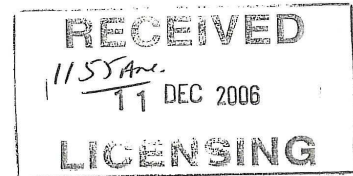


TRADE LETTER OF OBJECTION 11.12.06

11 12 .06

J. Buxton,  
Director of Development and Environment  
Darlington Borough Council  
Town Hall  
DARLINGTON  
DL1 5RF



Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976  
S70 – Variation of Fees and Charges – April, 2007

Dear Sir,

Further to the Statutory Notice published by the Council on 11<sup>th</sup> November, 2006. and receipt of the information requested in our recent letter, We now attach our detailed **OBJECTION** to the proposed variation of fees and charges for the licensing of Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles as advertised.

As we have only had since 08 12 06 to respond to the information supplied and prepare our submission, it has not been possible to circulate the detailed response amongst group members for comment and approval. The Objection should be accepted as being the response of the persons noted on the objection submitted in January, 2006 with respect to the fees increase imposed in April; this year. When we have had the opportunity to consult with individual members of the group we will submit a schedule of persons supporting this current objection.

We look forward to an acknowledgement of receipt of this letter of objection.

Yours faithfully,  
For and on behalf of  
Darlington Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Group.

Ms. Linda Linley

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be "PP" followed by a large, stylized flourish that extends to the right.

## DARLINGTON HACKNEY CARRIAGE AND PRIVATE HIRE GROUP

Darlington Borough Council.

Local Government Miscellaneous (Provisions) Act 1976  
S70 Fees and Charges

Detailed commentary and summary of Objection to the proposed variation of fess for Licensing of Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles as advertised by the Council.

The Group notes with concern the information provided under cover of Ms. Ross's letter of 08 12 06.

Analysis of the financial data provided recently is considerably at variance with the estimates provided in January, 2006 and which formed the basis of our detailed objection to the last fee increases proposed and accepted by the Cabinet in March, 2006.

We do not believe that the budgetary basis of the licensing fees is stable or objectively supported by independent evidence.

Considerable variance between the estimates provided for 2006/07 and the forecast outturn now provided, means that it is impossible to place any credence on the estimates for 2007/08.

No explanation of the differences in the cost heads included in the current year account, as against the budget provided to us, and the significant cost/income variations, are provided with the response to our enquiry.

In the absence of any explanations for the variances we can only highlight these in the following paragraphs and trust that the Council will be able to advance justification for the considerable differences which call into question the reliability of the process by which the Council assembles its estimated costs for this area of activity: which are then recovered by way of fees and charges levied on the trade.

### **Salaries and Oncosts**

We maintain our view that the total staff cost chargeable to the administration and enforcement of Taxi Licensing matters is excessive, being up to 100% higher than that applicable in a number of other North East authorities.

### **Operational Buildings a/c 11805**

We note that this cost is forecast at £3930 to year end against a budget of £2980.  
Has the taxi licensing office been reassessed on a square footage basis?

**Lump sum and mileage allowances a/c's 16040 and 16070**

These are forecast to be only two thirds of the budget. Is the number of vehicles charged against the account less or is less mileage being incurred on taxi licensing matters?

**Equipment Costs a/c 20315**

Why is the forecast expenditure for the year, at £3000, some £5100 below the estimate in the budget?

**Legal Fees a/c 22636**

We note the forecast outturn of £1700 is £4300 less than the budget. We queried this figure in our last objection as it was being budgeted at 10 times the previous year figure

**Advertising a/c 24030**

We are concerned by the cost of statutory advertising of fees increases.

The council might reflect on the additional cost to the trade involved in this instance, where the additional revenue from fees will be largely absorbed by the costs of advertising the increase.

**Accounting Services a/c 40415**

This cost head was not shown in the budget provided in January, 2006. Why is a cost now included and how is the sum of £2880 derived?

**Dev. and Env. Support Services a/c 41470**

This account is now forecast to charge £15780 for 2006/07 some £7400 more than shown in the budget. Why has the recharge been forecast to be so much greater than that shown in the budget in January, 2006?

In summary, the variances on buildings costs +950, Mileage and lump sum allowances (1690), Supplies and Services (10281) and Central support + 11717 mean that comparison of the budget advised for 2006/07 and the forecast outturn seriously undermines the credibility of the report submitted to the Cabinet, in March, 2006.

**Income**

We note the reductions in income which result from the noticeable reduction in licensed driver numbers and vehicles plated. We can only foresee a continuing trend in these given the current licensing policy and regime in Darlington.

The consequences in terms of the availability of late night transport for the public are already apparent.

We are concerned that the amount of sundry income is forecast at only £1600 against a budget of £8800. Why is this?

**Summary** – Since the budget estimates are the basis upon which the Council seeks to set fees and charges, it is clearly of paramount importance that the structure and elements of the Taxi Licensing Cost Centre are properly and objectively derived.

At present we can have no belief that budgets are either robust or accurate.

**For those reasons we urge the Council to withdraw the proposed fee increases.**

**11 December, 2006.**