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# COVID-19 Licensing Service information

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## Changes to phone line opening hours - 6 August 2020

With immediate effect the opening hours of our phone lines for enquiries is changing to 10.00am to 3.00pm Monday to Friday.

Contact numbers are as follows:

- Taxi licensing - 01253 478570 or 01253 478343
- Licensing Act / Gambling Act - 01253 478572 or 01253 478589
- Other licensing enquiries 01253 478397

## Service information - update 20 July 2020

Throughout the COVID-19 outbreak the Licensing Service have worked hard to provide the same standard of service to customers via telephone and email.

The Licensing office has now re-opened on a limited basis for essential face-to-face appointments only. The service will operate in line with government guidance to ensure the safety of both staff and those visiting.

### What you need to know

Opening hours will be limited to Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays only between 10am - 12pm and 2pm - 4pm.

Pre-booking is essential for a face-to-face appointment. We ask that people do NOT visit without an appointment.

To book a Licensing Service appointment please call 01253 478343 / 478570 or email [licensing@blackpool.gov.uk](mailto:licensing@blackpool.gov.uk)

Once a booking is confirmed, the team will advise what you need to do upon arrival, and the relevant safety precautions you must take.

Appointments will only be made if the Licensing Service feel that it is absolutely necessary to see somebody in person. Examples of reasons we may need to see you in person are:

- Hackney carriage transfer applications
- Checking original documentation (e.g. new driver applications)
- Plate/Disc collections and returns (e.g. new vehicle and vehicle changes)

This list is not exhaustive and consideration will be given to any request to visit the Licensing Service. Those requests not deemed to be absolutely necessary will be refused an appointment. Anything that can be done by telephone or email, such as the booking of pit tests or submission of renewal applications, will not normally be given an appointment.

We will continue to reply to email enquiries and answer calls as efficiently as possible. Please note we are currently experiencing an extremely high volume of enquiries and there may therefore be a delay in responding. The following contact numbers are available between 10.00am and 4.00pm Monday to Friday:

- Taxi licensing - 01253 478570 or 01253 478343
- Licensing Act / Gambling Act - 01253 478572 or 01253 478589
- Other licensing enquiries 01253 478397

We request that applications continue to be made either online (where the facility exists via our website) or by email where possible.

Thank you for your patience and understanding.

## Face Coverings in taxi and Private Hire vehicles with effect from 23 September 2020

With effect from 23 September passengers in Taxis and Private Hire vehicles are required by law to wear a face covering. The new regulations give operators the power to refuse travel if a passenger is not wearing a face covering (unless they have a valid exemption). There is no legal requirement for drivers to wear a face covering however Public Health advice is that transport staff (including taxi and private hire vehicle drivers) wear a face covering when they are unable to maintain social distancing in passenger facing roles such as in an enclosed vehicle.

Further information is available from the [DfT Safer Transport guidance](#).

## Guidance on the reopening of hospitality from 4 July

On 23 June the Government announced further easing of the coronavirus restrictions to allow most businesses, including licensed premises in the hospitality industry, to reopen providing they can do so in a Covid-secure manner. There are some businesses which must remain closed in law after 4 July, including nightclubs, casinos and bowling alleys. For a full list of those premises which can reopen from 4 July, and those which must remain closed, [guidance has been published on the gov.uk website](#).

To support businesses, the Government has published guidance on how they can reopen safely from 4 July. We would remind all businesses to carry out a Covid-19 risk assessment before opening. If your risk assessment does not indicate that you can operate in a Covid-secure manner then you should not reopen. Further information on the issues you should consider and steps you should put in place prior to opening is in the guidance documents which are available for:

- [Hotels and guest accommodation](#)
- [Restaurants, pubs, bars and takeaways](#)
- [The visitor economy](#)

Premises that reopen from 4 July should not permit live performances, including drama, comedy and music, to take place in front of a live audience. Steps should also be taken to avoid people needing to unduly raise their voices to each other. This includes, but is not limited to, refraining from playing music or broadcasts that may encourage shouting, including if played at a volume that makes normal conversation difficult. This is because of the potential for increased risk of coronavirus transmission, particularly from aerosol transmission.

## Knowledge of the Borough tests for new taxi drivers

We will shortly resume Knowledge of the Borough tests for new drivers who submitted their applications prior to the Covid-19 lockdown. These tests will be conducted on a one to one basis by videolink and those existing applicants will be contacted individually by the Licensing Service to arrange a suitable test date and time.

For new drivers who have yet to submit an application, testing will not take place until all drivers who applied pre-lockdown have been given the opportunity to book the test. We request that new applications are not submitted until we are in a position to offer tests to new applicants.

## Information for the hospitality industry on takeaways and deliveries

We have received a number of enquiries from businesses who wish to offer deliveries or takeaway food and drink during the current pandemic whilst the hospitality sector must remain closed. Should operators wish to do this, they are reminded that they must have the correct authorisation on their Premises Licence under the Licensing Act:

1. If providing hot food or hot drinks between the hours of 11pm-5am your Premises Licence must include the provision of "Late Night Refreshment"
2. If offering takeaway or delivery of alcohol, your Premises Licence must include "off" sales of alcohol. You should also check the conditions on your licence for any specific restrictions.

Please note, Blackpool town centre and Promenade is subject to a [Public Space Protection Order \(PSPO\)](#) which prohibits drinking alcohol in a public place. We would therefore expect those businesses who have off sales permitted on their licence to behave responsibly by not encouraging the contravention of this Order by selling alcohol in open containers for immediate consumption in the areas covered by the PSPO.

Should you require any further advice or wish to make a change to your licence please contact us.

## Medicals for hackney carriage and private hire drivers - update 15 May 2020

Further to our advice on the 19th March 2020, in which we stated "with immediate effect, existing drivers who would normally be due to produce medical evidence of fitness to drive are NOT required to do so until further notice" - that advice has now changed and we will closely be following the government guidelines on the relaxation of the requirement for a medical in relation to Bus & Lorry drivers. That information is as follows:

"The Government is making temporary provisions for bus and lorry drivers aged 45 and over to forego the need for a D4 medical in order to renew their driving entitlement. These changes are temporary and will only apply where the licence has not expired before 1 January 2020.

The licence will only be valid for one year instead of five years and the driver will need to submit a completed D4 when the licence is due for renewal in 12 months. Drivers with health issues will still need to declare these, and those with health issues that prevent them from driving safely will not have their licence renewed. All drivers must ensure they are medically fit to drive.

With NHS staff rightly focused on the nationwide response to Coronavirus, these temporary changes will help protect essential supply chains and keep the country moving at this critical time."

### What does this mean for hackney and private hire drivers?

Any driver who has been unable to get a medical due to the Coronavirus pandemic or any driver who will be due a medical by the end of July, will not be required to have a medical for 12 months.

### What if you have a health issue during that period?

Drivers who develop a health issue in that period will be required to notify us as soon as practicably possible. Any drivers with health issues that would either prevent or significantly impact their ability to drive or carry out their duties safely as a Taxi or PHV driver must notify the Licensing Service immediately and their eligibility to continue to operate as a licensed driver will be considered by the Licensing Service on a case by case basis.

Please contact the Licensing Service via telephone or email on 01253 478343 or [licensing@blackpool.gov.uk](mailto:licensing@blackpool.gov.uk)

We will be reviewing our position on this regularly and may extend this relaxation of medicals to include those drivers who will be due to submit to a medical beyond July, if it is deemed appropriate.

## Vehicle inspections from 1 June 2020

Taxi vehicle testing will re-commence at the Central Vehicle Maintenance Unit (CVMU) at Layton Depot from 1 June 2020. Vehicles with Certificates of Compliance that expire in June will be expected to book their vehicle in as normal for an inspection at CVMU.

The test can be done up to 28 days in advance and as long as you produce your existing certificate to CVMU before the inspection begins the new certificate will be dated from the expiry date of the existing certificate.

The test fee, currently £60 (subject to change) must be paid when booking the test. The test can be booked via the Licensing Service by telephone only using the contact numbers at the top of this page under "[Service information](#)".

### Important Information regarding new CoVid19 protocols at CVMU

- Testing will now take place Monday to Thursday. Testing will also be increased from 45 minutes to 60 minutes to give the mechanics time to implement safety measures between tests.
- When arriving at CVMU for the vehicle inspection, all paperwork and keys are to be left in the vehicle at the reception. Only one person per vehicle is allowed at CVMU and taxis are asked not to turn up early as we will only have the facility for one person to wait in the waiting area at any one time. This stipulation is for the safety of the public and staff.
- If your vehicle fails the inspection and requires a re-test these are to be booked in with CVMU directly and a time slot will be allocated. Vehicles will not be re-tested without an appointment, re-test bookings can be made by calling 01253 476636.
- All drivers who bring vehicles in for testing are required to wear a face mask/face covering while in the reception area. If drivers turn up without a face mask/face covering, they will be asked to wait outside of the depot on Plymouth Road until their vehicle inspection has been completed.
- All vehicles are to be presented cleaned/valeted and CVMU will spray the interior of the vehicle, where appropriate, with a disinfectant before we enter the vehicle to ensure the safety of the mechanics. Any vehicle presented which is deemed to be in an unclean condition will be refused an inspection.
- All paperwork will be left in the vehicle with the keys when the pit test has been completed. All defects/failures will be marked on the inspection sheet and photographic evidence of those defects/failures will be attached for reference. If owners/drivers are unsure of a particular defect/failure, they are asked to telephone CVMU where a mechanic will explain the defect/failure to them. Face to face contact will be kept to a minimum unless absolutely necessary.
- There will be markings down outside the reception to maintain social distancing, should there be more than one person in the reception area at any one time.

Inspections or re-tests will not take place on a Friday as CVMU will be open to the public for MOTs.

Certificates requiring plate number changes will be required to book an appointment with CVMU directly on 01253 476636 before they turn up to CVMU, this is again to protect staff and the taxi drivers/owners.

### Guidance on installing protective screens in taxis

You must tell us if you intend to install a protective screen in your hackney carriage or private hire vehicle to help prevent the spread of Covid-19.

If you wish to fit a temporary protective screen in your vehicle, you must first:

1. Tell us that you are planning to fit a protective screen by emailing [licensing@blackpool.gov.uk](mailto:licensing@blackpool.gov.uk)
2. Provide us with confirmation from your insurance company that your insurance is still valid if you fit a protective screen by including the written confirmation from your insurance company when you notify us.

You must also agree to remove the protective screen in less than 21 days after the date the UK Government officially declares an end to the current social distancing restrictions relating to Covid-19.

Upon the Authority being satisfied that drivers/operators of Hackney Carriage/Private Hire vehicles have met the criteria outlined above you will be permitted to install a safety screen in your vehicle. However, Blackpool Council does not seek to approve the use of specific safety screens and it is your responsibility to ensure that the device installed is fit for purpose and does not compromise public safety. In particular you are advised to ensure the following:

- The device is not to be permanently installed in the vehicle
- The device must not be fitted in such a way that it affects the structural integrity of the vehicle, or interfere with any manufacturer fitted safety equipment e.g. air bags
- The device must be fitted in accordance with the manufacturer's instructions
- The device must be composed of fire retardant materials
- The device must meet relevant safety standards

- The device must not impede driver or passenger access or egress to the vehicle
- The device must not impede the driver's vision, movement or communication with passengers

## DfT updated guidance for taxi and Private Hire operators

The Department for Transport has updated [Safer Travel Guidance for Passengers](#) and [Operators](#). The DfT has also prepared some [FAQs and responses to specific issues relating to taxis and private hire vehicles](#) during the Covid-19 pandemic. This includes issues including the wearing of PPE and the approach to the use of face masks amongst other issues.

## Warning for taxi drivers to avoid loan sharks during coronavirus pandemic

Taxi and private hire drivers are being urged to avoid turning to illegal money lenders to make up for any loss of income during the coronavirus pandemic. The warning comes from the England Illegal Money Lending Team (IMLT) – a national Trading Standards team set up to prosecute loan sharks and support their victims.

Loan sharks are unregulated, often give cash loans without any paperwork and charge extortionate interest rates. They may offer what appears to be a quick-fix small loan but in the long term, any money borrowed will come at a very high price and may lead to violence, threats and intimidation.

A loan shark is someone who lends money without the correct permission from the [Financial Conduct Authority \(FCA\)](#)

One case involved a loan shark who preyed on taxi and private hire drivers and provided vehicles with regular payments plus interest and lent money at excessive interest rates. Drivers were typically paying back at least £100 per week. To ensure these loans were repaid, the unscrupulous money lender took different forms of collateral, including spare car keys and an electricity payment card from one customer. Loan sharks often use threats and violence against those who fall behind with their payments, forcing many victims into crime.

Councillor Gillian Campbell, Deputy Leader Blackpool Council, said: “Protecting our community from loan sharks is really important because their actions can have a massive financial and emotional impact. Borrowing from a loan shark can seem like an easy option but it will soon spiral into debts of thousands of pounds that you can never repay. We are pleased to support the work of the National Illegal Money Lending Team to prevent taxi and private hire drivers from falling victim to the unscrupulous activities of loan sharks.”

In most cases, victims are introduced to the lender either through a friend, family member or because they are known in the community. Victims believe the loan shark is offering them a service, but their behaviour can quickly change if repayments are not met.

The England Illegal Money Lending Team (IMLT) have already prosecuted loan sharks for illegal money lending, blackmail, threatening behaviour, violence, kidnap, drugs offences and rape. The Team has had nearly 400 successful prosecutions resulting in 480 years-worth of custodial sentences, and more than 29,000 victims have been helped.

“Drivers have been threatened, intimidated, some have even considered suicide because of the impact that these loan sharks have had in charging exorbitant rates and then demanding the money back. I urge anyone affected by illegal money lending to get in touch for confidential support.” said Tony Quigley, head of the IMLT.

If you believe you have borrowed from a loan shark, contact the England Illegal Money Lending Team in confidence so that they can help you. Call the 24 hour helpline on 0300 555 2222, email [reportaloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk](mailto:reportaloanshark@stoploansharks.gov.uk) or complete an online report form on the [Stop Loan Sharks website](#).

## Important update for the taxi trade re. vehicle testing and MOTs - 21 April 2020

Further to our updates on the 25th March & 1st April, we have made some further changes to the testing requirements for Hackney Carriage & Private Hire vehicles. Vehicles whose Certificates of Compliance expire between 17th April and the 31st May 2020 will now be automatically extended for 3 months. The Central Vehicle Maintenance Unit (CVMU) at Layton will not issue vehicles with a new certificate - the Licensing Service will instead extend existing Certificates on our database. Lancashire Constabulary will be made aware of our decision to extend the Certificates of Compliance, which should avoid any disruption to drivers going about their daily duties.

We are still encouraging vehicles where possible to have an MOT to ensure that they remain in a roadworthy condition. For those vehicles that opt for an MOT the Licensing Service will allow that certificate to remain in place for 6 months. For example if your vehicle is due to be tested on the 1st May 2020 and you have an MOT, for the purposes of the licence it will expire on the 31st October 2020.

Should you decide to get an MOT you must inform the Licensing Service once the MOT certificate has been issued in order that we can

check the details against the online DVLA database and update your vehicle record. The MOT must not be undertaken prior to 28 days before the existing Certificate of Compliance expires or the expiry of the MOT will be adjusted accordingly. Any vehicles that have already provided us with an MOT prior to this decision will be amended where necessary to reflect these changes.

We would like to re-emphasise it is important that vehicles are to be kept in a roadworthy condition and garages will remain open for essential repair work. You can be prosecuted for driving an unsafe vehicle.

## Taxi trade update - 9 April 2020

The Department for Transport has provided a recent update to licensing authorities regarding taxi matters and has signposted some useful information in regards to social distancing and deliveries.

We are aware that hackney carriage and private hire vehicles are undertaking delivery work. The government's [Social distancing in the workplace during coronavirus \(COVID-19\): sector guidance](#) has a section on 'Deliveries' as well as 'Transport businesses'. Measures contained in the section on 'Use of private vehicles and car pooling' would apply to the taxi and private hire vehicle sector e.g. maintain good ventilation.

With regards to vehicle insurance for undertaking deliveries, members of the [Association of British Insurers \(ABI\)](#) have committed to support taxi and private hire drivers seeking alternative sources of income. Licensed taxi or private hire drivers that had hire or reward insurance in place, as of 8 March, will not need to contact their insurer to extend their existing cover while driving this vehicle to carry parcels, medical supplies, household goods, groceries or takeaway meals during the Covid-19 restrictions. The ABI's commitment will be in place until the end of the Covid-19 restrictions, or until 31 July 2020, whichever is sooner.

## Advice for the taxi trade - MOTs and Certificates of Compliance - update 1 April 2020

Due to the coronavirus outbreak the council's vehicle inspection depot in Layton is now closed for taxi inspections until further notice. The licensing service will allow any vehicles requiring an inspection to obtain an MOT certificate in lieu of a Certificate of Compliance in the intervening period. [Government guidance has been issued to MOT testing stations](#) and they have been granted permission to stay open during the current restrictions.

You must inform the Licensing Service once you have had your vehicle tested and an MOT certificate issued in order that we can check the details against the online DVLA database and update your vehicle record. You are not required to produce a copy of the MOT certificate to us. Your MOT will only be valid for licensing purposes until the date your Certificate of Compliance would normally be due.

## Advice for the taxi trade - update 25 March 2020

### MOTs

The government has today announced a temporary MOT exemption will be granted to vehicle owners from Monday 30 March.

In respect of licensed hackney carriage and private hire vehicles which are due an inspection:

1. Vehicles already booked in for tests this week at Layton Depot are unaffected and will continue to be tested as normal
2. Future tests booked in at the depot after next week are to be temporarily suspended - if you have made a booking you will be contacted directly with further information
3. If your existing Certificate of Compliance runs out before 30 March and you do not have a booking this week for an inspection at the council's depot you will need to get an MOT for your vehicle and email it to [licensing@blackpool.gov.uk](mailto:licensing@blackpool.gov.uk) in order that we can update our records. There are no exemptions for MOTs or Certificates of Compliance that run out prior to 30 March.
4. In respect of arrangements from 30 March, further details will be posted on this page once the Government has published its guidance in respect of the new regulations.

It is important to note that vehicles must be kept in a roadworthy condition and that garages will remain open for essential repair work. You can be prosecuted for driving an unsafe vehicle.

### Critical worker status

The Department for Transport has posted an update today on the current situation regarding the continued working of taxis and private hire vehicles:

"Taxis and private hire vehicles can continue to work. But the advice is absolutely clear - people should stay at home if possible. That is the way to save lives and protect our NHS. The public should avoid travel unless absolutely essential. The only reasons to leave our

houses are set out in the government guidance.

Clearly if absolutely necessary to travel by taxi or private hire vehicle, best efforts should be used to follow the guidance as far as is practically possible, including washing your hands as soon as you get home.

Taxi and private hire drivers should not generally be considered critical workers. Those undertaking Home to School transport or the transport of 'extremely vulnerable' people may be considered critical workers on a case-by-case basis. critical workers should also whenever possible make suitable arrangements for their children to stay at home; requests for children to attend school should be discussed with the school."

## Licensing Service update 23 March 2020

Further to government advice in respect of social distancing during the coronavirus pandemic, the Licensing Service counter in the Customer First centre on Corporation Street is now closed. This measure has been taken to protect staff, customers and the wider community in assisting to reduce the transmission of COVID-19 and is in line with other licensing authorities across the UK.

- The service will continue to operate on a "non-contact" basis by telephone and email
- Our phone lines are open from 10.00am to 4.00pm
- We request that only essential applications and paperwork is submitted at this time. If necessary, applications can be emailed to [licensing@blackpool.gov.uk](mailto:licensing@blackpool.gov.uk) Once we have reviewed your application we will contact you for payment by credit/debit card as required

## Information for licensed premises in respect of enforced Business Closures - 21 March 2020

The [Health Protection \(coronavirus, Business Closure\) \(England\) Regulations 2020](#), providing coronavirus closure powers, came into force immediately from 2.00pm on Saturday 21 March 2020.

The regulations provide a criminal sanction (unlimited fine) and enforcement powers to ensure the closure of licensed premises such as restaurants, cafes, bars, pubs, cinemas, theatres, nightclubs, bingo halls, concert halls, casinos, betting shops and other premises such as leisure centres. Exclusions include food and drink take-aways, cafes in hospitals, schools and hotel room service. Please note that although room service is permitted, any hotel breakfast room, dining room, hotel restaurant or hotel bar must remain closed. Bars in private members' clubs must also remain closed. The government will review the need for these restrictions every 28 days.

## Advice to the taxi trade - update 19 March 2020

Following on from the COVID-19 update published below on 13 March we have seen a number of key developments from the government affecting people all across the country. This is an unprecedented situation that is evolving on a daily basis with Government advice constantly being updated. Blackpool Council, as well as all councils across the country, are responding to government updates as soon as they possibly can. The council continues to react to government advice and the corporate leadership team are working hard to ensure that decisions are made in the best interests of its residents and service users and that they are made without delay.

The Licensing Service recognises that the current situation impacts upon the hackney carriage and private hire trade. In terms of maintaining applications, both existing and new applicants, we are doing everything we can to ensure that drivers, proprietors and operators can continue to operate safely during these challenging times. We should all continue to follow government guidance on how we all can reduce the risk of infection to ourselves and others, as well as ensuring we follow advice regarding self-isolation where necessary.

We recognise that many of you will be concerned about how your licences may be affected if you are unable to fulfil a required medical assessment or if your vehicle is due to undertake a "pit" inspection. We are aware that all routine appointments at GP surgeries have been cancelled and it may be possible that at some point in the future the council's vehicle maintenance depot in Layton is unable to remain operational in light of current events. Therefore, we have put a plan in place which ensures that, in the short term at least, these matters will not impact on your ability to remain licensed. These are as follows:

1. In the event that the council depot was to close and "pit" tests are unavailable, we will allow standard MOTs in place of a valid Certificate of Compliance in the intervening period.
2. With immediate effect, existing drivers who would normally be due to produce medical evidence of fitness to drive are NOT required to do so until further notice.

Drivers are reminded that tyres with a tread depth of under 2 mm should be replaced as soon as practicable in line with council policy.

These measures have been implemented with knowledge of government advice available at the time of writing. It is important to note that as government advice changes we will look to adapt to the situation as soon as possible.

The licensing department currently remains open for business, albeit working on a skeleton staff basis. Anyone seeking assistance from the service is encouraged to do so via phone or electronic means rather than in person. Please note there may be a delay in responding to your enquiry, and we would appreciate it if you would refrain from contacting us with non-urgent enquiries in order that we can concentrate on processing applications in order to keep the trade "on the road".

## Advice to the taxi trade - 13 March 2020

The advice in relation to COVID-19 (coronavirus) is changing constantly as is the position in relation to the number and severity of reported cases. As a result we're monitoring and regularly reviewing the situation and responding accordingly.

It is important to take advice and guidance from Public Health England (PHE) and government websites and not from social media websites. Following the advice of Public Health England, Blackpool Council is providing the following guidance to taxi and private hire drivers to help prevent the catching and spreading of coronavirus.

Drivers are encouraged to:

- Always carry tissues and use them to catch coughs and sneezes
- Dispose of used tissues in the bin as soon as possible
- Wash hands thoroughly and regularly with soap and water, or use sanitiser gel, to kill germs
- Clean surfaces regularly with sanitising wipes or spray to get rid of germs

We advise all taxi and private hire drivers to follow these simple and sensible steps at all times and particularly in the wake of the outbreak of coronavirus. We would also encourage licensees to take sensible and routine precautionary measures. Taxi drivers should regularly clean card payment devices, seatbelt buckles, door handles and other surfaces that customers may touch. Licensees who share a taxi or private hire vehicle with other drivers should regularly clean the steering wheel and instruments.

Public Health England have published information for [employers and businesses](#) and [staff in the transport sector](#) which includes guidance on face masks.

Public Health England is the lead agency and is providing [regularly updated information](#) for the public on the outbreak of coronavirus, including the current situation in the UK and information about the virus and its symptoms.

If you are worried about coronavirus, have a cough, temperature or shortness of breath and have been in physical contact with someone from an affected area then the NHS advises you to:

- Stay indoors and avoid contact with other people as you would with the flu
- Call NHS 111

We would expect all private hire operators to fully cooperate with any enquiries they may receive from Public Health England or any other relevant agencies.

Whilst the above advice is current at the time of writing, please regularly check the Public Health England and [NHS](#) websites for updated information.

### Licensing service

Municipal buildings, Corporation Street, Blackpool, FY1 1NF

**Telephone** 01253 478570

**Email** [licensing@blackpool.gov.uk](mailto:licensing@blackpool.gov.uk)

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