

Licensing Committee Annual Report 2025/2026

Contents

Introduction	3
Governance	4
Licensing Committee	4
Licensing Sub-Committee.....	5
Taxi and Private Hire Liaison Group Meetings	6
Training	7
Resourcing	7
Licensing Act 2003.....	8
Gambling Act 2005.....	10
Licensed Drivers, Operators and Vehicles.....	11
Other Licences	12
Street Collections	13
Animal Breeding and Boarding	13
Scrap Metal Dealers	13
House to House Collections	14
Street Trading	14
Dermal Personal and Premises Registration	14
Film Classification	14
Service Requests	15
Licensing Challenges for 2026/27 and Horizon Scanning	15
Multi-agency Liaison and Joint Operations.....	16
Safety Advisory Group (SAG)	18
Reducing Violence Against Women and Girls	19
Pubwatch	19
Institute of Licensing (IoL)	19
Under Age Sales.....	19
Joint Operations	20
Community Alcohol Partnership.....	20
Communication, Engagement and Information Management.....	21
Conclusion	21

Introduction

The shared Public Protection Partnership (PPP) delivers a range of regulatory functions across Licensing, Trading Standards and Environment Health. Licensing however is distinct in the way that activities are overseen, and policy is set. Whilst all decisions related to the PPP go through the Joint Public Protection Committee (JPPC), each partner authority retains its individual Licensing Committee and sets licensing related policy and monitors performance. This requires careful co-ordination and that clear governance arrangements have been put in place to ensure that this happens.

The Shared Licensing Service considers applications and exercises a range of delegated authorities to issue, suspend, refuse, and revoke licences, consents, notices and permits in the name of the Council.

Many businesses require some form of authority in order that they can deliver a range of services and goods to residents and visitors to West Berkshire. Legislation requiring a licence/consent/notice/permit for a business activity is generally enacted to protect users of a service or the wider community such as those that might be affected due to their proximity to the licensed premises or their interaction with an individual licence holder. Animal Welfare licensing provisions are there to protect the health and wellbeing of animals in regulated settings such as kennels or performances. Good regulation properly implemented also provides a level playing field for the licensed sector.

It is acknowledged by the licensed sector that an effective licensing regime, soundly administered and founded on sensible and effective policies creates consumer confidence which in turn is positive for licence holders. The service is aware that the licensing function, whilst offering protection, can also act as a barrier to others who wish to deliver services or supply goods. Every effort is therefore made to assist businesses to understand and progress through the licensing process. The service delivers a number of functions including business advice, processing of applications, monitoring compliance and where necessary taking enforcement action.

The Licensing Service covers a wide range of statutory licensing, registration and enforcement functions. These functions cover premises which sell and supply alcohol or provide regulated entertainment or late-night refreshment under the Licensing Act 2003. The service also issues licences for gambling premises, gaming machines and lotteries under the Gambling Act 2005. In addition, licences, consents and permissions are also issued for a number of other activities including hackney carriage and private hire drivers, vehicle and operator licences, animal breeding, boarding, performance and zoo licences, street trading, charitable collections, dermal licence for cosmetic piercing, ice cream vans, film classification and scrap metal dealers.

Governance

Licensing Committee

The [Licensing Committee](#) is responsible for setting the policy direction that forms the basis of licensing activity in the District. Under the Licensing Act 2003 and the Gambling Act 2005 there is a legal obligation for the Council to set key policies. In other areas the Council has a range of powers to set licence conditions and adopt sector specific policy positions. There is also a requirement for the Council to have a Licensing Committee of between 12 and 15 Members.

The Licensing Committee comprises 12 Members and the 2025/26 membership is set out below:

Liberal Democrat Group (7 Members)	Phil Barnett, Jeremy Cottam (Chairman), Billy Drummond, Nigel Foot, Tom McCann, Stephanie Steevenson, Martha Vickers
Conservative Group (3 Members)	Paul Dick (Vice Chairman), Paul Kander, Jane Langford
Minority Group (2 Members)	Clive Taylor, David Marsh

Following the annual Council meeting on the 14 May 2026 the 2026/27 membership of the Committee is as follows:

Liberal Democrat Group (7 Members)	Phil Barnett, Jeremy Cottam (Chairman), Billy Drummond, Nigel Foot, Tom McCann, Stephanie Steevenson, Martha Vickers
Conservative Group (3 Members)	Paul Dick (Vice Chairman), Paul Kander, Jane Langford
Minority Group (2 Members)	Clive Taylor, David Marsh

Over the 2025/26 period the Licensing Committee met on the:

- 15 May 2025 (Annual Meeting),
- 28 July 2025,
- 03 November 2025,
- 15 December 2025 (Special)

- 24 March 2026

The Committee considered several matters including:

- the annual consultation and review of fees and charges,
- the annual report,
- the adoption of the Film Classification Policy.
- the adoption of the hackney carriage and private hire licensing policy.

In terms of forward planning, in addition to the annual fees and charges and tariffs cycle, a number of policies and decisions including the following are scheduled for consideration during the 2026/27 cycle:

- Approach to Fireworks
- Updates to the Statement of Licensing Policy arising from amendments to S182 Guidance
- Consideration of the outcome of the consultation on the Taxi Plates consultation (and if any changes need to be made to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy)
- Charity Collections Policy
- Scrap Metal Licensing Policy
- Sex Establishment Policy
- Special Treatment Bye-Laws
- Street Trading Policy

The Forward Plan for the Licensing Committee will be discussed with the Chairman and Vice Chairman throughout the year and a copy can be found here: [Governance and accountability - Public Protection Partnership](#). A copy of the Forward Plan is also included on each agenda.

Licensing Sub-Committee

While the Licensing Committee carries out functions relating to policy formulation the Licensing Sub Committee determines certain licensing applications in line with the Scheme of Delegation agreed under the Licensing Act 2003 and the Gambling Act 2005.

To determining applications under the Licensing Act 2003 and Gambling Act 2005 the legislation requires the membership of each Licensing Sub-Committee to be three Members of the Licensing Committee.

Regardless of the regime, all licences are processed in a similar manner. The application is received, checked and where required a consultation held. As a rule, any new application that attracts relevant adverse representation during the consultation period will be heard before a Licensing Sub-Committee. Applications made under the Licensing and Gambling Acts must be granted in the absence of representations.

Applications for taxi licences are currently determined by officers and any appeals following refusal of the application are to be taken to the Magistrates' Court within 21 days of the refusal, except Hackney Carriage Vehicle (Proprietors) Licence appeals which are direct to the Crown Court.

The Licensing Act 2003 and Gambling Act 2005 prescribe responsible authorities that must be consulted and who may submit representations against a licence application. Responsible authorities include the police, fire service, trading standards, environmental health, planning, public health, Home Office, Canals and River Trust (when the application is on the waterway), safeguarding board relating to the protection of children from harm and the licensing authority itself. There is a requirement for applicants to place notices on site and advertise the application in a local newspaper.

During the 2025/26 financial year the Licensing Sub Committee met on three occasions.

Type of Application	Premise	Outcome
New Premises License	Best Buy Foods, 51 London Road, Newbury, West Berkshire, RG14 1JN	Granted subject to additional conditions
Review of a Premise Licence	The Gun, 142 Andover Road, Newbury, RG14 6NE	Premise license be amended with immediate effect to include the conditions agreed by the License Holder and the Home Office
New Premises License	Benham Park House, Speen, Newbury, West Berkshire, RG20 8LU	Granted subject to additional conditions

By way of comparison in 2024/25 the Sub-Committee met once, 2023/24 the Sub-Committee met on seven occasions, in 2022/23 the Sub-Committee was not required to meet, in 2021/22 six meetings were held, in 2020/21 the LSC met on two occasions, in 2019/20 six applications were heard, three hearings were held in 2018/19 and three in 2017/18.

Parties to the hearings have a right of appeal to the magistrates' court. There were no appeals against decisions made under the Licensing Act submitted in 2025/26.

Taxi and Private Hire Liaison Group Meetings

The Group was set up to provide a forum to meet with and consider comments from representatives of the taxi trade and seek advice from Licensing Officers on a range of issues that affect existing and proposed licences, policies, tariffs, fees and other matters

of common interest. The Group is also tasked with reporting back to the Licensing Committee with any recommendations for alterations to the existing or proposed licences, policies, tariffs and fees.

It is proposed that the membership of this Group be amended to comprise the Chairman and Vice Chairman of the Licensing Committee, the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Licensing, the Licensing Manager, Licensing Officers and representatives from the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Trade. The proposed amended draft Terms of Reference for the Group are attached as an appendix to the report.

The number of attendees from the Trade has remained steady over the last few years and Officers continue to encourage trade representatives to attend the meetings and the notes are circulated to the trade and Licensing Committee to keep them abreast of discussions that have taken place.

There are two scheduled meetings in the diary each year, one in October and one in January, and ad hoc meetings can be arranged subject to the agreement of the Chairman where it is necessary to do so.

In addition to the scheduled twice-yearly meetings, several meetings were held with members of the trade in relation to the draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy in 2025/26. The draft policy was amended, where appropriate to reflect these discussions and adopted at the Special Licensing Committee meeting in December 2025.

Training

Training for Licensing Committee Members took place on the 09 June and 11 June 2025. All Members that were unable to attend the training are afforded the opportunity to review the training video and ask any questions of officers arising from it.

In accordance with the Constitution all Members must attend the annual training before sitting on a Licensing Sub-Committee.

Training for the 2026/2027 year will take place on the 06 July 2026.

Resourcing

The Licensing Service comprises both the Applications and Enforcement functions. The Team establishment comprises around 10 FTE (11 posts). We have had a vacancy in the Enforcement Team since March 2026 and the Applications Lead Officer role has also been vacant since April 2026. The Applications Lead Officer role is currently out for recruitment and the Licensing Enforcement Officer role will be advertised shortly.

There is also around 0.3FTE in terms of policy and governance work to support the Committee and assist with policy development. In addition the Service Lead for Public

Protection currently manages the Service.

The end of year financial position for the Public Protection Service was an underspend of £21k. Balancing the budget proved to be challenging with an in-year deficit made up of the National Insurance increase, and higher than expected cost of living increase. To achieve this the Service had to hold several vacancies open for significant lengths of time. The impact on staff who have been covering additional responsibilities also needs to be recognised. Licensing finished the year with a £25k overspend and an income surplus of £15k.

One of the other most significant contributory factors to income shortfall is that most statutory licensing fees have not been uplifted since circa 2011 and since 2005 for the Licensing Act fees. The Chairman of the Committee has written to the Secretary of State to urge her to revisit these statutory fees.

Discretionary Fees are set on the basis of the time taken to process an application multiplied by the hourly rate which is currently £74p/h. Officers are currently reviewing the time taken to process applications and these will be reflected in the 2027/28 fees which will come to Committee in November for discussion. The Service is also taking part in a corporate review of the Council's fees being undertaken by an external consultant. The review is looking at comparator data, considering if there are any fees not currently being charged for that should be and the current fee levels.

Licensing Act 2003

This Act governs licensable activities which include the sale or supply of alcohol, regulated entertainment, and late-night refreshment provision in premises and at outdoor events including public houses, registered members clubs, late night bars, and night clubs, off licences, late night takeaways and restaurants.

The Act also governs licensable activities that take place in village halls, community centres, school halls and outdoor events where licensable activities are held.

Late night refreshment provision is the supply of hot food or hot drink to the public, for consumption on or off the premises, between 11pm and 5am.

The provision of regulated entertainment can include activities such as the performance of a play, an exhibition of a film, an indoor sporting event, boxing or wrestling entertainment, performance of live music, any playing of recorded music, a performance of dance, performance of live music and any playing of recorded music.

The Licensing Act 2003 is governed by four licensing objectives:

- Prevention of crime and disorder
- Prevention of public nuisance
- Public Safety

- Protection of children from harm

Temporary Event Notices (TENS) are a facility under the Licensing Act 2003 where people can serve a notice on the council that states that they will be serving alcohol and/or providing regulated entertainment and/or late-night refreshment at a specified time.

As it is not an application or permit, no permission is sought. It is merely a notice served upon the licensing authority, the police and environmental health.

However, [there are strict limits to the number of temporary event notices](#) someone can serve, for how long the event can run and the number of people that can attend. These include the fact that the maximum number of attendees (including staff) cannot exceed 500 people, and the event cannot last for more than 168 hours (7 days). A single premises can have up to 15 TENS applied for in one year, if the total length of the events is not more than 21 days. A person who does not hold a personal licence can apply for up to 5 TENS a year and a maximum of 2 late TENS. If you already hold a personal licence to sell alcohol, you can be given up to 50 TENS a year and a maximum of 10 late TENS per year.

There is the ability for either the Police or Environmental Health to serve an objection notice which would then lead to a hearing to determine if licensable activities at the event can take place.

The notice period required under the law is ten working days, not including the day the notice is received or the day of the event, and the objection window for the police and environmental health is just three working days. It therefore follows that these hearings would need to be set up and take place in a very short space of time.

There is the ability to serve a limited number of late temporary event notices. If these are objected to a counter notice is automatically served without recourse to the licensing sub-committee. No hearings in respect of TENS took place during 2025/26.

The Licensing Act 2003 provides for an application to review a licence which can be brought by a responsible authority or any other person where a premises is undermining one or more of the licensing objectives. The Licensing Team received one requests to review a licence in 2025/26.

The number of licensed premises under the Act are in the table below with a comparison to previous years.

Type	At 31/03/2021	At 31/03/2022	At 31/03/2023	At 31/03/2023	At 31/03/2024	At 31/03/2025	At 31/03/2026
Personal Licence	2207	2269	2336	2336	2424	2495	2564
Premises Licence	465	509	N/a	N/a	520	535	528

TENs (total issued)*	71	379	352	352	421	632	649
Club Premises Certificate	40	38	41	41	40	41	39

Note: for TENs the figure given is the total number of notices / applications received within the calendar year

The Act places a responsibility on licensing authorities to adopt a [Statement of Licensing Policy](#) which sets out how the authority intends to promote the licensing objectives. The Statement of Licensing Policy (SoLP) must be reviewed at least every five years. The current iteration of the policy was published in December 2023 and came into effect on the 01 December 2023. At the time of adoption, it was noted that the Act provides that during each five year period a licensing authority must keep its policy under review and make such revisions to it, at such times, as it considers appropriate. Revised S182 Guidance was issued in January 2024, February 2025, November 2025 and February 2026 and the ensuing proposed amendments to the SoLP are the subject of a separate report on this agenda.

There were 28 reports relating to premises license locations in West Berkshire in 2025/26, 17 were complaints and the other 11 related to requests for information or advice.

Gambling Act 2005

Gambling facilities include bookmakers, bingo halls, amusement arcades, casinos and permits and permissions such as lotteries. There are three types of licences issued under this legislation premises licences, operators' licences and personal licences.

There are three licensing objectives that underpin this Act:

- preventing gambling from being a source of crime or disorder, being associated with crime or disorder or being used to support crime,
- ensuring that gambling is conducted in a fair and open way, and
- protecting children and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited by gambling.

Applications under this legislation continue to be few and far between although Officers continue to work closely with the Gambling Commission to ensure compliance with licence conditions. No hearings were conducted under this legislation in 2025/26.

Current permissions in force under this Act are:

Type	At 31/03/2021	At 31/03/2022	At 31/03/2023	At 31/03/2024	At 31/03/2025	At 31/03/2026
Small Society Lottery	108	116	129	97	99	114
Licensed	9	8	8	8	8	8

Premises Gaming Machine Permit						
Licensed Premises Gaming Machine Notice	83	83	83	81	89	84
Club Machine Permits	6	7	7	6	9	6
Club Gaming Permits	0	0	0	0	0	0
Gambling Premises	12	13	12	11	15	12

The Act places a responsibility on licensing authorities to adopt a [Statement of Gambling Principles](#) which sets out how the council will carry out its duties under the Gambling Act 2005. The Statement of Gambling Principles must be reviewed and published every three years. The current iteration of the policy was published in January 2025 after it was reviewed and consulted on during the 2024/25 financial year. The policy will need to be reviewed, consulted on and updated by January 2028.

In 2025/26, the PPP received two new licensing applications relating to gambling and betting for premises in West Berkshire.

In 2025/26 the PPP received 25 new licensing applications relating to small society lotteries in West Berkshire.

All recipients of permissions are required to complete a return to the authority. A significant number of small society lotteries relate to schools / Parent Teacher Friends Associations (PTFAs).

Licensed Drivers, Operators and Vehicles

Legislation places a duty on the council for the licensing of Hackney Carriages ('taxis') and private hire vehicles, drivers of those vehicles and operators of those vehicles. The council understands the importance and responsibility it has, to ensure that licensed vehicles in the district are safe, comfortable, properly insured, and available where and when required, and that those involved in the trade are "fit and proper" to undertake the role.

In November 2022 the Department for Transport updated the Statutory taxi and private hire vehicle standards that had previously been published in July 2020 and then in November 2023, The Department for Transport issued "Taxi and Private Hire vehicle licensing best practice for licensing authority in England". In accordance with these recommendations Officers have redrafted and consulted on a Draft Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy which was adopted at the December 2025 Licensing Committee meeting.

At that meeting Members agreed to undertake a review of the application of the policy with respect to ‘protected plates’. Officers have consulted on the proposed changes and the outcome of that consultation is also the subject of a separate report on this agenda.

In 2025/26 the PPP received 417 applications that related to the licensing of taxi / private hire drivers, vehicles and operators for West Berkshire. We received 98 service requests in relation to the hackney Carriage and Private Hire Trade, 46 of these reports related to complaints of which 5 related to safeguarding concerns. The other 52 sought advice or information. In 2025/2026 there were 3 licensed driver revocations in West Berkshire.

Officers and Members continue to work with the private hire and hackney trade to ensure effective communication and consultation takes place via the Taxi Trade Meetings.

Current data about number of licences issued is set out below:

Type	At 31/03/2021	At 31/03/2022	At 31/03/2023	At 31/03/2024	At 31/03/2025	At 31/03/2026
Private Hire Operator	56	51	62	59	66	59
Private Hire Vehicle Licence	127	138	154	181	175	160
Hackney Carriage Vehicle	133	123	118	181	149	97
Private Hire Driver	106	100	107	155	181	164
Dual (HC & PH) Driver	193	184	178	177	170	157

Other Licences

As well as the main functions outlined above the Licensing Team also administers and enforces a wide range of other licences, registrations and permits current numbers of which are outlined below:

Type	At 31/03/2021	At 31/03/2022	At 31/03/2023	At 31/03/2024	At 31/03/2025	At 31/03/2026
Animal Boarding Establishment and Dog Breeding	11	20	16	12	14	13
Home Boarding of Dogs Licence	26	33	34	39	45	39
Riding Establishment Licence	5	6	7	7	8	7
Pet Shop Licence	4	3	4	2	2	2
Keep or Train Animals for Exhibition	N/a	N/a	N/a	4	6	4
Dangerous Animals	-	1	4	2	2	1
Zoo Licence	-	1	2	2	2	3

Scrap Metal Dealer Site	5	5	3	3	5	6
Scrap Metal Dealer - Mobile	5	3	3	1	1	0
Dermal Personal and Premises Registration	334	357	371	397	423	423
Hairdresser Registration	-	36	38	42	52	51
Street Trading Consent	20	25	26	17	32	19
Street Collections*	10	29	N/a	36	19	14
House to House Collections*	17	21	N/a	25	25	11
Caravan Licence	-	31	37	33	32	32
Licensable HMO	-	30	39	38	41	45
Primate Licensing	-	-	-	-	-	0

Note: for street collections and house to house collections, the figure given is the total number of notices / applications received within the calendar year.

Street Collections

Street collections only cover the collections of cash. The regulation of other forms of collection such as direct debits is a matter for the Fundraising Regulator. All those that are issued permits to collect are required to file a return to the Council.

There were 49 applications received for street collections in 2025/26 in West Berkshire. All were granted. We did not receive any service requests regarding street collections.

Animal Breeding and Boarding

There are a range of controls falling to the PPP around licensable activities involving the sale and keeping of animals. These include pet shops (sales normally conducted from home), regulated pet breeding, boarding and home boarding, kennels and catteries, riding establishments, zoos and animals involved in performance and display.

In 2025/26 there were 33 licensing applications in relation to animal boarding and day care facilities for West Berkshire.

There were 2 licensing applications in relation selling animals as pets, for West Berkshire. There was also 1 licensing application in relation to hiring and training animals for exhibitions in West Berkshire.

There were 3 reports relating to animal breeding in 2025/26 across West Berkshire, of these all were complaints.

Scrap Metal Dealers

There were 2 new applications for scrap metal sites and 1 new application for collectors in 2025/26. There were 11 reports relating to scrap metal dealers in 2025/26 in West Berkshire, two were complaints and 9 requests for information.

This is a priority area for enforcement and joint visits take place with Thames Valley Police (TVP) to ensure the provisions of the legislation and licence conditions are being

complied with, with particular focus on traceability, identification checks and cash payments. There has been a great deal of activity by licensing officers to locate and then engage with people who are engaging in scrap metal activities resulting in further applications being received and processed in 2026.

House to House Collections

House-to-House collections relate to charity bags. There have been issues identified previously around unauthorised collections however, over the last year this was not the case. The larger charities have national exemptions from the need for local permissions.

In 2025/26 the PPP received 29 licensing applications relating to House-to-House collections in West Berkshire.

Street Trading

Street trading consents are largely in place to ensure that the location is suitable and that controls are in place to manage a range of potential nuisance issues. In 2025/26 the PPP received 45 street trading consent applications. Of these 29 were new applications.

There were 13 reports in relation to street trading in 2025/26. 7 of the reports were complaints, the other 6 related to requests for information or advice

Licensing Officers have been focussing on unlicensed ice cream vans since early 2025 and we now have licensed 8 vans.

Dermal Personal and Premises Registration

Under the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 all premises or individuals that wish to practice the following must register with the local authority unless the treatments are done by or under the supervision of a medical practitioner, in which case there is no need to acquire a premise licence:

- acupuncture
- electrolysis
- ear piercing
- tattooing

Dermal registrations are issued on application only. In 2025/2026 there were 16 personal registrations issued and 9 premises.

Film Classification

We had 2 requests for information regarding a film classification for 2025/26 but no actual application was received. The licensing authority may be asked to classify a non-classified film or reclassify a British Board of film classification (BBFC).

A Film Classification Policy was adopted in 2024/25 which sets out the process for applications for authorisation of films to be considered by a Licensing Officer on behalf of the Licensing Authority, as set out in The Council's Scheme of Delegation. Any

requests to classify films may be referred by the Licensing Manager, at their discretion, or to the Licensing Sub-Committee for determination.

Service Requests

PPP Licensing data shows that it dealt with 495 Service Requests of those 194 were for Bracknell Forest and 301 in West Berkshire in 2025/26.

There were 535 in 2024/25, 394 in 2023/24, 312 service requests in 2022/23, 260 in 2021/22, 272 in 2020/21, 168 in 2019/20, 199 in 2018/19 and 210 in 2017/18. These are primarily requests for advice etc. This figure does not include licensing applications.

Licensing Challenges for 2026/27 and Horizon Scanning

There continue to be regular changes to legislation and guidance affecting the licensing arena. Over the next two years, the licensing service is likely to be affected by a mix of new laws that have already been passed, further detailed regulations that may still be introduced, and government consultations that could lead to new duties for local authorities. There may also be changes linked to devolution and the reorganisation of local government.

This means the service will need to prepare not only for changes in the law, but also for changes in how it enforces rules, how it works with partner organisations, and possibly where licensing responsibilities sit within local government.

New Standards of Modern Zoo Practice 2027

The new standards will come into effect from 24 May 2027 and will cover Great Britain (England, Wales and Scotland). The regulations will prohibit the long-term tethering of birds of prey, a practice criticised by animal welfare advocates. The common practice of allowing visitors to touch fish and cephalopods, such as rays and octopuses, will also be discontinued.

Larger enclosures will be needed for some animals. The changes also require improved conservation standards and safety measures when keeping dangerous animals including better training for staff when handling exotic animals, and improved public safety measures. Modifications will require better record-keeping and more focus on breeding programmes for endangered animals, research into behaviour and public education about conservation.

There are also new safety standard requirements including changes to the rules on double-gated entry systems, protections for staff working alone and the availability of firearms if needed. Zoos and aquariums will also be obliged to draw up continuity plans for what would happen to their animals if the institution faced financial hardship.

Some of the new standards will however include longer transition times including:

- new requirements for tethering birds of prey - these will come into effect on 1 January 2030
- the use of the free contact management, the ankus and electric goads for elephants must be phased out by 1 January 2030
- new requirements for enclosure sizes for elephants will come into effect on 1 January 2040

As of mid-2026, licensing authorities are shifting towards a more proactive, "business-friendly" model that balances traditional safety regulation with economic growth and high-street regeneration.

Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025

The Terrorism (Protection of Premises) Act 2025, also known as Martyn's Law, received Royal Assent on 3 April 2025. Statutory guidance was published in April 2026. The Home Office and ProtectUK have said there will be an implementation period of at least 24 months before the main legal duties take effect.

The law will apply to some premises and events that are open to the public. The Security Industry Authority (SIA) will regulate the new system. This is unlikely to create a new licensing function licensing teams, but it is likely to increase expectations on them to give advice, work closely with partners, support event planning, contribute to Safety Advisory Groups, and help licensed premises and event organisers understand their new duties on protective security.

Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026

The Tobacco and Vapes Act 2026 introduces a wide range of new offences and enforcement powers. These include the "smoke-free generation" policy, powers to issue fixed penalty notices (FPNs), provisions about which authorities are responsible for enforcement, and a legal framework for licensing retailers that sell tobacco, vaping and nicotine products in England.

From 1 January 2027, the new age-of-sale rule for tobacco will apply. This means that anyone born on or after 1 January 2009 will never be able to legally buy tobacco products.

Much of the enforcement work is likely to fall to trading standards and public health teams. However, licensing teams should expect linked impacts across services, especially if local retail licensing rules are brought into force, if new governance arrangements are needed, or if a local licensing model based on premises is introduced.

Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing

In taxi and private hire licensing, changes are moving beyond sharing safeguarding information and towards wider structural reform. The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 includes a full section on taxi and private hire licensing. This covers national standards, reporting concerns about drivers licensed by other authorities, temporary suspension powers and enforcement officers.

At the same time, the Department for Transport (DfT) ran a consultation between 8 January 2026 and 1 April 2026 on whether all local transport authorities in England should become responsible for taxi and private hire vehicle licensing. The aim is to deal with inconsistent standards and the long-standing problem of drivers being licensed in one area but mainly working in another.

For council licensing services, this means the next two years may involve preparing for updated local standards, stronger enforcement across council boundaries, more consistent policies and systems, and, depending on local government reform, the possible transfer of functions to a wider strategic authority area.

Licensing Act 2003

Changes under the Licensing Act 2003 are moving towards a system that is simpler and more consistent across the country, although much of the detail still depends on further consultation and later changes.

The government's response to the Licensing Taskforce accepted most of its recommendations, subject to further consultation. These include proposals for a National Licensing Policy Framework, an "amnesty" to remove outdated licence conditions, a review of Temporary Event Notice (TEN) limits, stronger "agent of change" principles, and measures to support hospitality and growth in the evening and night-time economy.

A later call for evidence showed broad support for a more consistent and open system across licensing authorities. For licensing teams, this means local policies, standard conditions, committee procedures and digital systems may all need to be reviewed once national reforms are finalised.

Non-Surgical Cosmetic Procedures

An important new duty could arise from the government's work on non-surgical cosmetic procedures. In its consultation response published in August 2025, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) confirmed that it plans to develop a local authority licensing scheme for lower-risk procedures using powers in section 180 of the Health and Care Act 2022. The highest-risk procedures are expected to fall under regulation by the Care Quality Commission (CQC) instead.

The same response makes clear that more public consultation and further regulations are still needed before the new system can start. Although the timetable is still uncertain, this is one of the clearest areas where licensing teams may gain a completely new function in the next two years. If that happens, it is likely to affect policy development, fee setting, inspection capacity, appeals and enforcement.

Animal Licensing Activities

There is no major new primary legislation in this area at present, but updated statutory guidance published on 1 June 2026 is important for day-to-day operations. Revised guidance from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra)

confirms that local authorities must make sure licence holders comply with the rules, refuse unsuitable applicants, take action against unlicensed operators, and follow a clear process for applications, inspections, ratings and renewals.

The guidance also sets out a reporting timetable to the Secretary of State. It says the next reporting window opens on 1 April 2027. It also says authorities should aim to decide new applications within 10 weeks and should remind licence holders to renew their licence three months before it expires. For councils that carry out this work, inspector capacity, staff training and qualifications, data reporting and enforcement against unlicensed activity will remain key service pressures.

Gambling Act 2005

National reform following the gambling white paper has already changed the way some land-based gambling venues operate. This includes legal changes for casinos that took effect on 22 July 2025. The government has also said that licensing authority fees for gambling premises licences will increase as part of wider reform.

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment Act 2026 also includes a separate section on impact assessments for gambling premises. This suggests that councils should keep a close watch on any further guidance and commencement dates. In practice, this could mean more pressure on councils dealing with applications, licence variations and local evidence about the impact of gambling premises in sensitive areas.

Devolution And Local Government Reorganisation

The English Devolution and Community Empowerment programme confirms that strategic authorities are becoming the main model for devolution, alongside a wider programme of local government reorganisation in two-tier areas.

Because licensing functions, especially taxi and private hire licensing, are increasingly being considered alongside transport, economic development and public safety at strategic authority level, councils should plan for the possibility that licensing responsibilities, committee structures, staffing arrangements and digital systems may need to change over the medium term.

High Street Organised Crime Initiative

The UK government has launched a £30 million High Street Organised Crime initiative to shut down rogue storefronts (like vape shops, mini-marts, and sweet shops) linked to illicit trades, money laundering, and serious organized crime. Although local authority licensing teams are not the lead enforcement body, they are expected to play a key supporting and disruptive role within a multi-agency response alongside police, NCA, Trading Standards, HMRC and immigration enforcement.

Multi-agency Liaison and Joint Operations

Safety Advisory Group (SAG)

Licensing Officers are attendees at SAG meetings. The SAG comprises of representatives from West Berkshire Council, emergency services and other relevant bodies. The SAG meets at regular intervals, or when necessary to review event

applications and advise on public safety. The role of the SAG is to provide advice to individuals and organisations planning a public event.

In 2025/26 the West Berkshire SAG considered documentation for 353 events.

Reducing Violence Against Women and Girls

The PPP Licensing Service is part of a wider Thames Valley Police (TVP) initiative looking at reducing incidence of harm affecting women and girls. The Team's specific area of input is with licensed premises and the management of risk within those premises. Licensing Officers attend enforcement visits with TVP and other agencies as part of this ongoing work. Officers will also be attending a series of Keeping Town Centres Safe events in the town centre over the summer alongside colleagues from TVP and the Building Communities Together Team.

Pubwatch

Licensing officers from the PPP regularly attend Pubwatch meetings alongside colleagues from Thames Valley Police and local businesses. The objectives of the group are to tackle and prevent anti-social behaviour and criminal activity, promote safe drinking environments for customers and secure working environments for staff and improve communication and sharing information between licensees.

Institute of Licensing (IoL)

The IoL is the professional body for licensing matters and is instrumental in providing access to case law and legislation updates, training, and information sharing. Licensing Officers regularly attend the quarterly regional meetings.

Under Age Sales

The PPP employs a specialist Under Age Sales (UAS) Officer funded through grant funding. A pool of UAS volunteers aged between 14yrs and 17yrs have been recruited and there are nine PPP officers available on a rota basis to be the second officer on the UAS test purchase operations with other members of the team on 'back-up' if required.

In 2025/26, the following UAS Operations have taken place in West Berkshire. There were nine successful purchases out of 66 operations. While the failure rate of 14% is concerning, it is a reduction on the 20% failure rate of 2024/25. Officers are continuing to raise awareness and promote the operations.

By way of comparison this figure was 21% for Bracknell Forest and 5% for Wokingham Borough. Overall, 22% of attempted alcohol purchases were successful, 18% of attempted knife sales and 17% tobacco sales were successful. Appropriate enforcement action is taken against retailers where these sales occur.

The PPP have also recently introduced a Responsible Retailer Scheme which aims to promote safe and lawful retail practices for age-restricted products across Bracknell Forest, Wokingham, and West Berkshire. By fostering a culture of compliance and

ethical responsibility, the scheme helps protect children and vulnerable individuals, and the wider community. You can read more about the scheme here: [Responsible Retailer Scheme - Public Protection Partnership](#)

	Vapes	Alcohol	Tobacco	Lottery	Total
	Fail/visits	Fail/visits	Fail/visits	Fail/visits	Fail/visits
WBC	3/15	5/19	0/7	0/10	1/15

Joint Operations

Joint operations with colleagues from Thames Valley Police (VAWG), Home Office (Immigration), Driver and Vehicle Standards Agency (DVSA), School Transport Teams (Operation Coachman including DVSA and TVP) and neighbouring authorities are regularly undertaken. We are currently in the process of arranging more dates for these activities to take place.

Community Alcohol Partnership

The West Berkshire Community Alcohol Partnership (CAP) brings together organisations including West Berkshire Council, Thames Valley Police, schools, alcohol services and local retailers to reduce the alcohol related crime, anti-social behaviour and harm caused by young people under the age of 25, with a particular emphasis on preventing underage drinking. During 2025, the CAP worked closely with Newbury College to develop and deliver the following:

- 16+ programme A new programme was created in collaboration with Newbury College to engage students about risky behaviours in respect of alcohol and associated behaviours including smoking, vaping and substance use.
- Resource distribution: CAP resources, including posters and online materials, were made available across the college intranet, providing students with easy access to local support services.
- Young Health Champions Programme: The young health champions programme teaches young people between 14-24 about managing their health and wellbeing and how to promote health messages to their peers. The CAP supported 23 learners in completing their Level 2 qualification.
- Inaugural Freshers' Fair: The fair took place at the beginning of this academic year and attracted over 300 new students, providing them with access to information on volunteering, career opportunities, cybercrime, alcohol, mental health, and gender-based violence.
- Plans are developing to support new activities for the new academic year in September 2026 and the freshers fair for the new cohort of students.

Communication, Engagement and Information Management

The Service provides a range of advice and information sheets via the website. A new website was launched on the 31st March 2025. The West Berkshire Council website has appropriate links to relevant pages on the PPP website. The PPP has also expanded its social media presence with active Facebook pages.

Facebook: [@PublicProtectionPartnershipUK](https://www.facebook.com/PublicProtectionPartnershipUK)

Protecting the public is at the heart of all work completed by the Licensing Team. The Team focuses on the four E's when working with licence holders:

- Engage,
- Educate,
- Encourage and
- if this fails, we will then Enforce.

Additionally, Officers regularly meet with applicants or licence holders to ensure licence compliance and educate and encourage licence holders if they are found to be non-compliant. For example, completing annual private hire operator inspections at their offices and taxi drivers at the ranks.

During the 2025/26 Municipal Year the following consultations were undertaken:

- Consultation on the fees and charges
- Consultation on the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Policy
- Consultation on amendments to the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy 2025-2030 with respect to protected plates and accessibility

In addition, officers attended several events to promote the service and engage with our residents including:

- Victoria Park Fun Day (01 June 2025)
- Pangbourne Fete (14 June 2025)
- Thatcham Family Fun Day (29 June 2025)
- Kidsfest in Thatcham Town Centre (28 August 2025)

Officers also attended numerous Lets Talk events throughout the year.

During the 2025/26 year six complaints against the service were received. Of these complaints two were upheld, two were upheld in part and two were not upheld. The number of complaints equates to 2% of the total number of service requests the team dealt with.

Conclusion

It is good practice to provide an overview of information to Committee Members, which enables them to be informed about licence applications, decisions made by the

Licensing Committee and the Licensing Sub-Committee, automatic grants, enforcement action and future work planned by the licensing area. This information enables Members to be informed and to aid decision making in the future. This information can be located on the PPP website where we also provide information to the trade and public and are also introducing a series of public registers so premises or persons holding a licence can be identified by all.