

Why do some Councils set out to annoy the people who pay for them?

I recently received a demand for £10 to keep open my Congestion Charge account from Transport for London. I have to pay an annual charge of £10 to maintain an electronic account to pay them money should I dare to drive on London's roads which I have helped pay for. Why? there is no cost to them in leaving my account on their computer.

This week I received a letter from Westminster Council demanding I fill in a form to confirm my little flat is still a second home. I have had to fill in such a form every year. It makes no difference to the amount of Council Tax I pay anyway. Why don't they just tell residents they have a duty to inform should a second home become a prime or only residence or vice versa?

Many Councils treat car parking as a means to threaten tax paying residents with fines. They make you play the game of guess how long it will take to hold a meeting or have a coffee or do some shopping. If you guess wrongly and do not pay enough in advance they slap a fine on you. Why not say if you have gone a few minutes over you can pay for the extra time without it being an offence, up to some suitable overrun limit? Better still why not pay on exit for the time you used? There could be a penalty for anyone trying to park all day in a 2-4 hour limit park. It does not help a shopping centre to have people rushing round afraid they will be fined if they linger too long.

Highways authorities delight in making it more and more difficult to drive around. They seem to want to cut the productivity and raise the costs of all the businesses which deliver us goods, or come to our homes to provide services. They prefer lights over roundabouts, want to mix cycle lanes with main roads instead of keeping them safely separate, and are regularly narrowing or closing routes. They allow long periods of road closure to carry out works, and are happy to see main utilities put under the tarmac down the centre of main roads to maximise the disruption every time they need repair, maintenance or replacement.

Councillors should look at all Council services and charges from the viewpoint of the long suffering Council Tax payer and insist on it all being more customer friendly.