



Department
for Transport

From the Secretary of State
The Rt Hon Mark Harper MP

Great Minster House
33 Horseferry Road
London
SW1P 4DR

Mr Simon Milburn,
Area Coroner, Coroners Office
Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Coroner Service
Lawrence Court
Princes Street
Huntingdon
PE29 3PA

[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]
[REDACTED]

05 January 2024

Dear Mr Milburn,

Thank you for your report of 18 August 2023 made under the Coroners and Justice Act 2009 and Regulations 28 and 29 of the Coroners (Investigations) Regulations 2013, following the inquest you conducted into the death of Louis Steven James Thorold.

I was very sorry to learn of the circumstances of Louis Thorold's death and would like to express my sincere condolences to his family.

I have considered your report and its recommendations very carefully and although our roads are some of the safest in the world, I would like to assure you that we are not complacent about road safety. I must stress that one road death is one too many and the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) is focused on ensuring that only those who meet the required medical standards are granted a licence.

You set out your concerns that if drivers beyond the age of 70 continue to drive without independent medical scrutiny of their continued ability to drive then there is a risk of deaths occurring in similar circumstances and you asked that the department take action to prevent future deaths.

The current driving licence arrangements are underpinned by a legal requirement that all drivers, of any age, must inform the DVLA if at any time they develop a medical condition that may affect safe driving. All drivers must meet the appropriate health standards for fitness to drive and a licence will only be issued to those who meet those standards.

When applying for or renewing a driving licence, applicants must self-declare whether they have any medical conditions. The DVLA will investigate drivers who notify a relevant medical condition by obtaining information from them and where appropriate from their medical professionals.

The DVLA will also investigate notifications from third parties, including concerned family, neighbours, or health care professionals. This is in recognition of the fact there may be times when individual drivers do not notify the DVLA appropriately or where a health condition affects their insight into their driving safely.

The DVLA takes road safety very seriously and wants to make sure that licence holders are fit and safe to drive. Drivers are encouraged to discuss any concerns about their driving fitness with their own medical professionals.

Although there is no legal obligation on medical professionals to notify the DVLA about a patient who is medically unfit to drive, they do have a duty of care to their patient and to the public to report when they have concerns and their patient is unwilling or unable to notify the DVLA. The guidelines issued by the General Medical Council (GMC) were updated in April 2017 and highlight a doctor's duty to disclose information to the DVLA where the patient has failed to do so.

In regard to older drivers, it is recognised that health can deteriorate in later life and driving licences expire at age 70 and are then renewed at least every three years. Applicants renewing a licence from age 70 must declare that they meet the legal eyesight standards for safe driving and confirm whether they have any relevant medical conditions which may affect safe driving. These regular renewals provide a timely reminder for drivers to consider their health in the context of driving.

We have considered whether any changes to this policy are justified and proportionate. Driver licensing arrangements are designed to be balanced and proportionate for all drivers, and we are of the view that the current process for drivers renewing their licence at 70 strikes the appropriate balance between fairness, road safety and the individual. There is little evidence to suggest that introducing a stricter regime which includes mandatory testing or medical examination would improve road safety. For this reason, we do not propose to change the current approach.

The DVLA recently published a Call for Evidence (CfE) on driver licensing for people with medical conditions. The CfE ran for 12 weeks and was an early stage request for input into a review of the legislative framework. Evidence has been gathered from members of the public and a range of experts across organisations. The CfE closed on 22 October and the responses are currently being analysed.

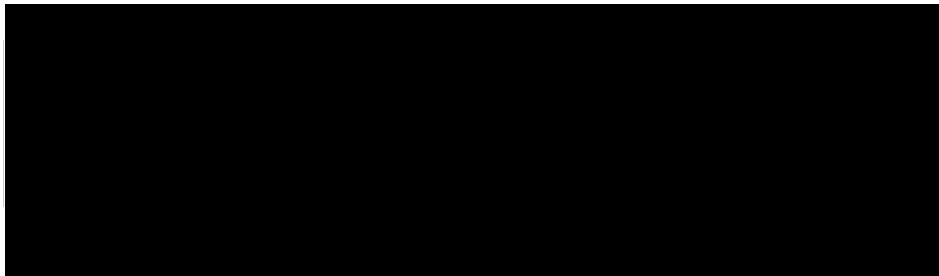
The full information regarding the CfE is available via <https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/driver-licensing-for-people-with-medical-conditions-call-for-evidence>

The CfE is looking to identify areas where policy or legislative changes may be able to improve outcomes for all drivers and other road users. Once the outcomes to the CfE have been analysed the DVLA will be in a position to provide an update to Ministers.

The Department for Transport does recognise that older people must be able to maintain the skills and confidence required to remain safe and effective drivers. With funding from my department, the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents (RoSPA) has developed an older drivers website www.olderdrivers.org.uk/. The website contains information to help older people to continue to drive for as long as they are safe to do so. It includes details on driving assessments and refresher training. It also provides advice on making the decision to retire from driving, if an individual is no longer able to drive safely. Driver education schemes are also provided by local authorities, and these are an effective way of providing support for older drivers and ensuring they remain fit and competent to drive.

I can assure you that our policies are kept under constant review and reducing the numbers of those killed and injured on our roads is a key priority for the Department.

Yours sincerely,



The Rt Hon Mark Harper MP

SECRETARY OF STATE FOR TRANSPORT