

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 28 JULY 2025

Councillors Present: Paul Dick (Vice-Chairman), Phil Barnett, Billy Drummond, Nigel Foot, Paul Kander, Jane Langford, Tom McCann, Stephanie Steevenson, Clive Taylor and Martha Vickers

Also Present: Julia O'Brien (Team Manager - Licensing), Mark Groves (Lead Licensing Officer), Moira Fraser (Principal Officer - Policy & Governance), Thomas Radbourne (Zoom Host) and Benjamin Ryan (Clerk)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Jeremy Cottam and Councillor David Marsh

PART I

1. Minutes

The Minutes of the meetings held on 20 January 2025, 17 March 2025 and 15 May 2025 were approved as true and correct records and signed by the Chairman.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

3. West Berkshire Council Licensing Annual Report 2024/25

Julia O'Brien introduced the West Berkshire Council Licensing Annual Report 2024/25 (Agenda Item 4).

Councillor Stephanie Steevenson enquired into the enforcement strategies of the Licensing Team, and Mark Groves outlined work with the Immigration Service and Thames Valley Police, specifically operations in the Thatcham and Hungerford areas, regarding illegal immigrants. Moira Fraser noted the reliance on community feedback from Ward Members, Parish Councils and residents, and the big campaign about underage sales.

The Vice-Chairman queried the frequency of enforcement notices, and Mark Groves stated it was around once a month.

Councillor Nigel Foot sought clarification on the enforcement of those who hired illegal immigrants. Mark Groves detailed the team's collaboration with the Home Office Border Force Team, who invited officers along to various premises, from restaurants to nail bars, noting potential licence reviews for establishments employing individuals without work rights, and potential penalties.

Councillor Tom McCann requested the number of people identified through investigations into illegal immigration, and whether the Council publicised businesses acting in such a way. Mark Groves stated that the Home Office held the figures, but due to their sensitive

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nature they were not available to the Committee. Moira Fraser added that any cases prosecuted in the courts that resulted in a guilty verdict would be put out as a press release and on social media.

Councillor Clive Taylor questioned why there was only a three month period for underage sales statistics, and Moira Fraser explained that data collection began in December when they employed an underage sales officer.

Councillor Paul Kander queried licence removal for repeat offenders, and Julia O'Brien confirmed that licences could be removed by Trading Standards, the Licensing Team and the Licensing Sub-Committee.

Councillor Kander asked what was required to take a licence to review, and Julia O'Brien responded that it depended on the offence and circumstances.

The Vice-Chairman enquired about past licence removals, and Moira Fraser mentioned a past case in Thatcham and licence transfers; however, it was noted that it was an extremely rare occurrence.

The Vice-Chairman suggested a meeting between the Chairman and key officers to ensure serious offences were brought to Members' attention more often.

Councillor Steevenson noted the lack of uplift in statutory licensing fees, and Julia O'Brien confirmed ongoing efforts to address the issue, having written to the Secretary of State, which was still awaiting a response.

Councillor Steevenson enquired about public registers on page 38 of the agenda. Julia O'Brien explained the plan to implement the new database system, with a target of six months, pending data protection checks. The Vice-Chairman challenged the six-month timeframe and encouraged officers to bring this target forward.

Councillor Billy Drummond questioned whether residents ever chose the slow EV charging points, and Moira Fraser explained this was data held by the Environmental Team and offered to investigate.

Councillor Phil Barnett asked about the upcoming Terrorism Protection Act, and Julia O'Brien stated that clear guidance was awaited on where areas of responsibility would fall. However, it was closely monitored by officers in readiness for if/when it came through to them for action.

Councillor Martha Vickers highlighted the Community Alcohol Partnership as a positive aspect and asked how involved the Council was with this scheme. Moira Fraser detailed the PPP's involvement and funding in the group, as well as educational efforts in schools.

Councillor Drummond proposed to accept officers' recommendations, which was seconded by Councillor Steevenson.

The proposal was put to the vote and the Licensing Committee **RESOLVED** to approve the Annual Report 2024/25 as set out in Appendix A.

4. Film Classification Policy

Mark Groves introduced the Film Classification Policy to the Committee (Agenda Item 5).

Councillor Steevenson asked about film licensing and the new set of conditions, and Julia O'Brien responded that there was no need for the policy until a recent application, which prompted the creation of one.

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Councillor McCann questioned Member input on potentially controversial films. Moira Fraser stated that officers would initially assess films, with a review possible by the Sub-Committee.

Councillor Kander questioned the definition of "film". Definitions and exemptions were discussed, leading to a need for a more polished definition which would be circulated after the meeting.

Councillor Barnett proposed to approve officers' recommendations, pending the inclusion of a definition of a film which was to be circulated and agreed after the meeting. This was seconded by Councillor Kander.

The proposal was put to a vote and the Licensing Committee **RESOLVED that:**

2.1 The policy be recommend for adoption, subject to the inclusion of a definition of a film.

2.2 It would be recommended to Full Council that Section 1.4 of the Council's Scheme of Delegation (Part 11 of the Constitution) be amended to delegate the classification of films under Section 20 of the Licensing Act 2003 to Officers.

5. **Forward Plan**

The Forward Plan was noted.

(The meeting commenced at 4.30 pm and closed at 5.25 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature