

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

LICENSING AND REGULATION COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBER, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES,
LETCWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF
ON MONDAY, 13TH OCTOBER, 2025 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Dave Winstanley (Chair), Amy Allen (Vice-Chair), Steven Patmore, Ian Albert, Ruth Brown, Keith Hoskins, Tim Johnson, Nigel Mason, Bryony May, Sean Prendergast and Stewart Willoughby.*

In Attendance: *Steve Cobb (Licensing and Community Safety Manager), Robert Filby (Trainee Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer) and James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager).*

Also Present: *There were no members of the public present for the duration of the meeting.*

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 01 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Barnard, Daniel Allen, Lisa Nash and Elizabeth Dennis.

2 MINUTES - 14 OCTOBER 2024, 10 MARCH 2025

Audio recording – 1 minute 21 seconds

Councillor Dave Winstanley, as Chair, proposed and Councillor Ian Albert seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meetings of the Committee held on 14 October 2024 and 10 March 2025 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

3 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 24 seconds

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be recorded.
- (2) The Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.
- (3) The Chair advised for purposes of clarification that 4.8.23(a) of the constitution did apply to this meeting and Members were required to be present for the entirety of an Item to vote.

4 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 3 minutes 08 seconds

There was no other business notified.

5 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 3 minutes 13 seconds

There was no public participation.

6 PRESENTATION OF THE ANNUAL LICENSING REPORT 2024/25

Audio recording – 3 minutes 21 seconds

The Licensing and Community Safety Manager presented the report entitled 'Presentation of the Annual Licensing Report 2024/25' and advised that:

- The report covered the highlights from the work of Licensing team over the last year but did not detail every aspect of the work completed.
- The Management Support Unit continued to support the service with administrative tasks, which allowed the Licensing Officers to focus on licensing activity.
- A concert was due to be held at Knebworth House in July 2026 for Iron Maiden, which would be a large concert and would be the end of their European tour.
- If Members were interested in the preparations around a large scale event and the licensing work involved, a walk around could be provided by the team.
- Following previous comments by the Committee, the number of inspections was now much higher than previously. Whilst there does not seem to be much of an increase between 2023/24 and 2024/25, this was due to a push to inspect in 2023/24 where each premises was risk-rated and the premises with a lower risk would not be inspected again until 2026.
- The number of applications received was slightly up on previous year, but a year-by-year comparison was not always an accurate view of the situation, as it would depend on the duration of the license granted. It was more accurate to look at the number of licenses held at any one time, which, as detailed at Appendix B, there were almost 100 more licenses than the year before, which meant new businesses were opening in the district.
- There had been 76 complaints received against taxi drivers, which was a significant increase, and the number of complaints received was higher, but this figure reflected genuine complaints.
- A Taxi Trade Association meeting had taken place recently which drew attention to the increased workload created by vexatious complaints. Officers highlighted the actual cost of investigating these complaints and, if they continued at high volumes, this would be added to the license fee.
- There had only been three Licensing Sub-Committee hearings held in the past year, although these were lengthy meetings.
- The report did not always highlight the complexity of enforcement work and therefore it looked as though there had not been much activity in this area.
- However, the work around the Cats Survival Trust took a lot of Officer time in ensuring that a suitable alternative location was found to prevent the cats being euthanised. In the end, only three cats were required to be euthanised due to ill health.
- An update to the Licensing Policy was to be discussed later in this meeting.
- The Licensing team were continuing to work with the Digital Transformation team to improve the customer service, but it was important to balance this against what was appropriate and actionable.

- The Violence Against Women and Girls Safety Charter was now live in Letchworth and Hitchin, and work was ongoing with premises in Baldock and Royston.
- To support the roll out, a new video had been developed to be more user friendly and was available on the Council website.
- As part of ongoing inspections, Officers would ensure that premises who had signed up to the Charter were aware of, and enforcing, it, with most premises adhering to the policy.
- A new safeguarding policy procedure had been developed for taxi drivers, following comments from the apprentice within the team, and now required face-to-face delivery of the training with a test at the end, which must be passed.
- License plates for taxis and private hire vehicles had been updated to use recycled materials which would last the duration of the life of the vehicle.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Nigel Mason
- Councillor Sean Prendergast
- Councillor Ruth Brown
- Councillor Tim Johnson
- Councillor Ian Albert
- Councillor Amy Allen

In response to questions, the Licensing and Community Safety Manager advised that:

- Previous issues with exiting the site at a Robbie Williams concert had been resolved, with around 80k in attendance for a Liam Gallagher concert which did not have the same issues. There were now separate exit routes for pedestrians, cars, taxis and coaches, with vehicles being kept separate from pedestrians.
- Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) were not risk rated in the same way as pubs and clubs. They were inspected at the start of the license and at the mid-way point of the 5 year license. Therefore, the figures provided of HMO inspections would depend on when the license was granted.
- The team had worked with the Revenues and Benefits team and the Environmental Health team at the Council to look at potential unlicensed HMOs.
- In relation to the Bygrave Plantation hearings, it was unusual to receive a variation and review for a site at the same time, and it was managed as best as possible. It was felt that the review should take place first, as there would be no variation if the license was withdrawn.
- The issue in this case related to the issuing of the decision notice from the review hearing, which meant that the variation hearing was held within the appeal period of the review. Procedures around this had since been amended to ensure that a longer period between the decision notice being issued and any further hearing was required.
- There was always a right of appeal on any licensing decision.
- Confusion over the second hearing had an impact on the decision made and was outlined as a reason for the appeal being successful. However, the majority of the decision was upheld with only minor amendments from the court.
- Ultimately, the appeal was allowed as the wording on the conditions was unclear and required tidying up, but also conditions had been added to events under 7500, which was not part of the variation and therefore deemed unacceptable.
- The recent Vape Shop closure in Royston had not been a licensing activity, as there were not licenced products involved. The work was conducted by North Herts Council Community Safety Team in partnership with Trading Standards at the County Council.
- There would be a communications campaign around the need to licence HMOs.
- There were limits to what the Council could do in relation to scrap metal, which focussed on ensuring that accurate financial records were in place at relevant sites, and that they were not dealing in cash.

- The licensing team continued to work with colleagues in the Fire department, as well as Councillors, to understand why fires happened and what can be done to educate around the dangers posed during inspections of sites.
- There had been proposed changes to the requirement to publish a licensing notice in local press, which was currently required and was included within the Policy of the Council.
- There was currently no fixed date on when the Women and Girls Safety Charter would be implemented in Royston.
- The Licensing team worked closely with the Green Space team to ensure that any land licenses granted were appropriate. Work was ongoing to ensure that procedures were in place to stop events going ahead if there was a risk to the public from that event.
- Some forms were onerous on the applicant, however these were often proscribed forms and could not be amended or simplified.
- The Licensing team would work with applicants and provide advice, in line with legislation, on TENs applications, rather than outright refusal for missing information or minor errors in the application.

Councillor Ian Albert proposed and Councillor Amy Allen seconded and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- (1) Reviewed the Annual Report and commented on its content.
- (2) Noted the Annual Report.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: Section 8.2.3 of the Council Constitution requires the Full Committee to meet at least once per civic year and section 8.2.3 (d) requires the Committee 'to receive an annual report on licensing activities including performance information'

7 ADOPTION OF A STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY REQUIRED BY VIRTUE OF SECTION 5 OF THE LICENSING ACT 2003

Audio recording – 1 hour 1 minute 08 seconds

The Licensing and Community Safety Manager presented the report entitled 'Adoption of a Statement of Licensing Policy Required by Virtue of Section 5 of the Licensing Act 2003' and advised that:

- A new Licensing Policy was required to be considered by this Committee, before adoption by Full Council.
- The government had launched a consultation on changes to the Licensing Act, which may require a review of this proposed new Policy, but it was not expected that these would be especially onerous changes, as some of the proposals were already covered in the Policy.
- There were no significant changes proposed from the previous Policy, as it was felt that it currently worked well.
- The Council had never lost a licensing appeal and the Policy, as well as training provided, was important in maintaining this.
- A vision for licensing across the district had been included in the Policy, but many other changes were to tidy up the Policy following recent hearings.
- There was clarification on noise nuisance added, confirmation that CCTV was not required in all licensing situations and the conflict between licensing and planning policy had been resolved.
- The Policy continued to promote virtual Sub-Committee hearings as the default position, with the ability to hold in person for specific cases.
- The summarised consultation responses were included at Appendix A, alongside Officer comments, and the full responses to the consultation were included at Appendix B.

- There were no major changes to the Policy following the consultation.
- The proposed Policy was included at Appendix C.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Tim Johnson
- Councillor Ian Albert

In response to questions, the Licensing and Community Safety Manager advised that the reference to the weight applied to the contribution of the Environmental Health officer was to strike a balance between lack of formal evidence and still allowing an expert opinion to be considered. However, it was agreed that the word 'substantial' would fetter the discretion of the Committee and could be amended.

Councillor Amy Allen proposed the recommendations and Councillor Ian Albert seconded.

As part of the debate, Councillor Ruth Brown proposed an amendment to remove the final sentence from paragraph D11.10 of the Policy at Appendix C. This was seconded by Councillor Sean Prendergast.

Councillor Amy Allen confirmed, as proposer, that she would accept the amendment into the substantive motion. This was confirmed by Councillor Ian Albert, as seconder, and, following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee:

- (1) Considered the responses to the public consultation.
- (2) Supported the proposed Statement of Licensing Policy attached as Appendix C, with an amendment to remove the final sentence from paragraph D11.10.

RECOMMENDED TO COUNCIL: That the Statement of Licensing Policy, as amended, be adopted.

REASONS FOR REFERRAL:

- (1) Licensing authorities are required to publish a policy every five years by virtue of section 5 of the Licensing Act 2003 ("the Act").
- (2) A new policy must be published by 7 January 2026 to comply with this statutory requirement.
- (3) The proposed policy builds on the success of the previous and existing versions of the policy, whilst reflecting legislative changes and the Council's priorities.
- (4) Responses to the public consultation were limited and raised no significant opposition to any of the proposals.

The meeting closed at 8.50 pm

Chair