

Cab drivers may have to pay to move planters for outing

Edinburgh black cab drivers have criticised the council after being asked to pay to have planters on The Royal Mile moved for their annual outing for vulnerable children.

For more than 75 years the capital's taxi drivers have treated local youngsters with special needs, life-limiting conditions and terminal illnesses to a fun day out parading through the city in their [brightly decorated cars](#).

But after seeking to return to the route taken by the much-loved Edinburgh Taxi Outing before the pandemic – at which point planters were used to block traffic from the High Street under the Spaces for People scheme – they were told temporarily removing the blockade would come at a cost.

Organisers have said they remain hopeful the issue is just one of “miscommunication” and that any fee would be waived by the council for the long-running event.

After submitting plans to go along Princes Street, up the Mound and down The Royal Mile for the first time since 2019 organisers were quoted a figure understood to be around £1,500 to have the planters moved.

In a letter seen by the Local Democracy Reporting Service the council said during events such as the long-running Taxi Outing its staff were “not required on site” and therefore

there were “no resources available to move or return the planters”.

It said: “If an organiser wishes to use a route which requires the planters moved or returned then the costs for the work would be at the expense of that organiser.”

A council spokesperson said the drivers would be free to shift the large boxes themselves or alternatively alter their route by turning down Cockburn Street.

Taxi Outing secretary Keith Bell said it isn't “physically feasible for us to do that”.

He said: “I'm not sure why they can't just send a man in a flatbed with a tail lift, drop the tail lift, or a pallet truck, and move the planters.

“What happens if the public see Joe Bloggs moving the planters? You really need to have a council lorry there with council staff moving it, because if I can just shift them what's to stop anyone else shifting them? It's on a hill as well, it's not like we can do that – we're taxi drivers.”

He added: “I think the figure quoted was probably for a commercial event, which is fair enough – if people are making a profit from the city it's only fair the council recoup their cost and I would never have a problem with that – it's just we've been going for over 75 years.”

The Association of Hackney Carriage Drivers of the City of Edinburgh said: “Despite the commendable efforts of the city's taxi drivers to uplift the spirits of vulnerable children, bureaucratic hurdles erected by the council threaten to undermine their altruistic endeavours.

“The refusal to accommodate these compassionate acts speaks volumes about the council's misplaced priorities.”

Mr Bell said he was “sure it's just a misunderstanding” and

“when the officials realise it’s for the Outing and we’ve been doing it for 75 years the matter will be resolved quite amicably”.

He said: “I suspect what’s happened is the email has come in – because the council is more like a sort of call centre where they just have generic staff answering the phone, doing the post – and the person probably wasn’t aware of what the taxi outing was, so they’ve just given the generic answer.

“I know sometimes how bureaucracy can get in the way and what you would think would be a simple solution sometimes turns into a nightmare.

“I’m sure it’s just a misunderstanding and when the officials realise it’s for the outing and we’ve been doing it for 75 years I think the matter will be resolved quite amicably.”

He added: “The whole point is they were installed for Covid – Spaces for People. Covid’s finished two years ago and they’ve kept them there.”

While the planters were installed in 2020 as part of a range of measures to make it easier and safer for people to walk, wheel and cycle during the pandemic, the council had previously agreed to permanently close the High Street to traffic between North Bridge and St Mary’s Street.

Originally the Taxi Outing – when the public are invited to take part by lining the streets and getting soaked by the balloon-clad convoy which is armed with water pistols – went along Princes Street and Regent Road, before heading to Musselburgh for S. Luca’s ice cream and in recent years ending at Archerfield Walled Garden.

However, amid tram works the procession was directed along The Royal Mile, where the Lord Provost would be dropped off at the City Chambers, and this became the new route for the event.

The Edinburgh Taxi Outing is set to take place this year on Tuesday, 11 June.

by Donald Turvill Local Democracy Reporter.



The 74th Edinburgh Taxi Drivers' Outing on 14 June 2022 from Edinburgh Zoo to Archerfield Walled Garden PHOTO ©2022 The Edinburgh Reporter