

APPENDIX A

Responses to Fees and Charges 2021/2022 Consultation

Austin Blackburn

I do not have a problem with inflationary increases, but this may be untimely for many in the taxi industry whilst there is so little work

I am little confused on how we pay for our two MOT's per year. Is it part of the initial PH operators licence fee?

Vehicle Exemption certs seem a good idea for those in that business.

When would we be subject to the general admin fee. I think this needs to be stated or examples given.

Officer Comments:

I note your concern that this inflationary increase is untimely and your comment with regard to this will be brought back before the Licensing Committee in March for further consideration.

Currently the 2 annual garage test fees are included in the vehicle licence fee. What is proposed is to remove this from the vehicle licence fee. Vehicle proprietors will telephone through to the Sevenoaks Customer Solutions Team to book their vehicle garage tests (the same as they currently do), and payment for the garage test will be taken at this point.

The general admin fee is proposed to support the processing of 6 monthly manual DBS checks on any drivers who do not take the opportunity to register with the DBS update service. It will also give the local authority the ability to charge an administrative fee should further changes to the service with serious resource issues be raised at future dates. This will enable us to keep the service at a self-funding level.

Ian Griffin

The decision to increase the charges across the board are clearly taken by people who have received there full salary/pension during the last 10 months.

I wouldn't expect a reduction from any council, let alone Sevenoaks, but when many of the drivers and living on a greatly reduced wage any increase is just another slap in the face. It can take years to save a few thousand pounds just a few weeks to live on it.

Then you bring in additional charges £50 for ten/fifteen minutes work and a piece of good quality paper, to issue an exemption certificate. Could be looked upon as a good hourly rate.

I do appreciate you have to make difficult decisions but you're hitting already badly damaged men and women.

I urge you to reconsider these increases, as the pandemic is a long way from finishing and something near to normal it's months if not years beyond that.

Additionally has the council spent any time looking for ways to help the drivers without it costing the council money. I appreciate changes only usually happen at the five year review but this is a once in a century catastrophe and any help would be grateful.

I would like to suggest increasing the age to which vehicles are allowed to continue working, the inspections are very thorough at Dunbrik, and with the rise of hybrid and electrical vehicles and a high purchase cost, the drivers need time to save or get out of debt before trying to buy their next vehicle.

Please look to help the drivers, don't just look at us as a revenue stream.

Officer Comments:

Many thanks for your response to the taxi fees and charges consultation. Your comments will be included in the report going to the Licensing Committee for consideration.

David Miller

I have just received a email about increasing the fees from April 2021.

It says respond to this email address to comment on fees.

I think it outrages putting up fees especially in the circumstances we are in with covid.

My work had reduced significantly due to covid and it is hard enough paying to get by as it is.

Officer Comments:

Your comments with regard to the proposed fee structure for 2021-2022 will be placed before the Licensing Committee in March for their consideration when making their final determination on next years fees.

D.Norcott

Please clarify for me the following charges

- 1: Does the £244:00 include the vehicle plate and 6 monthly test?
- 2: What does the DBS administration fee include (as most of the paper work is done by the applicant and their is already a charge for that)?
- 3: What does the term general admin fee mean?
- 4: Can the payment to the garage be paid in cash?

Officer Comments:

1. The £244 does not include the cost of any vehicle garage tests. Charges for vehicle garage tests will be taken separately when the appointment is made. The £244 includes the cost of a vehicle plate.

2&3 It is hoped (following the implementation of the new Statutory Guidance by the Department of Transport) that all licensed drivers will take advantage of the DBS Update Service at a cost of £13 per year. This will enable SDC to access licensed driver DBS records online whenever necessary (the statutory guidance requires checks are made every 6 months rather than every 3 years).

Failure to subscribe to this online update service will mean a manual check will have to be made every 6 months. The cost of these manual checks are £40 each (which is the cost SDC are charged by the DBS). At present no administration charge is made for the processing of these applications - but the move to check drivers from every 3 years to every 6 months could have a huge impact on Council resources should drivers not sign up to the update service.

We are, therefore, proposing to introduce a £50 administration fee (which will cover the time it takes an Officer to check and validate all the original documentation, send the documentation back to the applicant, complete and authorise the required DBS form, send the application to the DBS and upon receipt of DBS certificates : update the Council records accordingly.

I am proposing that the initial DBS application a driver needs to submit in order to get registered with the update service will not include the administration fee - but, once this DBS check is done, a driver will be expected to sign up to the online service. Should a driver not do so, manual checks will be made every 6 months, and a charge of £90 will be made (£40 DBS fee + £50 administration fee).

4. At present I do not have the answer to this question : it is proposed payment for the garage inspection will be taken by the Customer Solutions Team at Sevenoaks District Council when the appointment is made. There is a cash machine in the lobby of the Council Offices, but I am not sure at this time whether this will be configured to take such payments. I think possibly the wording of my fee chart might be confusing - I do not propose you pay Dunbrik direct, but you pay the Customer Solutions Team at SDC when making your garage inspection appointment - rather than this being taken up-front within the cost of the vehicle licence.

Lucy (Relyon)

We have calculated that the approx. cost of becoming a PH taxi driver is just short of £600! Various reasons equate to this figure, not just the price increases from the council, but additional EQUO test, and also with drivers now having to have a medical at their own GP surgery with that approx cost at £150.

Computerised Knowledge Test £51.50

EQUO Online Test £66

initial Application £204

DBS £40

Medical £150

Driving Test £70

You have created an increase of £42 on the initial application. Plus the extra £66

for the EQUO test. Overall the new applicant is paying an additional £109.50 just on your costs. And that is before they have paid for the driving test and medical!

The extra £50 DBS Administration fee - please confirm when this is payable? How often? That is another cost the driver will be hit with.

This industry has been particularly hard hit during this pandemic and is on it's knees. We do not even have the capability now of the council helping us employ new drivers.

Any increase in price at this current time is going to impact even more on this industry, but these price hikes will put even more people off becoming a taxi driver and affect an already struggling industry.

I fear that potential new applicants won't be able to afford all the initial outgoings to become a taxi driver. With the new test that is being introduced along with the regular DBS checks which create additional fees, is there no government funding available to the council rather than passing the costs onto new applicants?

Officer Comments:

Many thanks for your email and I do sympathise that these are extremely difficult times for everyone.

The Department of Transport issued Statutory Taxi & Private Hire Standards in June 2020 which focus on the protection of children and vulnerable adults. Part of these Standards cover the requirement for Licensing Authorities to implement safeguarding, county lines gangs and exploitation training to all taxi and private hire vehicle drivers.

The EQUO training we are implementing cover, not only these subjects, but also equality and disability awareness for drivers and allows each driver up to 10 tests.

With regard to the medical costs: This matter was put before the Sevenoaks District Council Licensing Committee in January 2019 who agreed a 6 week consultation. Following this consultation, the Licensing Committee agreed this change, having taken into consideration all responses to that consultation.

With regard to the £50 administration fee : Drivers who register for the DBS update service will not incur this cost (the online update service being a cheaper option at £13/year). It is proposed to implement the 6 monthly DBS checks when individual drivers are next due their 3 yearly DBS check. This is to ensure no additional financial burden will be placed upon drivers who are either new or who have recently undertaken this process. We will notify each driver when he is due to undertake his next DBS check and this will be done for a fee of £40 (which is the fee charged by the DBS) in the normal way. Each driver will then be expected to register with the DBS update service which is a cheaper option for the driver than the manual check. Following this, if a driver does not register with the DBS update service, then 6 monthly manual checks will be undertaken which will incur the

additional administrative fee of £50 (on top of the DBS fee of £40). As you can imagine; the move from 3 yearly checks to 6 monthly for each driver will have a huge resource effect on the Licensing Team should the uptake of the online registration not be implemented : and the cost of administering this additional manual service in officers time checking the documentation, making each return to the DBS, and updating our records will be considerable.

I will submit your comments and my response to the Licensing Committee for their consideration.