Only fair to keep OTC

Early in my road transport career, one of my roles was to provide quality assurance audits to fleet operators. Occasionally, I was called to provide evidence at a public inquiry (PI) in front of traffic commissioners (whose role is currently being reviewed by DfT).

The operators brought to PI may have had non-compliance issues, and I would have to detail the findings of the operator audits. I would explain what interventions and levels of support had been applied to monitor their future progress. As part of this, I would write a letter to the TC.

Some operators called up to a PI will have had significant failings, no question. In these circumstances, it's better to have someone unbiased listening to the evidence. A non-compliance detailed in a report may not portray the whole story; there could be mitigating circumstances. It's only fair that operators are given a chance to explain why they didn't do what they should have done.

Some operators may maliciously contravene their operator licence undertakings and abuse the system to maximise their personal gain. These are the operators that should have their licences revoked and their repute removed. But I've also seen well-meaning companies who have fallen foul of the rules through a misunderstanding or a lack of education. These may operate vehicles as a subsidiary to their main business to transport their own goods, but of course the same rules apply to them.

Traffic commissioners are there to make sure no-one has an unfair advantage. There is a financial impact of operating within the rules; TCs curtail the unscrupulous operators who don't want to. By the same token, TCs also examine the strength of the evidence brought by DVSA to verify its accuracy and challenge any areas of ambiguity to ensure fairness.

Revoking an operator's licence can take away someone's livelihood, so reviewing the case against them impartially, as TCs do, plays a fundamental role in governance of the road transport industry. Without them, who would make sure both sides play fair?

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