

DRAFT

Note: These Minutes will remain DRAFT until approved at the next meeting of the Committee

LICENSING COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 3 NOVEMBER 2025

Councillors Present: Jeremy Cottam (Chairman), Paul Dick (Vice-Chairman), Phil Barnett, Billy Drummond, Paul Kander, Jane Langford, David Marsh, Stephanie Steevenson, Clive Taylor and Martha Vickers

Also Present: Julia O'Brien (Principal Licensing Officer) and Sean Murphy (Service Lead - Public Protection), Mark Groves (Lead Licensing Enforcement Officer) and Moira Fraser (Principal Officer - Policy & Governance)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Nigel Foot and Councillor Tom McCann

PART I

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 28 July 2025 were approved as a true and correct record.

Councillor Paul Dick noted that it was suggested at the previous meeting that the Chairman meet with the appropriate officer regarding licensing enforcement. Councillor Jeremy Cottam advised that he was happy to do this.

Councillor Billy Drummond highlighted that he had asked a question at the previous meeting around residents choosing slow EV charging points and had not had an answer. Moira Fraser advised that she had asked the environmental team but had not yet heard back.

2. Declarations of Interest

No declarations of interest were received.

3. Licensing Fees and Charges 2026/27

Sean Murphy introduced the report on licensing fees and charges (Agenda Item 4). He explained that the paper focused on the setting of discretionary fees for Public Protection Services, which was a shared service across two authorities and would soon include a third. The fees were based on an hourly rate, currently set at £74 per hour, reflecting a 7.2% increase from the previous year. The report also noted that statutory fees, particularly those under the Licensing Act 2003, had not increased since their introduction and were approximately 70% below inflation.

Sean Murphy further clarified the methodology for calculating fees, including the inclusion of support service recharges and the impact of external inspection costs, particularly for animal establishments, which were currently conducted by the City of London. He noted efforts to recruit and train an in-house inspector to reduce costs.

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Councillor Stephanie Steevenson expressed concern that statutory fees had not increased since 2007, describing the situation as unacceptable and highlighting that the Council was comparatively inexpensive. She supported the move to in-house inspections and emphasised the need for fees to cover costs.

Councillor Jeremy Cottam confirmed that a previous letter regarding statutory fees had been sent to the Local Government Authority and relevant ministers but had not received a response. He proposed that officers draft a similar letter to local MPs to urge a review of statutory fees.

Sean Murphy explained that the lack of increase in statutory fees had resulted in budget pressures, requiring cuts in other service areas. He noted that while some sectors faced challenges, others could have afforded higher fees, but the Council was legally unable to cross-subsidise between sectors.

Councillor Phil Barnett queried the calculation of fees for riding establishments, noting variations in the percentage increase. Moira Fraser confirmed that the differences were due to rounding.

Councillor Clive Taylor asked about the high hedges fee under the Anti-Social Behaviour Act, seeking clarification on who paid the fee. Sean Murphy responded that the fee was paid by the complainant, and Moira Fraser added that the high fee reflected the cost of specialist inspections.

Councillor Paul Kander queried the meaning of asterisks on certain fees and was informed by Moira Fraser that these previously indicated discounts for electric and hybrid vehicles, which had been removed.

Councillor Kander also questioned whether the Council could introduce a statutory top-up fee to cover costs. Councillor Cottam and Sean Murphy explained that statutory fees were set by central government, and the Council was not permitted to add additional charges or cross-subsidise.

Councillor Martha Vickers asked whether other local authorities were in a similar position, and Councillor Cottam confirmed that the issue had been discussed at the Joint Public Protection Committee.

RESOLVED that the Licensing Committee:

- Is informed about the 2026/27 fees and charges detailed in Appendix A.
- Agrees that the fees for Private Hire Operators and Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicle licence fees are subjected to the statutory consultation period as described in paragraph 4.9.

4. Feedback from the Taxi Trade Meeting

Moira Fraser introduced the report on the taxi trade meeting, noting that the document had been circulated in the supplementary pack due to the timing of meetings. She explained that the Council typically met with the taxi trade twice a year, in January and October, to discuss relevant issues and policy changes, with meetings scheduled around the fee setting cycle.

Moira Fraser reported that the trade raised several areas for discussion. It was advised that the lead applications officer within the Public Protection Partnership had begun

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compiling the registers. The trade requested additional information to be included, and after cleansing the data, the revised registers were anticipated to be published by the end of the month.

Moir Fraser stated that the trade also raised the issue of fare increases. The trade indicated a desire to review fares but noted that the taxi policy needed to be set first to understand the implications. She also confirmed that the trade requested a review of the list of authorised garages. One garage had indicated it no longer wished to undertake taxi checks, and the trade had identified another company interested in providing this service. Mark Groves, Licensing Enforcement Lead Officer, had contacted the replacement garage, and the Council would also write to other local garages to gauge interest, subject to relevant checks.

Moir Fraser addressed concerns raised by the trade regarding the Council's website. The trade found it confusing to be redirected from the West Berkshire website to the Public Protection Partnership website. The Digital Services Team had added a note to the West Berkshire licensing page to clarify this. The trade also expressed concerns about having to use the Bracknell Forest website for online payments. She noted that there was not a quick fix for this issue.

Moir Fraser further reported that communication was discussed, and officers were set to meet to plan the next newsletter which was planned to be issued every two months.

Councillor Stephanie Steevenson commented that the criticisms of the website were distinct issues. She emphasised the importance of providing an online payment facility and highlighted the need for adequate resources to support efficient operations, including the reinstatement of the newsletter.

Councillor Paul Dick clarified that online payment was possible, but the issue was the appearance of the Bracknell name. Greater clarification was needed.

Councillor Dick also reflected on the positive progress made at the recent meeting with the trade, noting that the bimonthly newsletter and other improvements were well received.

RESOLVED that: the Committee noted the report.

5. Forward Plan

The Forward Plan was noted.

(The meeting commenced at 16:30 and closed at 17:09)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature