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

LICENSING COMMITTEE

MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON MONDAY 7 SEPTEMBER 2026

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

Also Present: Moira Fraser (Principal Officer - Policy and Governance), Mark Groves (Lead Licensing Enforcement Officer), Darius Zarazel (Zoom Host) and Thomas Radbourne (Clerk)

Apologies for inability to attend the meeting: Councillor Jeremy Cottam and Councillor Clive Taylor

PART I

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest received.

2. Outcome of the Consultation on the Protected Hackney Carriage Plate Arrangements

The Committee considered a report (Agenda Item 3) concerning Outcome of the Consultation on the Protected Hackney Carriage Plate Arrangements.

Mark Groves (Lead Licensing Enforcement Officer – Public Protection Partnership) introduced the item and highlighted the following points:

- The West Berkshire Hackney Carriage and Private Hire Licensing Policy had been adopted on 15 December 2025.
- As part of that decision, Members had resolved that the protected plate provisions should be reviewed within six months and any proposed amendments brought back to the Committee.
- Legal advice had been obtained regarding the protected plate arrangements and the consultation process, with details included within the report.
- The Licensing Committee had approved a public consultation on 24 March 2026.
- The consultation had been undertaken over a seven-week period between 27 March and 15 May 2026.
- The consultation had been promoted through the Council's website, direct engagement with the licensed trade, social media, parish councils and Council press releases.
- Four possible options for the future operation of protected licences had been consulted upon.
- A total of 38 consultation responses had been received, with a breakdown provided within the report.

Members asked a number of questions and received the following responses:

- Members asked for clarification regarding the tax implications for drivers who might need to replace their vehicles. Officers advised that taxation matters were a matter for individual licence holders, their accountants and HM Revenue and Customs, and were not directly relevant to the decision before the Committee.
- Regarding a question referring to the legal advice contained within the report, and what evidence or rational could be used to justify retaining any exemption or transferability arrangements should the Committee choose to do so. Officers advised that they were not in a position to comment on the legal advice beyond that already provided within the report and confirmed that the options presented had been through the appropriate legal process
- Officers advised that, to their knowledge, West Berkshire was unique in operating protected plate arrangements and that implementation would be managed in a manner that was workable for those affected

At the Chairmans request, officers provided a professional recommendation and advised that Option 2 was their preferred option.

Councillor Martha Vickers stated that she had initially been inclined towards Option 1 but recognised the rationale behind Option 2. She considered that the public had waited a significant period for improved accessibility but acknowledged that Option 2 sought to balance accessibility objectives with fairness to existing licence holders by providing additional time for adjustment.

Councillor Nigel Foot supported Option 2. He considered that the proposed implementation period would provide licence holders with sufficient time to plan and replace vehicles where necessary.

Councillor Phil Barnett expressed support for the officer recommendation. He considered the additional period before implementation to be important and indicated that he would support Option 2.

Councillor Stephanie Stevenson referred to comments contained within the consultation responses relating to:

- The transfer of protected plates between family members.
- Suggestions that some transfers may have involved financial gain.
- Concerns raised regarding the availability of wheelchair accessible vehicles.
- Allegations that some drivers were reluctant to transport wheelchair users.
- Comments regarding the comfort of wheelchair accessible vehicles.

While acknowledging that these matters were not directly related to the decision before the Committee, Councillor Stevenson considered them important issues arising from the consultation. The Chairman requested that officers note these concerns for future consideration.

Councillor Tom McCann stated that the consultation had confirmed the need for change. He noted that West Berkshire's arrangements differed from those operated elsewhere and considered that Option 2 represented a fair and reasonable approach, striking an appropriate balance between accessibility objectives and the interests of existing licence holders.

Councillor David Marsh, attending remotely and unable to vote, stated that he would probably have supported Option 1 for reasons similar to those expressed by Councillor Vickers. However, he recognised the arguments in favour of Option 2 and indicated that he was comfortable with the apparent direction of the Committee.

Councillor Phil Barnett proposed that the Committee adopt Option 2, as recommended by officers. This was seconded by Councillor Tom McCann.

Prior to the vote, officers sought clarification regarding the wording of Option 2, which referred to licences renewed "on or after" 1 January 2029. Members agreed that the decision should be clarified so that the exemption would cease **on 1 January 2029**, rather than only upon renewal after that date.

Councillor Barnett, as proposer, and Councillor McCann, as seconder, agreed to the amended wording

At the vote, the motion was carried.

RESOLVED that the Licensing Committee approve Option 2 and the protected plate exemption for all protected Hackney Carriage licences be phased out on 1 January 2029, at which point the protected licences would cease to have legal standing.

(The meeting commenced at 4.30 pm and closed at 4.50 pm)

CHAIRMAN …….

Date of Signature …….

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