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I entirely refute that there is a need for a rise in the taxi licence fees and object to this being rushed through with absolutely no consultation. This is being enforced on taxi drivers who are already aggrieved by the complete unfairness of the local licensing committee. The local licensing dept under the auspices of the council has allowed a huge increase in the number of taxis which now swamp the town with no rank space available. The Wyre Forest area does not have a demand for over 220 licensed drivers and over 100 vehicle licences. When the local decision to deregulate was made it was probably thought that as the rest of the deregulated areas throughout the country had moved away from Hackney Carriages on ranks and increased their private hire fleets it would be the same here. It hasn't and is causing problems for taxi drivers and the public.

Also the question hanging over the fairness for drivers to operate equally, I.e. with some drivers having to purchase wheelchair accessible cabs, now not able trade fairly on ranks, as there is no space; would not have come up. But now it has.....

I attended a Taxi Liaison Meeting on 7th March 2011. There were taxi drivers and operators and council officers present also there were three councillors present:

The chairman of the licensing committee cllr Jeff Baker.

The vice chair cllr Pauline Hayward and cllr Paul Harrison.

These three councillors could in no fashion put forward any reason or rationale for having a rise in the taxi licensing fees. They could not inform the meeting of how or why this rise in taxi licensing fees was to be implemented or what it was based on.

They could not say how the figure of 3.5% was arrived at or chosen, or even if it was just plucked from the air.

This troubles me deeply.

I feel that if something that affects the lives of local working residents is voted on by councillors surely they should understand what they are voting for and why.

It appears not.

These three councillors did have some interesting input. Jeff Baker (Chair) stated quite clearly that the local council controls the number of vehicles allowed to be licensed each year. I found this very odd as I understand it the local decision was taken to deregulate.

Pauline Hayward informed the meeting that she had seen *green* private hire cars driving about whereas the local decision is that they all have to red to be licensed. Paul Harrison seemed to believe that Help the Aged had not expressed a view over wheelchair accessible vehicles.

All these points need clarifying particularly Jeff Baker's remark as it a highly contentious area regarding the taxi trade.

At this TL meeting The Worcestershire Regulatory Services was introduced. This is described as being the first all encompassing Regulatory Service in the UK. It will be hosted by Bromsgrove District Council. It is also going to be more efficient and effective and use fewer resources. There have been redundancies in the Wyre Forest District licensing office so with all this saving on admin and expertise, why have the taxi licensing got to go up in this non profit making organisation, they should stay static or come down to match Bromsgrove the hosting council or Wychavon the cheapest in the county by far.

The Wyre Forest area is already the most expensive in Worcestershire for taxi drivers to ply their trade.

The Wyre Forest area has already got the most stringent regulations and policies within Worcestershire.

The Wyre Forest area has already chosen to deregulate.

The Wyre Forest area has already put a policy in place that means drivers of Hackney carriages are handicapped and cannot trade on an equal basis.

The Wyre Forest has a policy that all new Hackney Carriages must be wheelchair accessible, most rarely carry wheelchairs from the rank but the costly stipulation stands.

The Wyre Forest has a policy that does not give equal accessibility to all users.

The Wyre Forest area drivers have to attend disability workshops at their own cost.

The Wyre Forest area drivers have NVQ level 2 in Road Passenger Vehicle Driving no other Worcestershire area has. Again at the drivers own cost.

The Wyre Forest area is the most difficult, regulated and expensive area for a taxi driver to work in, as with the rest of the public we are all suffering the effects of the

recession already without this additional insult, it is fair to say that all service industry jobs will suffer through these lean times. Until there is a fair playing field to quote for our work against the other districts in the county and to earn a meagre existence this rise should be delayed. It should be delayed until the rank space is available for all taxi drivers to have a fair way of trading from them. (This was estimated as no sooner than 2 years to wait for extra rank space as it has to go to the County Council!)

This rise in fees, of course, may well be the most direct way for the council to get rid of the increased numbers of taxis on the roads; it would solve the illegal parking all over town. It would do away with the need for extra ranks on new sites. Those drivers with wheelchair accessible cabs would go broke and therefore out of business and the local council would license a private hire fleet only.

I seriously think that councillors should look at the costs involved in becoming an owner driver in this area, or a taxi driver renting a vehicle. They need to understand the trade and how it works and perhaps if more of them used taxis they would find out that the Wyre Forest area does not have a fleet accessible to all, there is not a vehicle made as yet that can provide this.

It is way more expensive in the Wyre Forest area than anywhere else in the County to provide the taxi service we do provide and as drivers and owner drivers we deserve a fairer approach.

Please defer this rise until an even playing field for tendering and bidding for business exists throughout the County and until the first Regulatory Service in the UK can give uniformity to regulations, policies, costs and ranks to work from.