

Public Protection Chairs Report

Control of Direct Debit Face to Face fundraisers – 22.09.14

Unlike street or door to door collections, which the Borough Council has powers to grant permission for, there are no current provisions to regulate face to face (direct debit) fundraisers who tend to operate on the street in locations such as town centres.

Local Government is encouraged to sign up to The Public Funding Regulatory Association (PFRA). The PFRA is a charity led organisation and a self regulatory body for all types of fundraising. The PFRA acts as a bridge between councils and charities practising face to face fundraising, maintaining professional standards and ensuring fair allocation of fundraising activities on the ground. If the Council were to sign up to the PFRA, there would be a particular burden on officer time.

Face to face fundraisers are present in Ironmarket, Castle Walks and other streets within Newcastle town centre. The majority of fundraisers already act in a professional manner and do not cause problems for shoppers in the town centre. There have been only two incidences of aggressive face to face fundraisers raised with the council in recent times.

The committee resolved that the council continues to permit self regulation of direct debit face to face fundraisers. If a problem does arise in the future, the council could revisit this matter for further discussion and action. It was felt that whilst the PFRA could be useful, only the charities that are signed up to them are monitored. There are thousands of charities that are not signed up to the PFRA and are not accountable to that organisation. Therefore the council would still not gain any new powers to tackle those outside of the organisation. It was also noted that the council would find it difficult to give officer time to such a project in times of financial constraints.

Draft Taxi Licensing Policy for Newcastle-under-Lyme – 22.09.14

The committee gave consideration to an emerging draft taxi licensing policy and was asked to make comments and recommendations having regard to the representation received from the taxi and private hire trade in the borough and to agree a timetable for implementation of the policy.

The committee was also asked to provide feedback and suggestions on the draft document to assist with the production of an updated draft policy that, it was proposed, would go out for consultation on 1st November 2014. Specifically the committee was invited to comment on options for a vehicle age policy and tinted windows on vehicles.

In respect of the vehicle age policy the committee expressed a preference to introduce a system whereby that a pre-test by an independent practitioner would need to be passed prior to an operator presenting a vehicle that is over eight years old for testing at the depot. An independent contractor could be another garage or an organisation such as the AA or RAC. The cost of this process would have to be met by the owner of the vehicle.

The committee resolved that the draft policy and comments and recommendations made by representatives and private hire trade in the borough be noted. The committee agreed to the timetable set out in the officer's report for implementation of the policy. It was also decided that the public protection committee meet on extra dates in October 2014 and February 2015. In light of

what was agreed above, it was decided the previous policy resolution relating to the age of hackney carriage vehicles, as agreed by Council on 16th April 2014, be not implemented on 1st January 2014.

Age Limit for Private Hire and Hackney Carriage Vehicles – 20.10.14

The committee received a report requesting members consider additional recommendations in relation to the age policy for Private Hire and Hackney Carriage vehicles operating in the borough.

Following the decision of the Public Protection Committee at its meeting on 22nd September a letter had been received from representatives of the Private Hire trade requesting that, as a result of the resolution passed on 22nd September 2014, the age limit of eight years for Private Hire vehicles was also suspended pending implementation of the new Taxi Licensing Policy in March 2015. The committee agreed that parity needed to be maintained between the Private Hire and Hackney Carriage vehicles.

After much discussion, the committee agreed that any Hackney Carriage and Private Hire licenses issued to vehicles over 8 years of age from 21st October 2014 will only continue to a full twelve month period if they meet any 'exceptional circumstances' conditions that may be continued within the final Taxi Licensing Policy. Any vehicles falling into that category will have until 31st March 2015 to meet any "exceptional condition" standards that may be contained in the final Taxi Licensing Policy. In the case that a vehicle fails to meet the 'exceptional circumstances' conditions, the license will be deemed expired and a refund would be made.

Draft Taxi Licensing Policy for Consultation – 20.10.14

The committee agreed to include the "exceptional conditions" age policy for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire vehicles in the councils Draft Taxi Policy Document before being sent out for full consultation. There was general agreement between members that a blanket cut off policy was not a way forward. Many members of the committee stated they would be making individual representations during the consultation period.

The committee agreed to send out the Draft Taxi Licensing Policy on 1st November 2014 and the public will be given 3 months to respond. The committee will then review the responses and hopefully adopt a new policy in February 2015. The new policy will take immediate effect at the February meeting.

Taxi and Private Hire Vehicle Fees 2015/16 – 03.11.14

The committee considered a report with regards to the raising of fees for the trade. Most fees cover administration and process costs and the committee agreed that there had already been an in-depth look at fees in 2013/2014. Therefore it was agreed that prices should just increase with inflation, but the final decision would have to be made by the cabinet.