

Dear Hackney Carriage
Proprietor

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Town Police Clauses Act 1847, Section 58
Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976, Sections 66 & 67
Hackney Carriage (Taxi) Vehicles – Overcharging Customers

The Licensing team has been investigating complaints about customers being overcharged, particularly customers who are being charged by a taxi to pick them up from their location. Following the investigation into these allegations, it has become apparent that a number of taxis are starting the meter at the outset of the journey without the customer in the vehicle. The customer is then being charged the metered fare for the distance from the taxis location or base to the customers pick up point, in addition to the metered fare for the rest of the customers journey.

The Licensing Team is therefore contacting all licensed Hackney Carriage proprietors to remind them that fares must only be calculated from the point in the district which the customer commences their journey. Therefore, the meter must only be started when the customer is in the vehicle. The customer cannot be charged any fee to pick them up, as a booking fee is not in the Councils table of fares.

Additionally, we are aware that a number of taxis are agreeing fares in advance with customers for bookings. This is acceptable, providing:

- For journeys solely within the Council's District the customer must not be charged any more than what the metered fare would have been.
- If the journey ends outside of the Council's District and no fare has been negotiated in advance then the driver must adhere to the metered fare.
- At all times, a driver is entitled to charge less than the metered fare.

We would remind all proprietors and their drivers it is an offence for a taxi to charge a customer more than the metered fare. There is a maximum fine of £1000 if convicted for this offence. Similarly, your suitability to hold a licence may be reviewed.

The Licensing Team realises that this reminder will cause concern for a number of proprietors, particularly those who have been used to charging customers in rural locations a fee to pick them up in order to cover costs. This practice however is illegal and must stop immediately.

Members of the trade may recall that the Council's Licensing Committee turned down the suggestion to add a booking fee to the Council's table of fares in 2012. We would welcome any feedback from the trade as to whether there is merit in taking this matter to the Licensing Committee again as a result of these complaints.

In the mean time, if proprietors wish to have the ability to charge a booking fee, they could consider transferring their Hackney Carriage Vehicle licence to a Private Hire Vehicle. A Private Hire Vehicle is not bound by the Council's table of fares, so may set their own fares. A Private Hire Vehicle must be pre-booked through a Private Hire Operator Licensed by East Hampshire District Council. A Private Hire Vehicle however cannot pick customers up hailing them in the street and cannot use taxi ranks.

We hope that the trade understands our need to communicate on this matter, as customers cannot continue to be overcharged illegally. Naturally if there are any questions which arise as a result of this letter, or if you wish to give any feedback on introducing a booking fee, then please do not hesitate to contact the Licensing Team on the numbers or addresses above.

Yours faithfully,

Mike Smith
Licensing Team Leader