

**From:** Jason Agar  
**Sent:** 30 September 2021 17:03  
**To:** [REDACTED]  
**Subject:** FW: [EXT] Fee increase objection

Dear [REDACTED]

Thank you for your objection(s) to the proposed Table of Fees for Taxi & Private Hire Licensing in Milton Keynes.

Please see below my comments (in red) in regard to your specific objections. Your objections, and my responses, will be attached to the published Regulatory Committee Report on Fees & Charges (with personal information redacted). If you require any further information please email me direct at [jason.agar@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:jason.agar@milton-keynes.gov.uk)

Jason Agar  
Taxi Licensing Lead

1. Our industry is still recovering from suppressed demand from the pandemic. Along with increased costs of fuel and energy (for those with plug-in hybrids and electricity) and additional costs (and time) of sanitising vehicles between customers. We require our

regulating council to support us, not impose additional costs on us at this time of recovery.

At present the income generated by Taxi Licensing fees does not meet the services' overhead costs. As a result a 2% fee increase is necessary to help recover costs for items such as electricity, rent, IT etc. The Council is fully aware of the Pandemic's impact on the licensed trade and as a result has:

- A. Provided a grant of £250 to all existing licensed vehicle proprietors in March 2021. There will be a further grant of £750 from October 2021.
  - B. Removed the 'in-house' vehicle testing fee which saves vehicle proprietors £122 per year.
  - C. Removed the 6 year minimum vehicle age limit for existing licence holders. Existing licence holders can now purchase an older/cheaper vehicle on renewal (but it must be less than 10 years old) .
2. The service provided by the council has been significantly cutback from the view of Milton Keynes drivers and operators.
- The Taxi Licensing Service was reviewed in June & October 2020 due to the Pandemic and as a result the number of licensing staff was reduced from 10 to 7.5 Full Time Equivalents (FTEs) from 1/1/21. These changes were necessary given the significant reduction in Taxi income that the Council experienced in 2020/21 as a result of the Pandemic.
3. Enforcement is either reduced or not seen (as the reduction in the number of articles in the local press testifies).
- Whilst the overall number of licensing staff has been reduced by 2.5 FTEs the actual number of Enforcement Officers has increased from 2.5 to 3.5 FTEs from 1/1/21. Due to the lockdowns and need to reduce the spread of the virus, the Council decided to minimise street level taxi enforcement during 2020/21. However, day/night enforcement patrols began returning to normal in July 2021.
4. Drivers can no longer see or telephone licensing officers.
- Licence holders can contact the licensing service by using email [taxi@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:taxi@milton-keynes.gov.uk) and a response will be provided within 5 working days. Should a licence holder wish to speak or see an officer then a request can be made in writing and, depending what the issued is, an appointment can made. However, officers will not meet with licence holders should they wish to submit an application or renewal. This must be done online using the Council' new portal and should a licence holder require guidance then they must consult the Council's Taxi Policy which can be accessed at [www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/environmental-health-and-trading-standards/licensing/hackney-carriage-private-hire/taxi-licensing-policy-annual-report-public-registers](http://www.milton-keynes.gov.uk/environmental-health-and-trading-standards/licensing/hackney-carriage-private-hire/taxi-licensing-policy-annual-report-public-registers)

5. We are required to e-mail everything in and hope someone will reply in adequate time.

Taxi Licensing has now left Synergy Park, Bleak Hall and therefore there is no reception area for licence holders to attend and drop off documents/pick-up plates etc. Licence Holders must now use email, post and the online application process to communicate with Taxi Licensing unless they have been given a specific appointment. Officers will provide a response within 5 working days therefore licence holders must make their applications approximately 1 month prior to expiry. Should a licence holder submit their application late then the Council cannot guarantee that it will be processed prior to licence expiry. As a result a licence holder may be prevented from working. Please note the online/email process provides an automated response and licence holders should note this response is confirmation that the application has been received and should not resend their emails or applications. Resent applications/emails will not be responded to.

6. This is not quality service and something that Milton Keynes Council should be ashamed of.

The Taxi Licensing Service is modernising its structure, systems and processes as the previous reception/paper application processes were outdated, inefficient and costly. Whilst the Council accepts that these changes have been challenging, for both licence holders and officers, the Council is very confident that the new digitised processes will provide a faster and more efficient service for all licence holders.

7. Milton Keynes Council in early 2021 decided to stop vehicle inspections and made those members of staff redundant to reduce costs by £60,000pa. It is evident that these savings have not transpired and we as drivers and operators should not be punished for the failures of Milton Keynes Council.

Council 'in-house' vehicle ramp inspections were stopped in late March 2020 as a result of the Pandemic and have not re-opened. As a result the Council has lost approximately £120,000 in income from those inspections. The two vehicle examiners were therefore made redundant which created a savings of £45,000. As a result the Council has not made any savings at this stage from the closure of the vehicle testing workshop.

8. Vehicle owners were forced to pay £120.00 upfront for vehicle inspections that have never taken place, and as inspections stopped in March 2020 it is likely that there is a small number of drivers that are owed 3 inspections (or £180). To my knowledge not a single driver has been refunded for this effective breach of contract. Milton Keynes Council, in my opinion, has no moral standing to increase our costs when it has been profiting from the interest of money paid by vehicle owners in good faith.

The Council has refunded 408 vehicle proprietors for the inspections they did not receive. A further 420 vehicle proprietors will be receiving their refunds in the coming months. Whilst the Council would have preferred to have all refunds completed by now this was not possible as many drivers have changed their Debit Card details so a

refund can only be completed at the time of licence renewal with a new Debit Card. I am not aware of any vehicle proprietors being owed 3 tests as the renewal fee included 2 tests.

9. Milton Keynes Council is subsidising MK Connect/Via heavily with publicity, grants and paying per trip. This has had a severe impact on our business with some drivers having lost significant business close to home. Furthermore this action by Milton Keynes Council may be lawful but it is highly questionable by drivers and operators as clearly MK Connect/Via is the Council's preferred private hire operator. How can drivers and operators be assured of fair treatment when we see clear preferential treatment to one operator?

MK Connect is a commercial contractual arrangement between the Council (Passenger Services) and Via to provide specific services formerly provided by Council supported buses. Via is a licensed Private Hire Operator and use MK licensed drivers and vehicles. The contract was put out for public tender in 2020 and Via was successful in winning the tender. This commercial contractual arrangement does not form part of the proposed Fees & Charges.

10. We hope that Officers and Councillors will give us a fair hearing and fully address the above issues before putting us under further. I would also request that I am informed of when the relevant Regulation Committee is meeting so I am able to attend and what arrangements there are to speak to the Committee.

The Committee meeting will be held on 3 November 2021 at 6:30pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Offices, Milton Keynes. Should you or any other licence holder wish to speak you must register as outlined on the front sheet of the Committee's Agenda (once published). Please note that the public gallery currently holds a maximum of 14 people.

**From:** Taxi <[taxi@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:taxi@milton-keynes.gov.uk)>  
**Sent:** 23 September 2021 15:28  
**To:** Jason Agar <[Jason.Agar@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:Jason.Agar@milton-keynes.gov.uk)>  
**Subject:** FW: [EXT] Fee increase objection

**From:** . . . . .  
**Sent:** 22 September 2021 23:01  
**To:** Taxi <[taxi@milton-keynes.gov.uk](mailto:taxi@milton-keynes.gov.uk)>  
**Subject:** [EXT] Fee increase objection

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Please find my objection to the latest round of fee increases.

**22<sup>nd</sup> September 2021**

Dear Sir or Madam,

**Ref.: New Taxi Licensing Fees**

I am writing to you to object to the increases in the above fees that have been proposed in the Milton Keynes Citizen dated 16<sup>th</sup> September 2021 for the following reasons:

1. Our industry is still recovering from suppressed demand from the pandemic. Along with increased costs of fuel and energy (for those with plug-in hybrids and electricity) and additional costs (and time) of sanitising vehicles between customers. We require our regulating council to support us, not impose additional costs on us at this time of recovery.
2. The service provided by the council has been significantly cutback from the view of Milton Keynes drivers and operators. Enforcement is either reduced or not seen (as the reduction in the number of articles in the local press testifies). Drivers can no longer see or telephone licensing officers. We are required to e-mail everything in and hope someone will reply in adequate time. This is not quality service and something that Milton Keynes Council should be ashamed of.
3. Milton Keynes Council in early 2021 decided to stop vehicle inspections and made those members of staff redundant to reduce costs by £60,000pa. It is evident that these savings have not transpired and we as drivers and operators should not be punished for the failures of Milton Keynes Council.
4. Vehicle owners were forced to pay £120.00 upfront for vehicle inspections that have never taken place, and as inspections stopped in March 2020 it is likely that there is a small number of drivers that are owed 3 inspections (or £180). To my knowledge not a single driver has been refunded for this effective breach of contract. Milton Keynes Council, in my opinion, has no moral standing to increase our costs when it has been profiting from the interest of money paid by vehicle owners in good faith.
5. Milton Keynes Council is subsidising MK Connect/Via heavily with publicity, grants and paying per trip. This has had a severe impact on our business with some drivers having lost significant business close to home. Furthermore this action by Milton Keynes Council may be lawful but it is highly questionable by drivers and operators as clearly MK Connect/Via is the Council's preferred private hire

operator. How can drivers and operators be assured of fair treatment when we see clear preferential treatment to one operator?

We hope that Officers and Councillors will give us a fair hearing and fully address the above issues before putting us under further. I would also request that I am informed of when the relevant Regulation Committee is meeting so I am able to attend and what arrangements there are to speak to the Committee.

Yours faithfully,