Services Ltd](#)

¹⁴⁴ [2018/010 C Ingram trading as T.I.P Skips](#)

¹⁴⁵ [2010/016 & 021 Alan Cooper trading as Alan Cooper Haulage & Jeanette Wootten trading as Woodhouse Furniture](#)

explanation provided falls within this definition. The second question is to then decide whether those circumstances caused or contributed to the non-payment.

- *“If the answer to the first question is ‘No’ it follows that the Traffic Commissioner cannot disregard the automatic termination of the licence, because the pre-condition to the exercise of discretion will not have been established.*
- *On the other hand if the answer to both these questions is ‘Yes’ then it seems to us that there is likely to be a strong case for concluding that the automatic termination of the licence should be disregarded.*
- *Where there are exceptional circumstances the Traffic Commissioner must go on to decide whether or not to exercise discretion to disregard the automatic termination of the licence. The discretion must be exercised in a way which achieves a just and proportionate result.”*

73. Any submission regarding an application to make a late payment should outline the circumstances which led to the late payment and attempt to address the above factors as well as identifying any other fact which might persuade the traffic commissioner to find that there are exceptional circumstances. Claims that the fee was posted need to be supported by corroborating evidence.¹⁴⁶ The Upper Tribunal has made clear that the responsibility for paying the continuation fee, by the prescribed time, falls on the operator.¹⁴⁷ Operators are expected to devise a reliable means of identifying the prescribed time for payment and then ensuring that they remind themselves of the need to pay before that date. That might be by reference to a regular diary entry, via the self-service system administered by DVSA, from a fee request or by reference to the operator’s licence discs which display the payment date. The consequence of non-payment by the prescribed time is the automatic termination of the licence. Non-receipt of the fee request, forgetting to pay or overlooking the need to pay do not amount to exceptional circumstances which justify disregarding that automatic termination. The date on the vehicle licence disc is a reliable reminder of the date by which the continuation fee must be paid. Consequently, there can be no general discretion or delegation to accept late payments received within so many days of the due date.

Submissions

Whether to Call to a Hearing

74. The decision on whether to call to a hearing falls within the traffic commissioner’s discretion.¹⁴⁸ *The decision to call to a public inquiry falls to the traffic commissioner, not to officials, and it is part of the traffic commissioner’s independent judicial function. The traffic commissioner may have regard to recommendations from his staff or others...*¹⁴⁹ In reaching that decision traffic commissioners are assisted by the case submissions prepared by staff deployed to the Office of the Traffic Commissioner. A submission does not need to set out every trivial factor or combination which has no influence, but each relevant factor needs to be there and analysed. Submissions need to be accurate through analysis of any supporting documentation and supported by a recommendation which is consistent with the Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions. A

¹⁴⁶ [2013/069 Irene Clark](#)

¹⁴⁷ [2018/010 C Ingram trading as T.I.P Skips](#)

¹⁴⁸ See Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions of Delegations and Multiple Licence Holders

¹⁴⁹ [2011/028 Heart of Wales Bus & Coach Company Ltd & Clayton Francis Jones](#)

submission might follow contact with the particular party either in writing, by email, by telephone or in person (for instance by a Senior Team Leader). This type of contact clearly does not equate to a judicial hearing and cannot be treated as such.¹⁵⁰ Any staff member discussing substantive issues must make a proper note of that contact.

- 75.** The Upper Tribunal (and its predecessor) has made clear on many occasions that each case must be considered on its own merits. Consistency of approach should not be mistaken for uniformity of decisions.¹⁵¹ Inevitably the concept of proportionality requires that interventions be graduated but each case will involve a collection of different and variable factors such that it is impossible to set anything more than starting points. Caseworkers should refer to appropriate Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions (including those on the Principles of Decision Making) as to the potential outcome.
- 76.** As the case law makes clear there is no requirement on traffic commissioners to engage in discussions with applicants and/or operators before reaching a preliminary decision on whether to call to a hearing. Operators are usually provided with an opportunity to comment in response to the findings of a DVSA investigation. It may, however, be appropriate to request further comments on the first occasion when operators are found to have incurred a small number of prohibitions; minor failings in their maintenance system; a small number of tachograph errors; vehicle excise duty offences; minor convictions and any other offences not proceeded with. In these cases, a letter can be sent to the operator requesting an explanation within a given timetable as to the reasons for the shortcomings and the steps being taken to overcome them, and to seek further assurances. In the event of convictions, the operator will be asked to confirm whether any further offences are outstanding. A satisfactory reply might result in a recommendation for an alternative disposal.
- 77.** Even the best organised operator may occasionally make a genuine mistake and, unless this is serious, action may not be required. For example, an operator might receive a Fixed Penalty Notice (FPN) or equivalent, which is not a Most Serious Infringement.¹⁵² It is expected, however, that an operator will learn from an incident and take prompt corrective action. A more serious view will be taken of repeated failings or a combination of apparent infringements.
- 78.** Where one or more warning letters have been issued in the past five years, it is anticipated that the traffic commissioner will wish to consider regulatory action. The traffic commissioner, however, might also consider a 'final' warning letter. In appropriate cases the traffic commissioner may request DVSA examiners to carry out a routine check to ensure compliance.
- 79.** Members of staff should anticipate in preparing written submissions that the traffic commissioner will wish to consider regulatory action if:

 - the operator and/or driver does not appear to heed the warning letter and non-compliance continues;

¹⁵⁰ See also Statutory Guidance on Delegations

¹⁵¹ [2003/327 The Fox \(A1\) Ltd](#)

¹⁵² See Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Good Repute and Fitness

- the initial report is so serious that a public inquiry is immediately justified by an apparent risk to road safety, fair competition or where the operator appears to have set out to flout the law deliberately.
80. If the measures imposed at an earlier public inquiry appear to have been effective and/or the relevant suspension or curtailment has expired, it will not normally be appropriate to call a further public inquiry if the operator applies for the licence to be restored to the previous authorisation, or even further increased after an appropriate period, provided the traffic commissioner is satisfied that standards have been restored and maintained. If appropriate, DVSA will be asked to carry out checks to establish suitability. A case submission should be made to the traffic commissioner to this effect.
81. Allegations on matters of fact relating to potential exercise of powers under section 17 of the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981, the Road Traffic Act 1988, and/or sections 26 and 27 of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act 1995 will need to be considered by the traffic commissioner. Reference should be made to the relevant Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions.

Periods of Grace

82. For standard licences section 27(3AA) of the 1995 Act for goods licences and Regulation (EC) No 1071/2009 for PSV licences (Annex 2) allows, but does not require, the traffic commissioner to provide a period of time to rectify the situation. The operator must be notified and should be given a limited time (because of the implications for fair competition), for instance 14 days, to make written representations before the traffic commissioner decides whether to allow time for rectification and for what period by way of a notice served under section 27(3A) of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act 1995 and section 17(1A) of the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981. To quote the Upper Tribunal: *“In our view, when considering whether or not to grant a period of grace, Traffic Commissioners will need some tangible evidence, beyond mere hope and aspiration, that granting a period of grace will be worthwhile, and that there are reasonable prospects for a good outcome. Some sort of analysis along these lines will be necessary because, amongst other reasons, Traffic Commissioners have to decide how long to grant. Moreover, as with a stay, there is no point in granting a period of grace if the likely effect is just to put off the evil day when regulatory action will have to be taken.”*¹⁵³ The maximum periods allowed under the legislation are as follows:

Shortcoming		Maximum Period of Grace
Transport Manager	Departure	6 months
	Death or physical incapacity	6 + 3 months
Effective & Stable Establishment		6 months
Financial Standing		6 months to demonstrate that the requirement will be met <i>on a permanent basis</i>

¹⁵³ [2014/008 Duncan McKee & Mary McKee](#)

83. When a period of grace is granted to an operator, they are responsible for ensuring that they demonstrate the requirement is met prior to the expiry of any period of grace. An operator should therefore actively manage any dates and request an extension, when appropriate, whilst remembering that the grant and any extension is always at the discretion of the traffic commissioner.¹⁵⁴ If a period of grace expires without the mandatory requirement being met then the traffic commissioner is obliged to revoke the operator licence.

Proposals to Revoke

84. As with initial indications given by traffic commissioners at public inquiry and/or driver conduct hearing this type of correspondence, also referred to as 'minded to letters', is intended to put the operator on notice that information has come to the attention of the traffic commissioner which, if left unanswered, would require the traffic commissioner to take action against the licence. The letter sent on behalf of the traffic commissioner therefore affords that opportunity to make representations. It is important for staff to always check the record to ensure that a letter has not already been sent by another part of the Office of the Traffic Commissioner and that if it has, then there is reference made or the dates for response are properly explained, so as to avoid confusion on the part of the operator.¹⁵⁵

Listing of Cases

85. Once a traffic commissioner has called a case to a hearing the case papers will be transferred to the staff in the relevant Office of the Traffic Commissioner for preparation and for the case to be listed. The Office of the Traffic Commissioner seeks to list public inquiries within twelve weeks of the traffic commissioner calling the inquiry. This is subject to available resources and includes consideration of the traffic commissioner's diary. The period may also be extended if the traffic commissioner believes that it is in the interests of the case to do so to allow proper consideration.
86. Case management decisions are important to ensuring the interests of justice, this includes the listing of cases. The Senior Traffic Commissioner has therefore identified the following principles to identify priority cases when listing:
- any serious concerns regarding the safety of the transport operation;
 - impounding (subject to the discretion to extend the time limits¹⁵⁶);
 - application by an Administrator etc under regulation 31¹⁵⁷;
 - application for interim authority or PSV application (where interim authority is not available);
 - cases of serious non-compliance¹⁵⁸;
 - cases of particular age.

As indicated above, the availability of advocates is not a priority where alternative representation might be obtained. In ensuring that a case is ready for hearing it

¹⁵⁴ [2018/011 Skyrider Ltd](#)

¹⁵⁵ [2012/045 Goods 2 Go Ltd](#)

¹⁵⁶ See Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Impounding

¹⁵⁷ See Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Legal Entities

¹⁵⁸ See Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on the Principles of Decision Making and the Concept of Proportionality, and in particular Annex 4

may be necessary to invite the traffic commissioner to make case management directions (see above).

Case Management

87. The Senior Traffic Commissioner is aware that in practice most public inquiry hearings are dealt with expeditiously and efficiently and that invariably they will not be listed for longer than half a day and that this time frame will be sufficient. Indeed, traffic commissioners are accustomed to dealing with cases to conclusion (including delivery of the decision) within that time scale and this is generally regarded as best and normal practice. Commissioners do not adopt an “overly legalistic” approach to their jurisdiction and are keen to adopt an approach at public inquiry that will have the effect of achieving operator licence compliance. This will often involve a clear engagement with the operator at both the evidence stage and the decision stage. This type of approach is to be encouraged.
88. However, there will always be cases where it is clear that a particular public inquiry will be complex and time consuming and the presiding commissioner will have to become involved in “case management” at an early stage. In these cases, traffic commissioners are reminded that useful guidance as to the principles of case management is available from the ‘overriding objectives’ referred to in the Procedure Rules in both the civil and criminal jurisdictions. By analogy, the Senior Traffic Commissioner considers that in these cases traffic commissioners will be able to actively manage the case whilst ensuring that cases are dealt with justly and expeditiously, so far as is practicable by:
- (a) ensuring that all evidence is served by the Office of the Traffic Commissioner in a timely manner;
 - (b) ensuring that any written evidence and representations from the operator and/or its representative is provided to the presiding traffic commissioner sufficiently in advance of the hearing so that it can be read and considered by the commissioner in advance;
 - (c) ensuring that operators provide the documents requested by the Office of the Traffic Commissioner in advance of the public inquiry where requested to do so;
 - (d) identifying the issues for determination by the traffic commissioner at an early stage;
 - (e) ensuring value for money in the use of time and resources (including considering the need to call witnesses whose evidence may be agreed);
 - (f) dealing with the case in ways which are proportionate to:
 - the size and type of licence/s involved;
 - the nature and scale of the breaches;
 - the complexity of the issues;
 - the likely orders and directions to be made;
 - the likely effect upon the operator of the proposed orders and directions;and
 - (g) ensuring that the public inquiry is listed expeditiously and that an appropriate time estimate is allocated.
89. Where a traffic commissioner requires more information, the correct approach is to make that request and to wait and see what is produced. When setting time

limits within which specified steps must be taken it is best to express the requirements as a date by which the steps must be taken rather than as a period of time with a potentially uncertain start/end date.¹⁵⁹ Traffic commissioners will be aware of what is required in order to ensure a fair hearing and the requirements for disclosure. Where that additional information is not forthcoming it may be appropriate for the traffic commissioner to instigate their own enquiries provided that, should there be any doubt as to the contents, the operator or other party is given the opportunity to consider that content and to comment upon it.¹⁶⁰

90. In managing a case it may be useful for a traffic commissioner to make case management directions for the parties to follow so that the case is in a state to be heard and that parties are not disadvantaged. Examples of case management directions might include:

- for a party to indicate whether a DVSA witness is required to attend by indicating what is at issue;
- in impounding cases to serve documentary evidence of ownership;
- to confirm that evidence is in a form which can be relied upon at a hearing;
- to supply a time estimate and/or an indication of the names and number of witnesses to be called by that party;
- to supply dates to avoid for listing;
- to serve specified documents including skeleton arguments on a point of law¹⁶¹.

The above is not an exhaustive list. The Upper Tribunal has criticised representatives for not supplying material in a timely manner. Parties are frequently requested to disclose documentary evidence such as original bank statements or maintenance records in advance of the hearing date. Compliance with directions allows for proper preparation, a more efficient use of tribunal time and therefore the interests of justice.

Taking Evidence Remotely

91. Witnesses must seek permission from the traffic commissioner prior to a hearing if they intend to present evidence remotely. If the witness intends to be abroad at the time evidence is given, they should follow the *process* set out in Annex 3. Before hearing live evidence from a witness in another country it is necessary to ensure the permission of that other country is obtained as required by [The Convention on the Taking of Evidence Abroad in Civil or Commercial Matters \(18 March 1970\)](#).¹⁶²

¹⁵⁹ [2013/076 City Sprinter Ltd](#)

¹⁶⁰ [2012/034 Martin Joseph Formby trading as G&G Transport](#)

¹⁶¹ As per [Tchengviz v SFO \[2014\] EWCA Civ 1333](#), the purpose of a skeleton argument is to assist the traffic commissioner be setting out as concisely as practicable the arguments upon which a party intends to rely. The skeleton should be concise; it should both define and confine the areas of controversy and not include extensive quotations from documents or authorities

¹⁶² Previous Upper Tribunal guidance in [Nare \[2011\] UKUT 443](#) was reaffirmed in [Agbabiaka \[2021\] UKUT 286](#) which although an administrative law decision extends to civil or commercial cases. The Criminal Court of Appeal in [R v Kadir \[2022\] EWCA Crim 1244](#) also indicated that the approach should apply across all courts and tribunals

Welsh Language Cases

92. In this document “Welsh case” means a case before the traffic commissioner in which all “individual parties”¹⁶³ are resident in Wales or which has been classified as a Welsh case by the traffic commissioner. Where not all of the “individual parties” are resident in Wales the traffic commissioner will decide whether the case should be classified as a Welsh case. In a Welsh case the Welsh language may be used by any party or witnesses or in any document placed before the traffic commissioner or at any hearing.
93. The call-up letter must alert individual parties to the above. Letters from the Welsh Traffic Area Office therefore contain the following advice in both English and Welsh languages: “*The Welsh Traffic Area Office welcomes correspondence in Welsh or English. Public Inquiries can be held using the Welsh language, provided that notice, by way of a request, is given at least 21 days before the appointed date.*”
94. A party or their representative should, unless it is not reasonably practicable to do so, inform the Traffic Area Office, in writing, no later than 14 days prior to the hearing date of a Welsh case that the Welsh language will be used by the party, their representative, any witness to be called by that party or in any document to be produced by the party. When the Welsh language is to be used at a public inquiry it must take place at a venue with simultaneous translation facilities. Whenever an interpreter is needed to translate evidence from English into Welsh or from Welsh into English, staff at the Office of the Traffic Commissioner acting under the delegation of the traffic commissioner for Wales must ensure that the attendance is secured of an interpreter whose name is included in the list of approved interpreters. Accordingly, whenever the papers are being assembled by the Office of the Traffic Commissioner for Wales they must be carefully checked so as to identify whether any of the documents contain evidence which is written in the Welsh language.

Hearing-Impaired Interpreters

95. A hearing-impaired party or their representative should, unless it is not reasonably practicable to do so, inform the Traffic Area Office, in writing, no later than 14 days prior to the hearing that an interpreter will be required. The Office of the Traffic Commissioner should make the necessary arrangements and will meet the reasonable costs of interpreters for deaf and hearing-impaired litigants for hearings. However, many people have a friend or relative who usually interprets for them. It is for the presiding commissioner to decide whether that friend or relative can exactly interpret what is being said to during the hearing.¹⁶⁴ Unless the relative or friend has a recognised qualification in relaying information between deaf and hearing impaired people, it may be advisable to use a qualified interpreter.¹⁶⁵
96. All hearing rooms in the Traffic Area Offices should be equipped with a hearing loop facility. A hearing-impaired party or their representative should inform the Traffic Area Office, in writing, no later than 14 days prior to any hearing held at a

¹⁶³ i.e. other than a Government Department or Agency

¹⁶⁴ See Paragraph above on Active Case Management

¹⁶⁵ Approach consistent with that adopted by HM Courts and Tribunal Service – <https://www.justice.gov.uk/newsite/courts/interpreter-guidance>

location other than a Traffic Area Office that a portable hearing loop facility will be required.¹⁶⁶

Foreign Language Interpreters

- 97.** A party (who cannot speak or understand the language of the tribunal well enough to take part in the hearing) or their representative should, unless it is not reasonably practicable to do so, inform the Traffic Area Office, in writing, no later than 14 days prior to the hearing that a language interpreter will be required.
- 98.** Where a party attends, and the presiding commissioner concludes that the party does not have that level of understanding, then it is open to the presiding commissioner to proceed relying on a friend or relative.¹⁶⁷ The presiding commissioner should be satisfied that the proceedings will be properly interpreted, failing which the case will have to be adjourned in order that an interpreter can be booked to attend.¹⁶⁸

Pending Prosecutions

- 99.** Occasions will arise when the traffic commissioner has decided to call a case to a public inquiry and/or driver conduct hearing and information is received that a prosecution is pending against a potential party or an employee.¹⁶⁹ Such cases will be referred to the traffic commissioner to decide whether the public inquiry and/or driver conduct hearing should proceed or be delayed until the court proceedings have been concluded. The submission should take account of the fact that:
- the traffic commissioner will be considering the operator's suitability to continue to hold an operator's licence and/or a driver's suitability to hold a vocational entitlement in the round, as opposed to the court making a finding on a specific offence(s);
 - the likely time delay before the criminal proceedings are heard. In particular the traffic commissioner will want to consider the scale of the implications that this will have for road safety or fair competition in the interim;
 - the seriousness of the offence(s), and whether the outcome if determined before the public inquiry and/or driver conduct hearing is likely one way or the other to lead the traffic commissioner to reach a very different conclusion than he/she might otherwise expect to reach;
 - the difference between goods, PSV and driver conduct legislation.
- 100.** In cases where a public inquiry and/or driver conduct hearing precedes court proceedings, the commissioner may need to consider whether the interests of justice require part or all of the evidence to be heard in private, but this discretion is limited for PSV cases. They may also need to consider whether to exclude certain individuals who are giving evidence even if this evidence is being given

¹⁶⁶ See Paragraph above on Listing of Cases

¹⁶⁷ See Paragraph above on Active Case Management

¹⁶⁸ <https://www.justice.gov.uk/newsite/courts/interpreter-guidance>

¹⁶⁹ The limited protection against double jeopardy does not apply ([R v I.K., R v A.B., R v K.A. \[2007\] EWCA Crim 971](#)) but can, if necessary, be argued as part of any subsequent criminal proceedings ([2008/526 Robert Kingman & Steven Kingman trading as Kingman Services](#))

in private. For example, if a DVSA prosecution is pending in the criminal courts it may be appropriate for the DVSA witnesses to be excluded after they have given their evidence and whilst the operator and/or driver is giving their evidence. This will always be a question of fact and degree according to the circumstances of each case and will often require very careful consideration by the presiding traffic commissioner who will want to seek a balance between the absolute requirement to ensure that the operator and/or driver has a fair hearing and the need of the commissioner to admit all relevant evidence.

Communication with Representatives

101. As above, the position of transport consultants is different from that of counsel and solicitors, whose conduct is regulated by their professional bodies. It is therefore appropriate to seek written confirmation that a transport consultant is authorised to act by the party in person or authorised officer (if it is a corporate entity) before communicating with that transport consultant, especially where a consultant's name has been left on the operator's record following initial application.¹⁷⁰ If a particular lawyer is not known by a member of staff then they may request an email from a company address confirming authority. As the case law above indicates members of staff would be well advised to make a contemporaneous file note of any important conversation. The legislation gives a discretion to traffic commissioners to allow representatives other than solicitors and counsel to appear. They should seek permission from the traffic commissioner in advance of any hearing at which they wish to be allowed to appear.

Adjournments

102. Circumstances requiring adjournments can occur at any time leading up to or indeed during a public inquiry and/or driver conduct hearing. A traffic commissioner will adjourn the proceedings if he or she considers that it is required in the interests of justice (i.e. to ensure that the proceedings are fair to all parties). Parties can apply for an adjournment prior to the hearing by submitting a written request to the traffic commissioner or by making a verbal application during a hearing. Any request must contain a detailed reason as to why an adjournment is appropriate and, where possible, corroborating evidence should be included with the request (this may include details of a scheduled hospital appointment or pre-booked holiday confirmation).¹⁷¹ The traffic commissioner will take all relevant factors into account when considering adjournment requests, including the effect on road safety of allowing an operator and/or driver to continue and whether the relevant party has complied with any directions.

103. Applications for adjournments are to be submitted to the traffic commissioner immediately and decisions taken on adjournment requests should be communicated to the party or their representative as soon as possible, with the aim of communicating the decision within 3 working days. If verbal notification of the decision is appropriate it is to be confirmed in writing at the earliest opportunity.

¹⁷⁰ See Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Operating Centres, Stable Establishments & Addresses for Service

¹⁷¹ [2019/030 TA Trucking Ltd](#)

Notification and Disclosure of Evidence

Publication

104. Notification of pending public inquiries should be placed in Notices and Proceedings¹⁷² or Applications and Decisions¹⁷³ in accordance with legislative requirements. The Office of the Traffic Commissioner may also send a list of all pending hearings to the relevant press officer who acts for the traffic commissioner.

*Call-up Letters*¹⁷⁴

105. A letter inviting a party to attend a public inquiry will be sent in accordance with the legislative requirements. Schedule 4 of the Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Regulations 1995 provides that “*at least 21 days notice before the date so fixed*” shall be given. Regulations 8 & 9 of the Public Service Vehicles (Operators’ Licences) Regulations 1995 provide that “*not less than 14 days notice*” shall be given. In many cases the Office of the Traffic Commissioner seeks to send call-up letters between 28 and 35 days before the scheduled date for the public inquiry but this is not mandatory. The letter should detail the reasons for calling the public inquiry, the evidence that the traffic commissioner will consider and any further information that the traffic commissioner requires from the operator. The letter will also invite operators to make representations to the traffic commissioner prior to the inquiry.

106. Whilst the legislation is silent on the period of notice for a vocational driver conduct hearing, the Senior Traffic Commissioner directs that those individuals should normally receive 21 days written notice of the hearing, although this may not be possible in individual cases such as where an early hearing is requested.

Traffic Commissioner’s Brief

107. The Office of the Traffic Commissioner prepares a traffic commissioner’s brief (or bundle of papers) which will include all information proposed to be considered by the traffic commissioner at the hearing. The traffic commissioner cannot and will not be bound by any recommendation or information received from officials. *Some of the information received may come from enforcement officers, for example traffic examiners or vehicle examiners employed by DVSA. Further information may come from the parties themselves, for example financial evidence and/or company records. It is open to a party to submit other documents and to make representations as to the scope of a hearing for the traffic commissioner to rule on.*¹⁷⁵ Any request for further material should therefore be referred to a traffic commissioner to apply the principles outlined in the attached Statutory Guidance (above) and the overriding objective and to then decide whether further directions are required and/or to seek further information as to potential relevance.

¹⁷² <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/traffic-commissioner-notices-and-proceedings>

¹⁷³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/traffic-commissioner-applications-and-decisions>

¹⁷⁴ See Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Operating Centres, Stable Establishments and Addresses for Service

¹⁷⁵ [Al-Le Logistics Limited and Others \[2010\] EWHC 134 \(Admin\)](#) - paragraph 36

108. A practice has developed amongst some operators and representatives whereby traffic commissioners are served with documents on the day of a hearing or shortly before. This impedes a traffic commissioner's ability to prepare for a hearing and has been expressly disapproved of by the Upper Tribunal. Where the traffic commissioner has requested evidence to be served in advance, if a representative is unable to comply with the request that representative should inform the traffic commissioner well in advance of the hearing and explain why. It is not sufficient for a representative to take an inactive part in proceedings. Where a representative intends to rely on other evidence then it must be lodged with the traffic commissioner at least seven days in advance. It may be necessary to produce evidence such as maintenance records on the day but again notice should be given to the traffic commissioner seven days in advance. Any bundle to be relied upon should be scheduled or indexed. The documents should then be properly introduced by any representative. Representatives may also properly be asked to identify those matters at issue. Failure to properly prepare a case may be referred as a breach of professional standards. If documents are lodged which do not meet the above requirements, then staff may refer them to a traffic commissioner in order to decide whether to accept them in that form. However, traffic commissioners will be alive to any device to delay regulatory action being taken.

Appeals Against Decisions Not to Issue an Acquired Rights Certificate

109. Under paragraphs 5 and 14 of Schedule 3 of the Road Transport Operator Regulations 2011, where the Secretary of State refuses an application for an exemption of the requirements of paragraph 6(1) of Schedule 3 of the Public Passenger Vehicles Act 1981 or paragraph 13(1) of Schedule 3 of Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) Act 1995, the applicant may appeal to a traffic commissioner for a redetermination of that application (i.e. a de novo (completely new) consideration of the application). It will be for the individual traffic commissioner to decide on the process for any hearing, if required, and the evidence to be submitted. There is no requirement for the Secretary of State to be a party to that redetermination but may apply to make representations and/or appear.

110. A similar process has been adopted in paragraphs 11 to 19 of Schedule 6 of the 1995 Act¹⁷⁶ to aid the transition of light goods vehicles into the operator licensing regime. The Secretary of State may exempt an individual, until the end of 20th May 2025, from the requirement under section 13A(3)(a)(i) or paragraph 14A(1)(c) of Schedule 3 to be professionally competent, if the Secretary of State is satisfied that the individual had, for ten years or more ending with 20th August 2020, continuously managed national or international transport operations as, for or on behalf of an undertaking that used only light goods vehicles. Applications must be made before 21st May 2024.

111. Where the Secretary of State decides not to grant an exemption the applicant may appeal the decision to a traffic commissioner within 28 days, beginning with the day after the date the decision is made. The traffic commissioner must, within 56 days beginning with the day after the date the appeal is made, confirm or reverse the decision. A traffic commissioner may consider as part of deciding an

¹⁷⁶ As inserted by The Goods Vehicles (Licensing of Operators) (Amendment) Regulations 2022

appeal any relevant information not provided by the applicant to the Secretary of State.

- 112.** Paragraph 18 of Schedule 6 allows a traffic commissioner to regard any individual as professionally competent, if they have been granted an exemption by the Secretary of State (or following a successful appeal against refusal). That exemption will last until the end of 20th May 2025.

Appeals Against the Removal of International Road Transport Permits

- 113.** Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions were previously issued setting out the process that would be adopted by a traffic commissioner when determining an appeal under The International Road Transport Permits (EU Exit) Regulations 2018. No such appeals were received under these Regulations, the Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions have therefore been withdrawn until such time as they are required.¹⁷⁷ If an appeal is made to a traffic commissioner against the removal of an international road transport permit, the Senior Traffic Commissioner will be notified and likely adopt an approach similar to that previously described which follows the prevailing Regulations at the time.

Representations From Parties

- 114.** As stated above, there is no requirement on traffic commissioners to engage with applicants, operators, drivers or other parties immediately prior to a hearing or during those proceedings. The Senior Traffic Commissioner recognises that at first sight some cases might appear to require the convening of a public inquiry or driver conduct hearing, but they might in fact be dealt with by an alternative disposal. Operators, applicants and/or drivers can submit written representations in response to reports of non-compliance or other adverse information. This helps to inform a decision on whether to take regulatory action thereby allowing resources to be targeted at those who present the greatest risk to road safety and/or fair competition.¹⁷⁸
- 115.** There may be occasions where it may be necessary for a senior member of staff (not below the grade of Senior Team Leader) to invite an operator to a formal meeting to seek a detailed explanation for the failings that have been identified. This may allow the operator opportunity to provide assurances as to the steps taken to avoid any reoccurrence. This type of interview will generally be offered where it is considered that an alternative method of disposal may be appropriate, such as, but not limited to, the giving of additional undertakings by the operator or a voluntary reduction in vehicle authority, but where this cannot be achieved through correspondence.
- 116.** The purpose of the administrative interview is to inform any submission to the traffic commissioner so that s/he can determine whether or not to take regulatory action. The process will not apply to drivers and applicants for vocational licences.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁷ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/traffic-commissioners-appeals-against-the-removal-of-international-road-travel-permits>

¹⁷⁸ Further assistance on the starting point for regulatory action is available in Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on the Principles of Decision Making and Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Vocational Driver Conduct

¹⁷⁹ The processes are set out in Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Vocational Driver Conduct

117. These interviews are not hearings but they do form part of the regulatory process and it is therefore important to ensure fairness to the operator. The operator is of course free to decline the invitation. The interviews will follow a consistent structure:

- prior to the interview (and at least 14 days in advance) the senior staff member will write to the operator identifying the operator licence failures either in summary form or by the inclusion of any reports that have been put before the traffic commissioner;
- the operator will be asked to attend with documentary evidence of current compliance such as maintenance records and tachograph or domestic hours' legislation compliance;
- the person attending may be asked for written confirmation of their authority to bind the operator to any undertakings etc;
- in the event that the operator does not attend or does not request an alternative interview date any initial recommendation for regulatory action will stand;
- the interviews shall be recorded and the senior member of staff must always be accompanied by another member of staff who will make notes of the matters discussed and those at issue, together with offers of remedial action given by the operator;
- the parties who attend the interview are entitled to be accompanied by a legal or other representative as if they were attending a public inquiry or driver conduct hearing;
- within 14 days of the interview the senior member of staff will make a final recommendation to the traffic commissioner as to the type of regulatory action that they might like to consider.

118. The senior member of staff is not authorised to make any regulatory decisions on behalf of the traffic commissioner and has no powers to make any regulatory decisions associated with the interview. The decision on whether to call the operator to a hearing or to deal with the alleged failings in another way will always remain with the traffic commissioner. Depending on the actions taken and assurances received by the senior staff member, it might be possible for the traffic commissioner to deal with the matter by way of correspondence and without convening a public inquiry. This regulatory action might include, for example, accepting a voluntary reduction of the licence authority and/or the giving of additional undertakings that are intended to deal with the operator licence failings. These could include, for example, detailed driver, transport manager and/or maintenance staff training packages or the implementation of new and comprehensive tachograph analysis systems.

Preliminary Hearings

119. These are not public inquiries and there is therefore no requirement to publish a notice of the hearing. It was previously custom to refer to these hearings as 'In Chambers' but because of the connotations derived from other jurisdictions, namely that these hearings are closed to the public, that term is no longer to be used. The preliminary or case management hearing will be recorded in the same way as a public inquiry or driver conduct hearing.

120. In complex cases, a preliminary or case management hearing can be beneficial in narrowing or crystallising the issues. An application, for example, could be

considered at a preliminary hearing, provided that it complies with Article 6 European Convention on Human Rights and other procedural requirements. However, this might not be an appropriate forum where there is also an interim licence in force. It is a matter for the traffic commissioner to decide whether a case would benefit from this type of hearing. Where a party is called to any preliminary hearing the Human Rights Act 1998 still applies.

Location of Inquiries

- 121.** The majority of all public inquiries, impounding appeals, and driver conduct hearings will be held in the tribunal room of the relevant Office of the Traffic Commissioner. It is, however, an established principle that public inquiries held on environmental grounds should be held as close as possible to the proposed operating centre as it is highly likely that the presiding traffic commissioner will conduct a site visit and it is important that the representors (who will be local residents) will be able to easily attend. Traffic commissioners may also decide to hold hearings virtually where a fair hearing can be achieved.
- 122.** Where a public inquiry has been called to consider bus punctuality matters it may be in the public interest to hold the inquiry at a venue which is local to the operator's base because of the local interest that the case may have generated.
- 123.** The traffic commissioner alone must make the decision on whether or not a public inquiry should be held locally to the operator. The decision shall not be delegated.
- 124.** In cases that relate to an operator who holds a licence in more than one traffic area, the lead traffic commissioner¹⁸⁰ will normally hold the public inquiry in the tribunal room of the Office of the lead traffic commissioner. The lead traffic commissioner will usually decide to hear all matters together to consider all allegations of non-compliance which relate to that operator. Whilst the legislation enables an operator's licence to be subject to revocation, suspension or curtailment (or in the case of PSV operators, a reduction in the number of authorised vehicles) the traffic commissioner hearing the case will have regard to the evidence available at that hearing with the object of reaching a decision on licences which are the subject of the public inquiry.
- 125.** A multiple licence holder may, therefore, face some action against one or more of its operator licences, and any determination which is made may only relate to those operator licences which fall to be considered by the traffic commissioner. Even if all of a multiple licence holder's operator licences are before a traffic commissioner at a single hearing, the traffic commissioner may decide to make a direction against some, rather than all of the licences. A revocation of one operator's licence will not necessarily lead to a revocation of all licences.¹⁸¹

Stays

- 126.** Any request for a stay needs to be carefully considered and full written reasons should be given for the decision reached. When reaching a decision, the traffic commissioner will be assisted by: the above Statutory Guidance, Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Principles of Decision Making and the Upper Tribunal starting point. Where a stay is refused the party has a right of

¹⁸⁰ See Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Delegations

¹⁸¹ Subject to Statutory Directions and Statutory Directions on Good Repute and Fitness

appeal, either through oral argument or in writing, to a judge of the Administrative Appeals Chamber of the Upper Tribunal.¹⁸² One of the factors the Upper Tribunal will consider is whether the appeal is likely to succeed. *The better the prospects of success the stronger the case for granting a stay. The worse the prospects of success the greater the weight that must be given to other factors, such as the impact on road safety, fair competition and compliance with the regulatory regime if a stay is granted.*¹⁸³ The Appellant retains the burden of showing that the decision was plainly wrong. The Upper Tribunal must ask whether the appellant has shown that the process of reasoning and that the application of the relevant law required the traffic commissioner to come to a different conclusion¹⁸⁴

Cases Remitted for Rehearing by the Upper Tribunal

127. The traffic commissioner for the relevant traffic area must always be made aware of any appeal in advance of the hearing and preferably upon first receipt of notification. Where the Upper Tribunal makes a direction or formal request the traffic commissioner must be informed as soon as possible. Where a case is remitted for rehearing the traffic commissioner must also be alerted to any directions before the staff who work on their behalf take any action.¹⁸⁵ If another traffic commissioner is required to hear the case it is important that the Senior Traffic Commissioner is made aware so that an available traffic commissioner can be identified and deployed as soon as practicable thereby avoiding unnecessary delays in relisting.

128. Time is of the essence when a stay request has been received. Whilst a judge of the Upper Tribunal has 14 days in which to make a decision in practice the time period will often be much shorter due to the impending date of implementation of the traffic commissioner's decision. A traffic commissioner therefore has 7 days to supply a copy of a decision relating to a stay to the Upper Tribunal. On refusal of a stay, staff should arrange for the following to be forwarded to the Upper Tribunal as a matter of urgency:

- in the case of an oral decision, an immediate transcript of the decision, together with a summary of the background to the case;
- in the case of a written decision, a copy of the same with any additional comment as appropriate.
- a copy of the full written reasons for the refusal of the stay.

129. All relevant papers should be copied to the person lodging the Appeal.

¹⁸² See Statutory Guidance and Statutory Directions on Appeals

¹⁸³ Upper Tribunal stay decision in 2014/065 Trevor Kevin Dibnah trading as Weyside Travel

¹⁸⁴ [Bradley Fold Travel Ltd and Peter Wright v Secretary of State for Transport \[2010\] EWCA Civ 695](#)

¹⁸⁵ By example: [2012/028 Shamrock \(GB\) Ltd](#)

ANNEX 1 - RETAINED EU LEGISLATION

Regulation 5 of the Road Transport Operator Regulations 2011 states that a standard licence constitutes an authorisation to engage in the occupation of road transport operator for the purposes of:

Regulation (EC) No 1071/2009 establishing common rules concerning conditions to be complied with to pursue the occupation of road transport operator repealed Council Directive 96/26 EC and applicable from 4th December 2011

Article 3 - Requirements for engagement in the occupation of road transport operator

1. Undertakings engaged in the occupation of road transport operator shall:

- (a) have an effective and stable establishment in the United Kingdom;
- (b) be of good repute;
- (c) have appropriate financial standing; and
- (d) have the requisite professional competence; and

Article 13 - Procedure for the suspension and withdrawal of authorisations (i.e. to pursue the occupation of road transport operator)

1. Where a competent authority establishes that an undertaking runs the risk of no longer fulfilling the requirements laid down in Article 3, it shall notify the undertaking thereof. Where a competent authority establishes that one or more of those requirements is no longer satisfied, it may set one of the following time limits for the undertaking to rectify the situation:

- (a) a time limit not exceeding 6 months, which may be extended by 3 months in the event of the death or physical incapacity of the transport manager, for the recruitment of a replacement transport manager where the transport manager no longer satisfies the requirement as to good repute or professional competence;
- (b) a time limit not exceeding 6 months where the undertaking has to rectify the situation by demonstrating that it has an effective and stable establishment;
- (c) a time limit not exceeding 6 months where the requirement of financial standing is not satisfied, in order to demonstrate that that requirement will again be satisfied on a permanent basis.

2. The competent authority may require an undertaking whose authorisation has been suspended or withdrawn to ensure that its transport managers have passed the examinations referred to in Article 8(1) prior to any rehabilitation measure being taken.

3. If the competent authority establishes that the undertaking no longer satisfies one or more of the requirements laid down in Article 3, it shall suspend or withdraw the authorisation to engage in the occupation of road transport operator within the time limits referred to in paragraph 1 of this Article.

ANNEX 2 - OFFICE OF THE TRAFFIC COMMISSIONER - DISCLOSURE PROTOCOL

Principle

This is a fluid jurisdiction, where operators may continue to operate after the preparation of initial evidence and a call-up letter. Additional matters may arise so it is important to ensure the fairness of proceedings at all times.

A party appearing at a tribunal hearing before a traffic commissioner is entitled to receive details of the case, which might result in:

- action being taken against their operator's licence;
- an order disqualifying them from holding or obtaining or involvement in the management of an operator's licence;
- an order disqualifying a person from acting as a transport manager;
- a financial penalty being imposed under section 155 of the Transport Act 2000;
- an order against a driver's vocational entitlement;
- a proposal to refuse an application in respect of any of the above.

The legislative provisions which a traffic commissioner is considering making a direction under will be set out in the call-up letter along with disclosure of the evidence which will be considered at the hearing. This letter should be read in conjunction with the case summary contained in the bundle which is there to ensure the parties can quickly grasp the essential facts and matters in issue. A case summary should include:

- a summary of each of the alleged shortcomings or offending behaviour;
- a summary of any account given by the operator/director, transport manager, relevant driver(s), for instance whether the shortcomings were accepted or denied and summarise any assurances of remedial action;
- the specific conditions and/or undertakings that are alleged to have been breached;
- highlight the relevant compliance record (if any);
- any required explanation of the grounds for intervention;
- the date for compliance with case management directions.

Cases involving an application for return of an impounded vehicle differ from the above in that they are inter partes, i.e. there is an applicant and a respondent, who will each have evidence to present. In those cases, a presiding commissioner may make case management directions for the parties to serve their evidence and to lodge a copy with the tribunal.

Guidance

There are no procedural rules covering disclosure, but the following principles apply:

- a traffic commissioner can only make a decision on admissible evidence, which has been disclosed to all relevant parties;
- a party should know the case it has to meet;
- a notice must state the grounds on which the traffic commissioner is considering that action;
- there is no obligation to set all of this out in the call-up letter and it can be disclosed in a number of ways;
- it would be impracticable to disclose everything, which a commissioner has ever seen;
- the disclosure should identify the evidence which is to be considered at the hearing to ensure that the party is given proper notice so that the party can prepare for the hearing;
- where it emerges that the evidence has not been disclosed the traffic commissioner should order an adjournment to allow time for preparation. The length of the adjournment will depend on the particular case;
- the deliberate tactic of some parties/representatives of waiting to see what evidence the traffic commissioner has before making admissions or representations is not advised and may impact on repute or fitness;
- it is legitimate for a traffic commissioner to pursue a relevant line of enquiry when it arises. The traffic commissioner will need to consider whether there should be an adjournment to allow time to consider the new material;
- any request for further material should be referred to a traffic commissioner to apply the principles outlined in the overriding objective as set out in the Statutory Guidance and to decide on its potential relevance;
- OTC and DVSA may receive anonymised complaints and information but as a matter of fairness a party must know the case against them and be afforded the opportunity to challenge that evidence;
- any allegations can always be passed to DVSA for investigation.

Bundle

OTC will prepare a traffic commissioner's brief (or bundle of papers) which should include all information proposed to be considered by the traffic commissioner at the hearing.

That bundle will usually contain material under the following standard headings:

Section One – Licence details

Operator/Licence details
Case summary

Vehicle List
Call-up letter
Transport Manager call-up letter
Most recent application form
Application form
Transport Manager application form
Any Companies House documentation
Supplementary and re-schedule letters

Section Two - Statements

Section Three – Enforcement history

Roadworthiness prohibition notices
Driver prohibition notices
Overloading prohibition notices
Fixed Penalty Notices
Convictions
Previous Public Inquiry letters
Previous warning letters

Section Four – Correspondence

Objections/opposition/complaints
Correspondence related to public inquiry (adjournment requests, representations from operator, etc)
Historical correspondence (CLO, etc)
Annex A of call-up letter

Section Five – Finances

Copy of finances
Financial calculation

Some of the information considered may come from enforcement officers, for example traffic examiners or vehicle examiners employed by DVSA. Further information may come from the parties themselves, for example financial evidence and/or company records.

It is open to a party to submit other documents and to make representations as to the scope of a hearing for the traffic commissioner to rule on.

Non-Compliance

A failure to ensure that the applicant is not fully informed of the substance of any uncopied representation will be a breach of natural justice that may give grounds for successful appeal leading to a decision being over-turned and probably remitted for rehearing, but this can be remedied through careful case management.

ANNEX 3 - VIRTUAL/HYBRID HEARINGS AND TAKING EVIDENCE FROM ABROAD

The Senior Traffic Commissioner has power to deploy the other traffic commissioners and deputy traffic commissioners in England and Wales, and the Scottish traffic commissioner and deputy, in respect of any reserved matters, throughout the jurisdiction. The Senior Traffic Commissioner has deployed individual traffic commissioners to take responsibility for respective traffic areas in England and Wales. The Scottish traffic commissioner similarly has responsibility for reserved matters in the Scottish traffic area.

Deputy traffic commissioners have been allocated an office for administrative purposes but have no role in the delegation of functions to members of support staff. An individual deputy traffic commissioner can be engaged to undertake such reserved functions as may be delegated by the traffic commissioner for the relevant traffic area they are working in at any given time and, whilst acting under the same statutory guidance and statutory directions as the traffic commissioner may be subject to general direction by the traffic commissioner deployed to that traffic area. For instance, a deputy traffic commissioner may receive directions relating to the use of time and resources in application of the overriding principle. This might include the listing of individual cases.

The High Court gave guidance on remote hearings and the principles to be applied (in a clinical negligence case) in [SC v University Hospital Southampton NHS Foundation Trust \[2020\] EWHC 1445 \(QB\)](#) per Johnson J. In essence the court held that there are some circumstances where a remote hearing would not be fair, but in many circumstances, with careful case management, a remote hearing can deliver the interests of justice. Relevant factors may include whether parties are represented, whether they have access to the technology, the nature of the issues to be determined, the length of the hearing, the volume of written material and the complexity of the evidence. Experts may be more familiar with giving evidence in difficult circumstances. A judge can mitigate some of the disadvantages of a remote hearing by taking regular breaks. However, the fact that a case can be conducted remotely does not mean it should be. A remote hearing lacks many of the features and benefits of a court hearing including solemnity, formality and focus as well as multi-layered human communications.¹⁸⁶

The Upper Tribunal has long recognised the potential advantages of remote attendance at hearings¹⁸⁷ and traffic commissioners adopted increased flexibility in the listing of cases, during the period of Government restrictions. Traffic commissioners will generally follow the approach of the courts and other tribunals¹⁸⁸, namely that tribunal functions are exercised by traffic commissioners presiding from tribunal buildings, save in limited circumstances. An example might involve the Senior Traffic Commissioner deploying additional resources to address a backlog.

¹⁸⁶ Further guidance can be drawn from: [Re P \(A child: remote hearing\) \[2020\] EWFC 32](#), [Re S \(Vulnerable Parent: Intermediary\) \[2020\] EWCA Civ 763](#), [A \(Children\) \(Remote Hearing: Care and Placement Orders\) \[2020\] EWCA Civ 583](#), [B \(Children\) \(Remote Hearing: Interim Care Order\) \[2020\] EWCA Civ 584](#), [C \(Children\) \(Covid-19: Representation\) \[2020\] EWCA Civ 734](#), [Depp II v News Group \[2020\] EWHC 1237 \(QB\)](#); [Quality Solicitors Harris Waters v Okonkwo \[2020\] EWHC 1168 \(QB\)](#); [Les Ambassadeurs Club v Albluewi \[2020\] EWHC 1313 \(QB\)](#); [Quatey v Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust \[2020\] EWHC 1296 \(QB\)](#)

¹⁸⁷ [2018/067 Daniel Jemmett](#)

¹⁸⁸ [1 November 2020 Announcement by the Lord Chief Justice and Senior President of Tribunals](#)

Listing remains a judicial responsibility and function. Listing decisions will be made by or on behalf of the traffic commissioner with responsibility for the respective traffic area. The core concern of road safety and the fairness of proceedings should inform that decision, which might require some or all of the evidence to be taken virtually. When making listing decisions traffic commissioners will consider carefully whether suitable practical arrangements can be made to ensure that the hearing can, in fact, take place safely. This will involve consideration of a variety of factors including the type of case, the venue, the length of hearing, the number of witness and witness handling facilities and available technology.

Any presiding traffic commissioner will be aware of the need to hold the confidence of all parties. There are particular risks to vulnerable parties. Remote hearings make it harder for a presiding traffic commissioner to discern whether a party is vulnerable and technical issues relating to the technology used may make it more difficult for parties to follow proceedings. The following may be particularly at risk:

- a young adult;
- those who have English as an additional language (whether or not assisted by an interpreter);
- neuro-diverse persons, who have a learning disability or those who are experiencing mental ill health.¹⁸⁹

Experience of remote or virtual hearings has shown that they are more suitable in limited circumstances. In all cases the overriding principle has been one of fairness to both applicants, operators and other parties. This requires careful consideration when considering whether a case could be listed for remote hearing by video. It may be possible for traffic commissioners to dispose of non-complex regulatory cases through remote video hearings. The following indicate potential suitability:

- the case should not be complex (preferably single issue) with an expectation that the anticipated duration of a hearing should not exceed 1 hour;
- the number of required attendees from the operator should be limited to a maximum of three people;
- the operator must be cooperative and must have complied with all directions particularly to have documents provided in advance of the hearing;
- where the party is professionally represented;¹⁹⁰
- where none of the parties are vulnerable and there is no risk to their participation or understanding of the hearing.

Traffic commissioners retain the discretion to hear cases remotely, subject to the above considerations.

Virtual hearings require stricter boundaries than physical face to face hearings. Setting the parameters about participation at the start of the hearing may prove essential. Traffic commissioners will be alive to the difficulties experienced by litigants in person and be ready and able to help them with the hearing process. The presiding traffic commissioner retains discretion to adjourn cases where a party complains that they are unable to follow proceedings due to technical difficulties.

¹⁸⁹ The Equal Treatment Bench Book sets out good practice for dealing with vulnerable parties: <https://www.judiciary.uk/announcements/equal-treatment-bench-book-new-edition>

¹⁹⁰ See above paragraphs on Representation

The effectiveness of any virtual hearing will often depend on adherence to case management directions. Standard case management directions have been developed to minimise unnecessary in-person attendance of witnesses. However, witnesses must seek permission from the traffic commissioner prior to a hearing if they intend to present evidence remotely, particularly if they intend to be abroad at the time evidence is given. This might result in a hybrid hearing where some participants attend the hearing in person and others remotely. A failure to comply with directions may result in an application being adjourned to the end of the current list. In regulatory cases it may form the basis of a finding that the party is unable or unwilling to cooperate and interim measures to encourage compliance.¹⁹¹ Decisions may be required on a case-by-case basis, with reference to all relevant factors and considerations, subject to the direction and deployment of the Senior Traffic Commissioner.

Taking Evidence from Abroad

Background

Before hearing live evidence from a witness in another country it is necessary to ensure the permission of that other country is obtained as required by [The Convention on the Taking of Evidence Abroad in Civil or Commercial Matters \(18 March 1970\)](#). The Hague Convention establishes a framework of co-operation mechanisms in order to facilitate and streamline the taking of that evidence from abroad in civil and commercial cases by using an International Letter of Request (ILOR). This letter is sent by the judicial authority of a concerned contracting State, to the Central Authority of the other State. There is a warning that not all States are signatories.

The previous Upper Tribunal guidance in [Nare \[2011\] UKUT 443](#) was reaffirmed in [Aqbabiaka \[2021\] UKUT 286](#) which, although an administrative law decision, extends to civil or commercial cases. The Criminal Court of Appeal in [R v Kadir \[2022\] EWCA Crim 1244](#) also indicated that the approach should apply across all courts and tribunals.

Traffic commissioners cannot ignore the Court of Appeal's strong guidance that whenever the issue arises in a tribunal about the taking of evidence from outside the United Kingdom, the question of whether it would be lawful to do so is a question of law for that country (whether or not a signatory). The judgment highlights the damage which can be caused to the UK's diplomatic relationships which go beyond the interests of justice. It again states the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) position, but helpfully distinguishes oral submissions from oral evidence.

Enquiries must be made of the foreign state where the person is located to ascertain whether it objects to evidence being given orally to a Tribunal in the United Kingdom from within its territory. This reflects the understanding between Sovereign States not to seek to exercise the powers of its courts within the territory of another, without having the permission of that other State to do so. Any breach of that understanding by a court or tribunal in the United Kingdom risks damaging the United Kingdom's diplomatic relations with other States and is, thus, contrary to the public interest. The potential damage includes harm to the interests of justice. The question of whether it

¹⁹¹ [2012/005 A N D Haulage Ltd](#)

would be lawful to take evidence from a person in another country, is question of law for that State. Permission is not required where persons wish to give oral evidence by video or telephone from within the United Kingdom, including for this purpose: England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Isle of Man, Isle of Wight, the Channel Islands, or from British Overseas Territories such as Gibraltar, the Falklands, the British Virgin Islands and the Cayman Islands.

On 29 November 2021, the FCDO established the Taking of Evidence (ToE) Unit, which is responsible for ascertaining the position of different overseas governments to the taking of oral evidence from persons within their territory. The FCDO maintains a list of the foreign states that have indicated that they permit the giving of oral evidence to United Kingdom Tribunals from within their territory.¹⁹²

Process

Where a party wishes to rely on oral evidence by video or telephone from a person located abroad (including evidence from the party personally), that party or their representative must notify the Office of the Traffic Commissioner (OTC) through the Traffic Commissioner Corporate Office (TCCO): tcco@otc.gov.uk. Any such notification must include: the date of any listed hearing and the state from whose territory that person would, if permitted, be giving oral evidence. There is no need for the party to provide either the name of the person located abroad or any summary of what their oral evidence. This is an administrative process, so there is no need for this to be copied to other parties. Upon receipt of this information, TCCO will contact the ToE Unit on behalf of the party seeking to rely on oral evidence from a person abroad. If the ToE Unit is aware from previous enquiries of the stance of the state in question, it should be able to confirm whether the state has any objection. However, the OTC does not have a formal arrangement with the FCDO nor do we have the means to make enquiries of another state via the British Embassy or British High Commission in that country, as a consular fee will be charged. OTC will need to inform the party that made the request of the response from the ToE Unit. The TCCO will notify the STC.

The above process has no bearing on judicial decisions, such as whether the evidence of the person located abroad is relevant to the issues which the tribunal must decide and whether to admit that evidence. If permission is delayed or refused, the presiding D/TC might need to examine alternatives to oral evidence being given from abroad. This will include its relevance, and why the person cannot attend the hearing in person or otherwise give evidence by video or telephone from within the United Kingdom. The presiding commissioner should consider whether the evidence could be given in like terms by a person located within the United Kingdom. The traffic commissioner may also need to consider the consequences of a failure by the party to inform the OTC in a timely manner that it wishes to rely on evidence from a person located abroad.

This may be particularly problematic in impounding hearings where the relevant regulations require a hearing within 28 days of receipt of the application and where there is a hearing, the decision must be issued within 14 days of that hearing. Regulation 23 (goods) and regulation 25 (PSV) allows a traffic commissioner to extend the prescribed periods in order for a case to be dealt with fairly and justly but that requires reasons to be given. Where there is a factual dispute and/or a claim based on knowledge, that is likely to require witness evidence. It can take months for the ToE

¹⁹² <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/taking-and-giving-evidence-by-video-link-from-abroad>

Unit to receive a response to an enquiry via an Embassy or High Commission. It is unlikely to meet the statutory intent to use the power to extend the deadlines in those circumstances. The presiding commissioner should consult with the STC before doing so to discuss the alternatives, as above.