



REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF RESILIENT COMMUNITIES

LICENSING AND SAFETY COMMITTEE

19 NOVEMBER 2025

UPDATE REPORT ON GHOST PLATES

1.0 Summary of Report

- 1.2 This report will inform members of the current position with regard to the introduction of infrared cameras to tackle ghost plates on licensed vehicles within the borough.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 This report is for information purposes and there are no decision required by the committee.

3.0 Background

- 3.1 Ghost plates, also referred to as shadow plates or phantom plates, are specialised vehicle registration plates designed to evade detection by automated number plate recognition (ANPR) systems and traffic enforcement cameras. These plates have become a significant concern for the police, local authorities and other enforcement agencies due to their potential use in illegal activities.
- 3.2 Detecting ghost plates can be challenging due to their sophisticated designs. However, several methods and technologies can be employed to identify them:

A) ANPR Systems

Advanced ANPR systems are equipped with high-resolution cameras and enhanced image processing software capable of identifying anomalies in plate designs. These systems can flag vehicles with plates that appear unusual or unreadable.

B) Infrared Cameras

Infrared cameras can detect reflective coatings and materials used in ghost plates that are not visible under normal light conditions. This technology can reveal the hidden patterns and textures on the plates.

C) Manual Inspection

Enforcement officers can conduct manual inspections to identify suspect plates. This includes visually examining the plates for unusual characteristics, such as altered fonts or reflective surfaces.

3.3 Ghost plates may appear similar to standard vehicle registration plates, but with subtle modifications. Common characteristics include:

- Reflective or shiny surfaces that obscure characters under direct light.
- Altered fonts and sizes that make characters challenging to read from a distance.
- Special coatings or films that distort the plate's appearance under different lighting conditions.

3.4 Within Walsall, the issue of ghost plates has not been identified as a significant concern. Nevertheless, the Licensing service at has procured equipment to detect ghost plates and will proactively ensure that all vehicles licensed as Hackney Carriages or Private Hire vehicles are thoroughly checked.

3.5 The DVLA guidance specifies that a vehicle registration plate must adhere to the following criteria:

The number plates on your vehicle must:

- be made from a reflective material
- display black characters on a white background (front plate)
- display black characters on a yellow background (rear plate)
- not have a background pattern
- be marked to show who supplied the number plate
- be marked with a British Standard number - this is 'BS AU 145e' for plates fitted after 1 September 2021

The characters must not be removable or reflective. If your number plates were fitted after 1 September 2021, they must also be a single shade of black.

Your number plates can also:

- have 3D (raised) characters
- display certain flags, symbols and identifiers
- display a green flash, if you have a zero-emission vehicle

3.6 The utilisation of ghost plates is unequivocally illegal, and individuals caught engaging in this practice could be subject to enforcement action. The legal implications and penalties associated with the use of ghost plates are as follows:

- Offence: The use of ghost plates constitutes a fraudulent activity and is a direct violation of vehicle registration laws.
- Fine: Offenders may be subject to fines of up to £1,000 for the use of illegal plates. Repeated offenses can attract higher fines and additional legal actions.
- Vehicle Seizure: Enforcement authorities possess the authority to seize vehicles found to be equipped with ghost plates and to conduct further investigations.
- Imprisonment: In extreme cases, individuals involved in the production or utilization of ghost plates may face imprisonment, contingent upon the extent and severity of their fraudulent activities.

3.7 Since August 2025, the council's appointed garage has conducted inspections on a total of 529 vehicles in relation to the authority's vehicle standards policy. This inspection has included carry out checks to ensure so called 'ghost plates' are not in fitted. Following the conclusion of this initial trial period, the licensing service made the decision to invest in two additional infra-red cameras. These new devices are designated for deployment by both licensing personnel and community protection teams as part of their enforcement activities. The enhanced capability is expected to contribute significantly to upholding regulatory compliance and ensuring public safety during future operations.

3.8 We will update the Licensing and Safety Committee on the progress with this matter and any failures by vehicles on the fleet at a future meeting.

4.0 Resource Considerations

4.1 **Financial:** Cost of equipment will be found from existing revenue budgets and will be reviewed depending on any additional costs that maybe incurred during the additional work.

5.0 Legal:

5.1 No issues identified.

6.0 Staffing issues:

6.1 The additional work will be carried out using existing staffing.

7.0 Citizen Impact

7.1 No issues identified

8.0 Community Safety

8.1 The public are entitled to expect that as a licensing authority the council takes all necessary steps to ensure their safety. In terms of taxi and private hire law public safety is a paramount concern and therefore this proactive piece of

work should reassure residents that the council is taking its legal duties seriously.

9.0 **Environmental Impact**

9.1 No issues identified

10.1 **Performance and Risk Management Issues**

10.1 Decisions by the committee must be compliant with all relevant legislation.

One of the overwhelming priorities of the licensing authority is to ensure fairness in its processes.

Taking this proactive stance should reduce the risk of vehicles using such plates and if they are found the vehicle proprietor or licensed driver may be subject to enforcement action. They may also be brought before licensing and safety committee or one of its sub committees for a decision on whether a licence should be suspended or revoked or any other decision the committee feels is appropriate.

11. **Equality Implications**

11.1 Nothing arising from this report.

12. **Consultation**

12.1 None required.

13. **Contact Officer**

13.1 Muhammed Sayful Alom
Licensing Team Leader
Telephone: 01922 652742
Email: sayful.alom@walsall.gov.uk