

Warning over Home Office & Police Dispute over DBS Information

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The Local Government Association (LGA) has warned the Home Office of the risk being posed to public safety by a disagreement on the lawfulness of certain DBS information being provided to licensing authorities.

It has been reported that police forces are no longer providing information to councils on criminal investigations involving prospective taxi and private hire drivers because of a dispute between the Home Office and police over whether it is lawful to do so.

The LGA reported that some councils had also been told by the Disclosure and Barring Service that they could no longer check whether a prospective taxi driver had been barred from working with children or vulnerable adults unless they worked on a school transport contract.

The warning came in the wake of the Deregulation Bill going back before Lords this week (3 February) which includes, in clause 10, proposals to the duration of taxi and private hire licences from one to three years.

The LGA said the clauses should be deleted and a comprehensive reform of taxi and private hire vehicle licensing undertaken, based on the Law Commission's report published in 2014.

It has demanded a guarantee from the Department for Transport and the Home Office that "access to this vital information will be immediately returned and maintained in the future, without risk of it being removed again".

Cllr Ann Lucas OBE, Chair of the LGA's Safer and Stronger Communities Board, said: "Extending the length of taxi licences without ensuring councils can keep carrying out robust checks risks putting children and vulnerable people at risk.

"Recent child sex abuse cases in Rotherham and Rochdale are a stark reminder of the vulnerability of some passengers."

Cllr Lucas added: “Taxi drivers routinely work with vulnerable adults and children as part of their daily work, regardless of whether they have a school contract or not. It is imperative that councils can keep checking applicants against barred lists and be able to find out if they are under criminal investigation.

“The consequence could be councils unknowingly granting licences to people investigated for sexual offences and only finding out three years later when the driver renews the licence and has the conviction flagged up.”