

DRAFT

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

LICENSING COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON TUESDAY 24 MARCH 2026

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

Also Present: Moira Fraser, Julia O'Brien, Riley Timney, Thomas Radbourne, Darius Zarazel

PART I

1. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 3 November 2025 were approved as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 December 2025 were approved as a true and accurate record and signed by the Chairman.

2. Declarations of Interest

No Declarations of Interest were received.

3. Variations to Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicles and Private Hire Operator's Fees

Moira Fraser introduced the report concerning the outcome of the consultation on statutory fees for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Vehicles and Private Hire Operator's fees, which had previously been agreed for consultation on 3 November 2025.

The Consultation ran from 6 November to 4 December 2025, and the outcome was due to be reported to the January Licensing Committee meeting, but due to the cancellation of that meeting, it was instead reported at this meeting. It was noted that the fees had already been approved at the Full Council meeting in February and would come into effect on 1 April 2026.

Officers advised that two responses had been received to the consultation, both from members of the public, but these related to tariffs rather than fees and had therefore not impacted on the recommendation to full Council.

Resolved: That the Licensing Committee note the report.

4. Consultation on Protected Plates and Accessibility

Julia O'Brien introduced the report, outlining that the purpose was to agree the timetable and methodology for consulting on protected plates, as previously discussed at the December meeting. She explained that the consultation would last seven weeks, which was slightly longer than usual due to the Easter period, and would include questions regarding respondents' awareness of protected plates and their relevance.

Members queried whether there were any groups or parts of the local community missing from the list of consultees. Officers responded that the consultation would be as wide as possible, and confirmed that the trade, residents, and taxi users would be consulted.

LICENSING COMMITTEE - 24 MARCH 2026 - MINUTES

Officers noted the challenge of engaging with the disabled community due to the disbandment of the local disability awareness forum, but assured Members that efforts would be made to gather their views.

The Chairman suggested national charities that focussed on wheelchair access and related issues should also be consulted to ensure a comprehensive perspective.

Members asked whether there was data on the number of protected plates year on year, specifically whether the number was decreasing. The Chairman referred to item 4.6 of the report, which stated that 35 Hackney Carriage licenses were affected, and queried historical figures. Officers confirmed that the number was decreasing, recalling that there were originally 80 or 90 such licenses, but they did not have precise historical data.

Members highlighted the difficulty of engaging with disability groups, particularly those who may not use online platforms. Members suggested utilising community engagement forums such as "Lets Talk" to reach vulnerable residents. Officers agreed and confirmed that hardcopies of the consultation would be taken to these events across various localities.

Members raised the potential impact of future Local Government Reorganisation. Officers confirmed that policy alignment would be necessary for all Council Policies if this occurred.

Members recommended that Officers contact the West Berkshire Learning Disability Partnership, coordinated by Alex Kaardal at the volunteer centre, to further engage with the disabled community. Councillor Nigel Foot offered to provide contact details to Officers.

Members sought clarification on whether the consultation would address both protected plates and accessibility as separate issues, expressing concern that combining them might inadvertently affect broader taxi policy. Officers clarified that while the issues were related, there would be a single consultation, with distinct questions to capture the views of both the trade and the disabled community.

Councillor Stephanie Steevenson, as the Council's representative on the Learning Disability Partnership Board, confirmed her willingness to assist with consultation and noted that the Board's members were not necessarily wheelchair users.

The Chairman requested that officers provide further information on the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, best practice, and government requirements, as well as the potential impact on trade in the outcome report which would be brought to the next Licensing Committee meeting.

Actions:

- National Charities focussed on wheelchair access and related issues be consulted to ensure a comprehensive perspective.
- Community engagement forums to be utilised to reach vulnerable residents, with hardcopies of the consultation to be taken to events across various localities
- Councillor Nigel Foot to provide contact details for West Berkshire Learning Disability Partnership to officers.
- Councillor Stephanie Steevenson to assist with consultation of the Learning Disability Partnership Board.
- Officers to provide further information on the requirements of the Equality Act 2010, best practice, and government requirements, as well as the potential impact on trade.

LICENSING COMMITTEE - 24 MARCH 2026 - MINUTES

Resolved: That the Licensing Committee:

2.1 **AGREED** that the 'protected plate' consultation on Hackney Carriage vehicles be carried out as described in [paragraph 5](#) of the report.

2.2 **AGREED** that the results of the consultation be brought back to the next meeting of the Licensing Committee where Members will consider amendments in respect of protected plates, if any are needed, as set out in the current policy including any implementation dates.

5. Forward Plan

The Chairman invited Members and officers to consider any further amendments to the forward plan. He noted that an update had been circulated and was available to members.

Members sought clarification from officers regarding items seven and eight on the forward plan and asked for an explanation of the charity collections policy and special treatments by-laws. Officers responded that the charity collections policy related to the authorisation or registration of charity collections to prevent multiple collections occurring simultaneously. Officers explained that other councils had policies specifying the types of collections permitted and their locations. Regarding special treatments by-laws, officers stated that the Council currently registered activities such as tattooing and ear piercing. Officers noted that there were increasing concerns about unlicensed Botox and other dermal treatments not currently covered by registration, and the Council was considering expanding the scope of activities regulated.

Members asked whether "Chuggers" (paid face-to-face charity fundraisers using high-pressure sales tactics) would be included in the review of charity collections. The Chairman felt that this should be included in any policy updates. He noted that there had not been any reported problems locally but felt that it was a valuable suggestion.

Members sought clarification on whether the outcome of the protected plates and accessibility discussion would be included in the July meeting as part of the forward plan. Officers confirmed that this was an omission and that the report back on this item would be added to the July meeting, resulting in five items for that meeting.

Members raised the issue of correspondence sent to Central Government regarding license fees, noting that no response had been received. The Chairman confirmed that a letter had been sent to MHCLG and the Local Government Association over a year ago without reply. He stated that a redrafted letter would be sent to the Local MPs within the next week, requesting their personal lobbying on the issue due to the financial impact on the Council.

Members asked whether other councils were lobbying Central Government. Councillor McCann confirmed that the Local Government Association and other councils had been lobbying for changes to licensing fees for some time, but there had been no progress.

Members recalled a previous discussion about investigating the possibility of imposing a local surcharge to recover costs and queried the legality of such a measure. The Chairman and officers confirmed that this was not permitted as the fees were centrally regulated.

Actions:

- "Chuggers" to be included in the review of charity collections, and any subsequent policy updates.

LICENSING COMMITTEE - 24 MARCH 2026 - MINUTES

- The outcome of the Protected Plates and Accessibility consultation to be included in the July Licensing Meeting as part of the forward plan.

A redrafted letter to be sent to Local MPs regarding licensing fees, requesting their personal lobbying on the issue.

(The meeting commenced at 5.00 pm and closed at 5.25 pm)

CHAIRMAN

Date of Signature