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Ignorance of ULEZ is no bliss for Surrey drivers

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Surrey County Council has stood by its decision not to allow ULEZ signs in the county, despite data showing tens of thousands of Surrey motorists have been hit with fines for breaking the zone's rules.

More than £15 million in penalties has been charged to addresses in Surrey for breaching the terms of London's Ultra Low Emission Zone, figures obtained through a freedom of information request have revealed.

The ULEZ, which imposes a £12.50 daily charge on high polluting vehicles that enter its boundaries, was first implemented in central London in 2019, but has since grown to cover almost the entirety of Greater London.

Surrey County Council vehemently opposed the 2023 expansion into the outer London suburbs, and refused to install ULEZ signage on Surrey's roads.

But tens of thousands of Surrey drivers have received penalty charge notices (PCNs) for not paying ULEZ charges almost every year of its existence, hitting a peak of 76,305 fines handed out in 2024.

The council's transport lead Councillor Matt Furniss (Conservative: Pilgrims) told the Local Democracy Reporting Service the council's stance on refusing ULEZ signage and cameras in Surrey would remain "unchanged" as no measures to mitigate its impact on motorists had been agreed.

He said: "Many other local authorities also refrained from entering into this agreement. This situation remains unchanged as sadly none of the mitigation measures put forward to support Surrey residents have been put in place by the Mayor of London or Transport for London (TfL)."

A scrappage scheme to replace older, non-compliant cars was offered to London residents by Mayor Sadiq Khan, but this was not extended to people living in the home counties – many of whom commute by car into the capital.

Councillor Furniss added: "We continue to urge the Mayor and TfL to do what is right and extend the scrappage scheme outside of London for those that are impacted, provide exemption for key workers, and provide more and better bus routes between Surrey and London."

The figures, which came from a freedom of information request to TfL, showed that £15.513 million in fines to drivers for not paying ULEZ charges have been issued to addresses in Surrey since the scheme started in 2019.

TfL's data revealed Surrey accounts for around three percent of all ULEZ penalties issued across this time period.

Fines are typically issued at £180, but this is reduced to £90 if it is paid within 14 days. However, if the PCN is still unpaid 28 days after it was issued, then a £270 charge certificate can be sent out.

In addition, tens of thousands of Surrey motorists have appealed fines imposed upon them for this reason – with more than two thirds being successful at the first appeal stage according to TfL data.

When a motorist receives a PCN, they can first appeal directly to TfL itself – and the figures showed that 43,664 appeals reached this stage from Surrey since 2019, of which 29,931 were accepted – meaning the fine was cancelled.

If an appeal is rejected at this stage, there remains the option to pursue it further at a tribunal.

A total of 2,049 Surrey appeals reached this stage over the same period, although 1,107 of these were refused. Some appeals listed at both stages remain pending.

Sadiq Khan has vigorously defended the ULEZ scheme as a vital measure to reduce dangerous levels of pollution in the capital – with recent air quality studies suggesting it has been successful to this end.

However, critics say it is punitive to lower income households, and that many motorists in the home counties who frequently drive into London were given no say over its introduction.

A TfL spokesperson said: "Those outside the London boundary are also benefitting from cleaner air, with drivers outside the capital shifting to vehicles that meet the standards.

"The ULEZ is not about making money. It is generating ever smaller net revenues as it matures, with the most recent data showing that more than 97 per cent of vehicles seen driving in the zone are compliant."

Any income raised by ULEZ charges is invested into improving TfL's public transport network, some of which stretches into Surrey.

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The spokesperson added: “We worked with councils on the boundaries of London ahead of the expansion of ULEZ and rely on their cooperation to put up ULEZ warning signages on the approach to the zone.

“There is extensive signage on the boundary itself and to raise awareness, we launched a multi-channel campaign targeting Londoners and home counties drivers, including radio ads, ahead of the expansion and welcomed their views on our consultation.”

James Moules Local Democracy Reporter

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Image: ULEZ signs on A3 near New Malden Google Street view

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