HARROW
MONITORING GROUP

advocating inclusion so everyone can access - and shape - the services they need
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Tim Moss CBE
Chief Executive
Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency

Sent via email: Tim.Moss@dvla.gov.uk

Dear Mr Moss

Driving licence renewal at 70: older people should not have to struggle to prove who they are

Harrow Monitoring Group is writing following accounts from older residents who have encountered considerable difficulty renewing their driving licences through the GOV.UK service for people aged 70 and over. Their experiences raise a serious question about the design of this service: has DVLA adequately considered the people required to use it, including those with limited digital confidence, reduced dexterity or no readily available assistance?

Residents describe choosing the online route partly because the postal alternative presents its own obstacles. The return envelope requires the correct postage, which may mean visiting a Post Office or finding someone willing and able to obtain a stamp for them. What appears to be a minor administrative requirement can create a real barrier for someone with restricted mobility or limited support. Providing a prepaid return envelope would be a straightforward and practical improvement.

Those turning to the online service expect a convenient way to complete a routine renewal. Instead, some describe a succession of hurdles: creating an account, navigating identity checks, attempting unsuccessfully to use a valid driving licence as photographic identification, and trying a passport route that presents security questions whose connection to licence renewal is unclear to them. They also report being directed to download a mobile application, photograph identity documents and complete facial verification. Please clarify which stages belong to DVLA and which are provided through GOV.UK One Login or another government service, and who takes responsibility when the overall journey fails.

For some older people, these requirements are physically difficult as well as confusing. Shaky hands can make it hard to position a document, hold a phone steadily or complete an image capture successfully. Residents report that apparently small errors lead to failed verification, without sufficiently clear explanations or an effective route to human assistance. Repeated rejection can leave an applicant anxious, frustrated and unsure how to proceed.

An inability to satisfy a smartphone camera is not, in itself, evidence that a person cannot drive safely. A service specifically intended for older drivers should anticipate that some users will have tremor, impaired vision or difficulty handling a small screen. These are foreseeable needs that should inform the design of the service from the outset.

HMG recognises the importance of protecting personal information and preventing identity fraud. However, security measures must be proportionate, understandable and accessible. DVLA already holds a licensing record for the person seeking renewal. Please explain why further identity checks are required in the circumstances described, why a current DVLA-issued photocard may fail verification, and what alternative is available when the difficulty lies with the technology rather than the applicant's identity.

The existence of a postal route does not settle these concerns. Applicants who have spent considerable time attempting online renewal should not simply be left to abandon the process, obtain postage and start again. Nor should access depend on having a relative, neighbour or voluntary organisation available to manage the procedure. Older people should be able to renew with dignity and retain control over their personal information.

We ask DVLA to review the complete renewal journey with older users, including people with tremor, visual impairments, limited digital skills and no smartphone. That review should examine failed identity checks and abandoned applications, rather than relying solely on feedback from people who successfully complete the process. Please provide the findings of any existing accessibility testing and explain what changes have followed.

We also seek practical action: prepaid return envelopes; clear guidance about the identity-check options available; an accessible alternative to mobile image capture and facial verification; and readily available staff assistance when automated checks fail. Applicants should receive clear explanations of unsuccessful checks and a workable next step, rather than repeated instructions to attempt the same unsuccessful procedure.

Please identify the senior officer accountable for the accessibility of this service and provide a substantive response addressing these concerns, the action DVLA will take and the timetable for improvement. Where responsibility is shared with another government body, we expect a coordinated response rather than residents being passed between organisations.

Driving can be essential to older people's independence, social contact and access to services. DVLA should be able to demonstrate that its renewal arrangements support eligible older drivers through a necessary process. The experiences reported to HMG suggest that, for some residents, the process itself has become an obstacle. That requires attention and a clear public answer.

In line with HMG's commitment to transparency and public accountability, this letter is in the public domain and is being shared with the Minister for Roads, Age UK and Harrow's Members of Parliament, given the wider implications for older people's access to public services.

Yours faithfully

Husain Akhtar
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Harrow Monitoring Group
former Councillor, London Borough of Harrow