

## Representations to Environment and Licencing Committee – PH/HC Fee Rise – 2023/2024

20<sup>th</sup> February 2023

*'What have you got, at the end of the day? What have you got to take away? A bottle of whisky, and a new set of lies, blinds on the windows and a pain behind the eyes.'*

1. In February 2022, I identified **unlawful activity**, and **maladministration** within Gedling Borough Council, this led to an internal and then an external review of the hackney carriage and private hire accounts, and the creation of **three sets of accounts** for the last six financial years, for each licencing regime, driver, vehicle and operator, as is required by Section 53 and 70 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.
2. The two step process of firstly an internal and then secondly an external review, resulted also in two reports, one by Gedling Borough Council, and then a further report by the Chartered Institute of Professional Financial Accountants (CIPFA), their report was based purely on a 'face value' review, and did not go into any reasonable depth as to how the accounts had been created or calculated. Within these reports it has been clearly identified that unlawful activity and maladministration took place, and that **approximately £150,000 will be repaid** to hackney carriage and private hire vehicle proprietors and private hire operators.
3. I requested the accounts under Section 1 of the Freedom of Information Act 2000, that were created as a result of the internal review **before** the external review was completed, so I could look to assess them myself, and make any representations to CIPFA as to accuracy and legality, this request for the accounts was denied, on the grounds that they would be published to the public with the two reports, they were **not published** to the public, along with the reports.
4. Since the publication of the reports to the public, I have managed to now ascertain the accounts, and these accounts are attached at **Annex A** and they cover the financial years for 2016/2017 to 2022/2023.
5. I have reviewed the accounts, and have then submitted a request for further information, my concerns relate to the following:
  - The cost code for **Customer Services - 7350** increases almost each year, quite substantially, however the driver and vehicle licences issued by Gedling Borough Council, over the last three financial years has significantly decreased, I am waiting on exact figures from the council, however in one case that is well known, the number of hackney carriage vehicles licenced by the council, has decreased by over **fifty percent** in the last three financial years. To see that costs are increasing, when licences are decreasing, needs to be investigated further. Over the six year period, the cost code for customer services is over **£1.5 million**, this is obscene.
  - The cost code for **Vehicle Allocations – 3110** has been placed under the **driver's licence account**, I have asked for further details as to why this is the case, it would seem to be either a mistake, or a deliberate act, I intend to investigate further.
  - The cost code for **4575 – Contribution to Reserves and 8059 – Track and Trace Contain Funding**, is a concern, it shows funding received, perhaps in relation to the hackney carriage and private hire trade, which is then allocated to reserves, and this is not explained within the accounts, this will be investigated.
  - The cost code for **Licences – 4445** is quite substantial, and has remained static whilst the number of licences being issued and therefore administered by the council decrease substantially. I cannot see how this can be the case, and therefore needs to again be investigated further.

- The cost code for **Legal Services – 7080** and **Employee Salaries – 1000** also requires clarity and further investigation, if employees are allocated to the licencing team, they can of course must be charged, but the concern then becomes as to why customer services are being used, when employees are already provided for.
- The cost code for **Corporate Administration – 7390** would appear to need further analysis, why it is being charged needs to be looked at, and how it related to the licencing regime.

6. You were told, year after year, that everything was in order. I was told by your appointed officers, after I investigated your accounts and raised concerns, that everything was in order, it turned out not to be, it turned out to be what can only be described as, a mess. I offered to assist with the reviews, my offer was turned down, we didn't need to be where we are right now, with further investigations having to take place, however we are where we are.

7. I recommend that if I cannot get a full report to you, by the time you meet to discuss these representations, that you suspend the fees rise for another year, and leave them as they currently are, and allow me to then submit a report back to you, once I have finished my investigation. The only reason I will not be able to report back to you by the time you look at these representations, is if Gedling Borough Council delay my investigation. It is up to you, it is your choice.

Kind regards,

[Redacted signature]

[Redacted contact information]