

These Minutes have been amended.
Please see the Minutes for 9 June 2008 for amendments.

LICENSING COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 21 APRIL 2008

Present: Tony Linden (*Chairman*) (P), Jeff Beck (P), Billy Drummond (A),
Andrew Rowles (P), Adrian Edwards (P), Geoff Findlay (P), Manohar Gopal (A),
Gwen Mason (P), Owen Jeffrey (P), Quentin Webb (P), Keith Woodhams (P).

PART I

5. APOLOGIES.

No apologies for absence were received.

6. MINUTES.

The minutes of the meeting held on 21st January 2008 were approved as true and correct record and signed by the Chairman.

7. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST.

There were no declarations of interest received.

8. ANNUAL REPORT FROM RESPONSIBLE AUTHORITIES

Brian Leahy attended the meeting to provide a general overview of the work the Council's Licensing team undertook, in co-operation with the Council Partners', over the last year. Members were informed that there had been 216 daytime visits and 80 night visits to premises licensed to sell alcohol. Some of these visits were in conjunction with police support. In response to a question from Councillor Jeffrey Members were informed that there were over 480 licensed premises within the district. The visits were primarily made to ensure that changes to license conditions and variations to conditions were being adhered to, and to licensees where there were suspected risks. It was noted that Government policy advised that premises were not to be inspected unless there was suspicion of risk. As well as responding to information from the police the licensing team were also pro-active and tried to facilitate a close working relationship with licensees.

Brian informed the Committee of other inspections that the Council's Licensing Team had conducted which included 438 taxi inspections, 56 private hire inspection that equated to 100% of firms in operation within the district, 21 cat and dog boarding inspections, 19 gambling inspections, 20 gaming centres inspected, 8 massage premises inspected, 3 registered scrap metal dealers inspected, 8 riding schools, 2 zoo inspections and 21 street trading inspections including 2 prosecutions. These were an insight into a part of the inspections that the licensing team undertook.

Apart from inspections Members were also informed that the Council's Licensing Team had issued 303 taxi and private hire licences, 555 temporary licenses had been signed off and 110 alcohol premises licenses agreed.

The Chairman thanked Brian Leahy for his presentation and introduced Michael Hutchins who was representing the West Berkshire Disability Alliance.

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Michael Hutchins informed Members that he would be focusing his presentation on his experience of using taxis within west Berkshire as a wheelchair user. Michael also said he would be referring to the experiences of other disabled users of taxis.

Members heard how the Disability Alliance in conjunction with West Berkshire Council had been working towards a 50/50 split of taxis that were enabled to cater for disabled passengers. Although operators of taxis who were equipped for disabled passengers were often busy during the day the main problem with accessibility remained during the evenings. Michael also raised concern that there seemed to be little information regarding which firms were tailored for disabled users, how to book them and what type of disability that they were equipped to cater for. There were regular operators that relationships could be established with, but they had to operate within their own working routine.

Another issue of concern raised by Mr Hutchins was the equipment used by taxi drivers and the training given to users. Members were informed that taxi drivers were willing to aid disabled users but that they were not always able to operate the equipment to a satisfactory standard and the clients therefore did not often feel safe. Mr Hutchins suggested that a working group be established to scrutinise how effective taxi access was for the disabled and what could be done to improve the service provided.

Councillor Findlay as Portfolio Holder responsible for Licensing thanked Mr Hutchins for his observations and agreed that should the Committee be supportive he would welcome a Task Group to investigate the issues raised. Brian Leahy also welcomed the establishment of a Task Group but reminded Members that they would need to investigate compliance with policy as when dealing with these issues the Council relied on subjective information passed to them from users. Officers had already discussed establishing a database of taxi providers who could cater for disabled users and the type of vehicle they could provide and this was something any working group should consider.

After discussing the establishment of a working party it was agreed that the following Members would form a Task Group in consultation with Mr Hutchins; Councillors Woodhams, Findlay, Mason, Jeffery and Linden.

The Chairman thanked Michael Hutchins for his presentation and introduced Chief Inspector Geoff Smith and WPC Baryman.

Members were informed that the police had a responsibility for over 500 licensed premises and over the last 12 months 53 new licenses had been considered and that there had been 359 incident reports. Thames Valley Police were pleased to note that a number of the incidents had come either from reports from within premises or CCTV which was a good example of joint working that they were trying to establish. Part of the partnership working that Members were informed about was the 87 visits made to establishments with other bodies, Chief Inspector Smith told the Committee how successful partnership working had been over the past year especially the success of PIMMS and other groups such as the Alcohol Awareness Group. The Chairman thanked the Chief Inspector and hoped that such a positive message was fed down to NAGS, Parish Councils and Members. Councillor Findlay also thanked Thames Valley Police and was pleased to see the benefits of agencies working together towards a common aim.

Councillor Bryant asked the Chief Inspector if he felt that the new licensing laws had impacted on performance. Members were informed that the major impact over

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the last 12 months on how the police were able to operate had been the success of partnership working.

Councillor Jeffrey asked if the CCTV in Thatcham had been successful. The Committee were informed that the CCTV in Thatcham had aided in a number of serious assaults and contributed to the success of PIMMS.

Councillor Mason informed the committee how informative she had found an evening with Thames Valley Police whilst they worked within the district. It was agreed that any Member wishing to take part in such a visit should contact relevant Officers to aid with the arrangements.

The Chairman thanked Thames Valley Police for their presentation and introduced Theresa Bashford and Kevin Thompson from Trading Standards, West Berkshire Council.

Theresa Bashford informed Members that that the Council had been working closely with schools to inform and teach children about the dangers of illicit produce as well as training teachers. Kevin Thompson explained that the Council had conducted a number of test purchases that had resulted in prosecutions, as listed:

- Aerosols. 5 test purchases 1 sale.
- Fireworks. 0 sales from 12 attempts.
- Knives. 4 sales from 14 attempts.
- Tobacco. 5 sales from 45 attempts
- Alcohol from off sales. 10 sales from 87 attempts
- Alcohol from pubs. 3 sales from 8 attempts
- In addition surveillance was carried out in 19 pubs to check for underage drinking none was found.

In response to Members questions Kevin Thompson explained how underage test purchases were conducted and informed Members that the welfare of volunteers was paramount.

Councillor Jeffrey raised concern about the high percentage of test purchases that had resulted in a sale. During discussions Councillor Jeffrey stated that he felt more resources should be made available to increase the number of test purchases as the number of sales of not only alcohol and cigarettes but also the sale of knives was a concern. In response to Councillor Findlay's statement that the results should be viewed in context to wider statistics for this region, Councillor Jeffrey reiterated that he felt more resource should be given to test purchases. In response Councillor Findlay said that the high percentage of sales associated with test purchases was expected when considering that Officers targeted premises after concern had been raised by the police and public. It was noted, although not agreed, that the Council had to operate within agreed resources.

The Chairman thanked the Council's representatives from Trading Standards and introduced Paul Anstey from Environmental Health, West Berkshire Council.

Paul Anstey informed Members that although there had been 92 service requests a number of these would relate to multiple complaints about the larger events. Of the 92 requests only 4 progressed to formal notices being issued with no prosecutions.

The Council did provide an out of hours service that had not seen a dramatic increase in calls due to the new licensing regime; this was largely down to close working with partners. Members were also informed that the Glade Festival had received a five year licence that would be subject to limited monitoring and that Officers were unable to gain access to the last festival due to the recent floods.

9. EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC.

RESOLVED that members of the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the under-mentioned item of business on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as contained in Paragraphs 1 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended by the [Local Government \(Access to Information\)\(Variation\) Order 2006](#). [Rule 9.10.4 of the Constitution also refers.](#)

10. LICENSING FEES AND CHARGES

Members considered an urgent confidential report regarding a change to the Council's fees and charges.

RESOLVED that the Licensing Committee request that the S151 Officer alter the level of licensing fees and charges as set out in the confidential report.

(The meeting commenced at 6.30 p.m. and closed at 8.35 p.m.)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature: