

Dear Sir,

I am writing this letter to object to the proposed rise in the Licence Fees announced recently by the Borough Council. I have been representing the Taxi Trade in Newcastle over the last 3 years and I have made representations on their behalf to previous proposed increases in fees and changes to the Policy. I feel that there is no reason why I cannot make a representation in my own right.

There is no reason given within the notice as to why the increase in fees is required and indeed there were no reasons given for the previous rise in fees which was approved in April 2020 and implemented in June 2020 only 4 months ago. The Taxi Trade made representations against the previous rise in fees and these were considered by the Licensing and Public Protection Committee on 27th April 2020 however the minutes of this meeting and the report that was produced to the Committee did not give any details as to why there was a need to increase the fees. Likewise, there was no detail about why there was a need to increase the fees contained in the report to the Licensing and Public Protection Committee at the meeting of 8th January 2020, the Committee authorised the advertising of the proposed rise in the Local Press following this meeting.

The latest proposed increases were subject to a report to the Licensing and Public Protection Committee on the 12th October 2020 again there is no reason given in the report as to why the increases are required and the Committee authorized the advertising of the proposed increases and set the consultation period to commence for 28 days ending on the 12th November 2020.

I would like to request that this consultation is postponed or delayed, considering that Covid Crisis and the restrictions imposed by the lock down are not due to be lifted until 2nd December 2020. There has been no opportunity to consult with the other Taxi Trade members during the current restrictions and therefore the trade has been unable to discuss this and make meaningful representation against the proposed rise. A postponement or delay would also give the Licensing Service the opportunity to give full justification for the proposed rise in fees.

The Notice produced by the Council states that any rise in fees will not be implemented until April 2021 so therefore a postponement until the New Year should not be an issue. As the requirement is for a 28 day consultation period over the proposals a new consultation could be commenced in the New Year and there would still be time to have the 28 day consultation period before the implementation date of the 1st April 2020. The previous consultation period was not commenced until 10th January 2020 and ran until

6th February and the Committee hearing was 27th April so the Council cannot claim that a delay is not justified

I would consider this a sensible and reasonable request and hope that the Licensing Service can agree there is sufficient time to complete a full consultation in the New Year and therefore the consultation can be postponed.

There is no justification for these rises as the cost of administering 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 apply to increase the fees again less than 5 months after the last increase both unnecessary and unjustified.

Newcastle Borough Council have not given any justification for these proposed rises in fees and as the Local Government Ombudsman Directive states that the fees set for Taxi Licensing should be such that the fees covered the actual cost of Administering the Licensing Function, then surely the Council have to give the reason why the rise in fees is required.

The Taxi trade in Newcastle, like the rest of the country, is suffering financially because of the Covid 19 crisis and the number of customers and journeys has dropped dramatically. Many of the drivers have made the decision to stop working until the crisis is over and the country returns to a semblance of normality. As there is no sign of this occurring in the coming months there seems no reason to assume that the Taxi Trade will recover until the middle of next year, even the lifting of the lockdown will have little effect on the business as restrictions will still be in place until the crisis is finally over. The Government has recently extended the furlough scheme until March 2021 which is a further indication that the Government accepts that the effects of the Covid Crisis will be ongoing until the Spring 2021 so the need to hold the consultation at the present time seems to be unjustified.

Yours faithfully

Trent Licensing