

Appendix B- Email regarding new driver application process

Subject: A Taxi Ilfracombe Ltd

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Good afternoon,

After speaking to Noel in Licensing yesterday, we have decided to put our concerns regarding the issue of new Hackney driver applications in writing.

We took on two new drivers in early April and despite the fact we have been on the ball with all applications, DBS etc, they still don't have their badges. We initially had to wait for the BTEC provider, they cancelled our initial training as they did not have enough candidates. Eventually they both went through their training last Tuesday and we thought we were home and dry but then we spoke to one of the licensing officers who said we would be lucky to receive the badges within two weeks. When we were awaiting the BTEC training, we had asked if there were any way temporary badges could be issued - but the answer was a very swift no. We really do sympathise with staffing struggles these departments seem to be suffering now, but we cannot continue to expand the business or even replace any staff that may leave, when the process takes so long. We have been lucky with these two candidates as continuous employment was not an issue for them as they were (thankfully!!) happy to wait but going forward we really feel very negative about putting new candidates through - we don't think we can reasonably ask people to work for us when it will be three/four months before they will receive their first pay cheque. It just feels like we are hitting brick walls constantly. In addition, today we have been informed that these current candidates will need to re-submit their DBS applications as it has been so long since we started the ball rolling.

Our main source of income is school contracts for Devon County Council, so we still have to wait for the separate DBS to go through, after the Hackney badges have been issued. Despite us asking, they were not able to start the DBS process without the drivers hackney badge being issued. The work we do for Devon County Council is crucial to the students and patients we transport – not only to get them where they need to go, but to give support at an uncertain time of their life. Our drivers and escorts build excellent repours with the students and patients we transport and we feel they really benefit from the consistent and reliable transport we provide, especially the children in social care, who don't always find it easy to relax with new people. Our drivers have become trusted to these children and provide a bit of stability in what can sometimes be an unpredictable life for them. We cannot even consider putting any Tom, Dick or Harry through, just to suit the financial needs of the business. We see it as our responsibility not to only employ people that tick all the boxes (DBS, BTEC etc), but our employees need to be empathetic and follow the caring ethos that we try to promote at A Taxi.

We feel when chase updates with the training provider/local council/county council, we are made to feel like an inconvenience. We do not see any reduction in the fees we are being charged - but we are expected to wait without even a date they aim to have the badges complete by.

There is obviously a shortage of new drivers coming through in the industry and we genuinely want to help the situation - we currently have 30 employees and 15 vehicles and the work is there for us to take. Because of the current fuel prices and minimum wage going up, the only way we can keep going is to expand and take on more contracts - but it is just impossible.

We are being forced to adapt to the authorities time frames but there is no such consideration towards our predicaments. We provide an excellent service, our vehicles are maintained and cleaned to the highest standard, our employees are all paid an hourly rate above minimum wage, with holiday and pension. We value the work we do and provide an invaluable service to the children and patients we transport - but it doesn't seem to mean anything.

To be honest the way things are, we are struggling to see a way forward for us - we are struggling to cover our expenses and are behind with our VAT and PAYE payments. As you know we are forced to be very competitive with our pricing for Devon County Council, we are immediately at a disadvantage from the general "one man band" bidding on contracts, as we need to quote enough for the driver to earn a living and to cover our overheads as well – which isn't happening currently. The only way we can keep up with increasing wages and fuel prices is to continually expand the business by hiring new drivers and taking on new contracts.

We are in the same boat as everyone else and we know the departments we deal with at both councils have no say in staffing and priorities. We appreciate the work that they do and know they are bound by rules and regulations, but who else do we talk to?

We would like to offer Jess' services – she has 20 years' experience in accounts and administration and being Colin's (Managing Director of A Taxi) daughter, she has lived in the industry since she was a girl. She is happy to donate some of her time regularly to your department if it could help the industry in our area.

We do not want this email to come across as complaining and unappreciative of the service we receive but we are genuinely very concerned for the future of the industry as a whole and our staff and passengers and we do want to help. It is not our way to "ruffle feathers" generally but our main concern is that we will be forced to close A Taxi - making 30 people redundant and letting down the 40+ students/patients we transport, so we cannot just sit and watch this happen.

We hope you will consider our comments and come back to us with a way forward.

Take care,

Simon Rice & Jessica Isaac

A Taxi Ilfracombe Ltd