

## Members of the Planning and Licensing Committee

The Brentwood Taxi Trade Consultative Group (TTCG) was set up many years ago to provide a forum for the trade, officers and councillors to meet and discuss policy in a relatively informal yet also constructive way. Over the years, the TTCG has been key to ensuring that the trade in Brentwood works to high standards with a shared appreciation of the agreeing and then maintaining those standards by the trade as a whole. We appreciate that the group does not make decisions and that the discussions held do not in any way bind the individual councillors who attend the Planning and Licensing Committee.

The TTCG members have been appointed to represent Hackney Carriage and Private Hire drivers. Hackney Carriage and Private Hire proprietors as well as taxi operators in the Borough. The TTCG members work closely with all aspects of the trade who work both in Brentwood and Shenfield and the TTCG members jointly represent over 350 individuals who work within this trade.

The TTCG members have spent many months discussing the fees for Driver Licences which is now on the agenda of the Planning and Licensing Committee.

We would like you to make you aware of the points below which we hope you will consider when making your decision on this proposal which has been put forward by the Principal Licensing Officer, Paul Adams.

1. The fee for renewing a driver licence is currently £240 which if this proposal is agreed by members will increase to £406. This is a substantial increase and is way above inflation.
2. The trade in Brentwood is increasingly under threat from Uber drivers who operate under TFL rules which are much less stringent than those in Brentwood. Uber drivers have no topographical knowledge of Brentwood and recently the criminal record checks as well as the medical records of 13,000 Uber drivers have been brought into question. Uber drivers in Brentwood are paid a "retainer" of between £8.50 and £12.50 per hour just to sit and wait for potential bookings. The Uber platform is looking to achieve market domination to such a level that Brentwood Licensed drivers will be forced out of their trade.
3. The TTCG members have been inundated with complaints from hundreds of our drivers pointing out that the level of service from the Licensing Department has reached an all-time low. We are being asked to pay an increased fee for a declining level of service.
4. The TTCG and its members have been supplied with numerous financial statements over the past 2 years which have proven, when their accuracy was questioned by the trade, to be factually incorrect and flawed and later rescinded by the finance department and the licensing department. The TTCG have been informed by the Principle Licensing Officer that his predecessor, Gary O'Shea, made fundamental errors when presenting information to members and the anticipated £41,716 **surplus** on this account shown in the Agenda papers for the Planning and Licensing Committee of 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2015 was in fact a £40,000 **deficit**. This is, quite frankly, incredulous and we require a full written explanation from Head of Service.
5. The TTCG need to understand why the cost from Financial Services to the Drivers Licence account was £3,792.99 as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2016 and yet the cost of Financial Services on this account was £8,594.47 as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2015, £10,941.28 as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2014 and £11,768.48 as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013.

6. It is incredulous that as at 31<sup>st</sup> March 2013 £31,207.16 was charged for Financial Services to the taxi trade and £29,888.94 was charged in 2014 just for issuing our licences! Once again, we require a full written explanation from Head of Service.
7. The TTCG have requested information regarding time monitoring of Licensing staff which we were assured was being completed and we were assured at previous TTCG meetings that these Licensing team time records were being used to calculate this year's licence fees. However, when we requested copies of these time monitoring sheets (which we are entitled to view under the FOI Act), we were advised that no such sheets existed and were not being filled out. It beggars belief that these actions are deemed acceptable within this department.

#### **Going forwards**

8. The TTCG would request that accurate time recording of officers' time is carried out in order to set the fees in line with the legislation. This is vital because the Licensing department has been completely restructured over the last 12 months. Accounting for officer time is now further complicated by the fact that officers time is now split between Brentwood and Thurrock local authorities. The rationale for the changes was to improve efficiency and reduce costs. So, the changes should have led to a welcome reduction in licence fees, rather than any further increase.
9. The TTCG will not object to the fees as proposed if we can be provided with certain assurances. These assurances are:
  - i) accurate recording of officer activity will take place,
  - ii) that the time recording will be subject to quarterly review by managers,
  - iii) quarterly reviews take place of the different taxi licence accounts, measuring performance against the budgets,
  - iv) that the management information relating to these quarterly reviews is shared with representatives of the TTCG,
  - v) that the TTCG is consulted on any action which it is proposed be taken to deal with any consequent deficit or surplus on all or any of the taxi licence fee accounts.
10. If assurances can be given re points i) to v) above, then the TTCG would not oppose the proposed licence fees, on the understanding that this is being done, so that in the future there can be certainty on the accuracy of the recording of time and expenditure and confidence that the fees levied are lawfully set at the correct level.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'D. Bond'.

Signed on behalf of:

Members of the Taxi Trade Consultative Group