

Dear Sir,

This letter is written on behalf of the Newcastle under Lyme Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Associations, The Taxi trade Group and numerous other members of the trade. This letter is written to object to the proposed rise in the Licence Fees announced recently by the Borough Council. The notice was published and advertised on the 10th January 2020 giving a 28 day period in which to object.

There is no reason given within the notice as to why the increase in fees is required and indeed there has been no reasons given for the previous rises in fees which appear to have occurred annually since 2017.

There is no justification for these rises as the cost of administrating the Licensing Department has not increased and the Service provided by the Licensing Department and the Garage has got progressively worse not better. There are numerous delays, inaccurate information passed to Licence holders and changes in procedures and requirements that have resulted in many Licence holders losing their employment, ability to earn a living or even to lose their licences which makes the whole need to increase the fees yet again both unnecessary and somewhat hypocritical.

The Associations can see no justification for these proposed rises in fees and there is no justification or reasoning for these rises given in the notice of the 10th January 2020 or in the previous notice for the rise proposed in April 2019. As such we would strongly object to these rises and would ask the Borough Council to reconsider this matter and they at least give some justification or reasoning for the rises.

For some years now Local Authorities have been bound by the Local Government Ombudsman Directive that the fees set for Taxi Licensing should be such that the fees covered the actual cost of Administrating the Licensing Function. The Licensing Budget should not make a loss or profit and should be set aside from other budgets and "ring fenced" to prevent the money being spent elsewhere. The Local Government Ombudsman Office also directed that the Licensing Budget for Taxi and Private Hire should be completely separate from all other budgets in order that it is clear to all that the fees are set appropriately. We have, on a number of occasions in the past requested that the details of the Licensing Budget be provided to the Association to ensure that the Borough Council have been adhering to the requirements of the Legislation. These requests have been made verbally at a number of meetings over time but to date no information has been forthcoming.

We would now like to officially request the Taxi and Private Hire Licensing Budgets for the years 2016-2017, 2017-2018 and 2018-2019. This request is made under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 which states that Council has 20 working days to respond to this request.

The Associations have registered their objection to these proposed rises and would hope that the Borough Council will take this letter as one letter which covers all the members of the Associations and that the Borough Council reconsider these rises and the need to increase the fees be reassessed.

Yours faithfully,

Murtaza Alam

Secretary Newcastle Hackney Carriage Association.