

CHELTENHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL

STATEMENT OF COMPLAINT

Statement of [REDACTED]

Age of witness: Over 18

Occupation of witness: N/A

I am a wheelchair user and have an assistance dog, trained by Support Dogs (<https://www.supportdogs.org.uk>), who are accredited by Assistance Dogs UK (<https://www.assistedogs.org.uk>)

My assistance dog is a Dachshund named [REDACTED]. She supports me in daily tasks which are challenging as a wheelchair user and her training has provided her the necessary skills to assist me in public places, allowing me to integrate further into society.

At about 2245hrs on Saturday 17th September 2022 I was in Cheltenham Town Centre with my husband and my assistance dog. We attended the taxi rank on The Promenade in order to get a taxi home. We approached the first taxi on the rank, which was a Silver Mercedes car, KV12XUY, bearing a CBC Taxi Plate HCV197 and requested hire of this taxi.

The taxi driver was a white male about 5ft 7 in height with short hair. As it was very dark it was not easy to see his features. He refused our fare saying he does not take dogs.

[REDACTED] was wearing her accredited uniform which entails an assistance dog jacket and I informed the driver that [REDACTED] is a registered assistance dog, offering to show him certification. He laughed and said it can't be an assistance dog because it is not wearing a "high vis" jacket. I showed him [REDACTED] certification, which includes a photo of myself and [REDACTED] but he still refused our fare.

I made the driver aware I was taking photos of his vehicle and told him I would be reporting the offence as he is breaking the law.

This interaction ended at 2253hrs. I was left in a very vulnerable position where I was in my wheelchair on the Promenade with no way to return to my home safely. At around 2255hrs, the driver who had refused my fare, drove away from the taxi rank with another fare who had joined the queue after our arrival. This fare was an able bodied couple.

We were eventually taken home by another taxi driver. He also was unaware of the law in relation to assistance dogs, as detailed in The Equality Act 2010. He told us he only agreed our fare because he could see how visibly shaken we were from the exchange with the

1

Signed [REDACTED] 03/11/22

other taxi driver. He initially told us to wait for a wheelchair accessible taxi, but then looked and saw there were no wheelchair accessible taxis in the full rank. At this point he agreed to take us home but insisted the assistance dog sat on our lap. This is not compliant with ADUK training as all assistance dogs must always be on the floor. I agreed to have my assistance dog on my lap in order to safely be able to get home.

The incident has left me extremely upset, scared and angry and I believe this driver broke the law by not adhering to The Equality Act 2010. It has had a detrimental effect on me and as a result, I no longer feel comfortable travelling into Cheltenham because I don't believe there is a safe or reliable taxi service to get me home. I have not attempted to use a taxi since this event took place.

Signed [REDACTED] 03/11/22