

Minutes of a meeting of the General Purposes Licensing Committee on Monday 5 February 2024

www.oxford.gov.uk



Committee members present:

Councillor Mundy (Chair)	Councillor Clarkson (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Lygo	Councillor Humberstone
Councillor Upton	Councillor Waite
Councillor Miles	Councillor Muddiman
Councillor Rawle	Councillor Thomas
Councillor Coyne	

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Alison Daly, Legal Adviser
David Stevens, Principal Team Lead
Joshua Curnow, Supervising Senior Licensing Officer
Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager
Celeste Reyeslao, Committee and Member Services Officer
Tanaka Merralls, Trainee Solicitor

Also present:

Councillor Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Hunt, Smowton and Sandelson sent apologies.

18. Election of Chair for the remainder of the Council Year 2023-24

Councillor Edward Mundy was elected Chair for the remainder of 2023-24 Council Year.

19. Declarations of interest

Item 4: Licensed Vehicles Emission Standards Amendment

Councillor Rae Humberstone stated he had met with the secretary of City of Oxford Licensed Taxicab Association (COLTA) in relation to this subject matter; it was not a pecuniary interest; the Councillor made the declarations for reasons of transparency and indicated he would leave the room during the consideration of this item.

Councillor Edward Mundy stated he had met with members of COLTA in relation to this subject matter; it was not a pecuniary interest; the Councillor made the declaration

for reasons of transparency and indicated that he would consider the application with a free and open mind.

20. Licensed Vehicles Emission Standards Amendment

Cllr Humberstone left the meeting having declared an interest on this item.

The General Purposes Licensing Committee considered a report from the Executive Director for Communities and People to delay the introduction of new emission standards for Hackney Carriage Vehicles licensed by this Authority.

Joshua Curnow, Supervising Senior Licensing Officer, reminded the Committee that it had approved the roadmap for emissions standards in January 2019, highlighting the next stages of the roadmap including the requirement for all new and renewal Hackney Carriage Vehicle applications to meet the ultra-low emission vehicles standard beginning 1 January 2025. The Committee was asked to consider options set out in the report which had been included in the agenda pack and circulated prior to the meeting.

The Licensing Officer informed the Committee that COLTA had submitted a request for an adjournment following the publication of the agenda and explained that Mr Sajad Khan, Secretary of COLTA, was in attendance to present this request before the Committee.

Mr Khan addressed the Committee and clarified that COLTA had decided to retract its request for an adjournment. In the absence of questions for the Licensing Officer, the Chair invited Mr Khan to speak.

Mr Khan provided an overview of the challenges faced by the taxi trade in Oxford, highlighting the impacts of COVID-19 pandemic between March 2020 and July 2021, and the cost of living crisis that followed where drivers expressed difficulties in sustaining their livelihoods. He further highlighted the substantial impacts of the recent industrial action and the implementation of Low Traffic Neighbourhoods, stating that the lessened sources of fares due to train strikes, prolonged routes and increased fares all had resulted in the challenges that the drivers currently faced.

Mr Khan also raised concerns regarding Oxford Direct Service' (ODS) inability to provide services for Low Emission Vehicles or carry out warranty work for electric cars which forced drivers to seek services outside of Oxford, impacting the affordability of electric taxis. It was emphasised that the taxi trade did not contribute significantly to carbon emissions compared to other sectors.

In response to questions from members of the Committee, Mr Khan provided the following points:

- A second-hand electric vehicles scheme was introduced which offered drivers £5,000 grant including waiving of licensing application and MOT fees. Approximately 20 drivers took part in the scheme. It was pointed out that whilst some drivers opted for brand-new vehicles simply due to personal preference and financial capability, the majority of the trade were not afforded this option.
- Oxford had a Hackney Carriage limit of 107 vehicles. Some proprietorships that were in 2019 had changed through private transfers which were often within families.

- COLTA had met with Clipper Cab regarding a technology which converted diesel vehicles to zero-emission products however these vehicles offered limited electric mileage that were not suitable for the trade.

Mr Khan further elaborated on the issue relating to the unavailability of LEVC qualified mechanics at ODS, explaining that when electric vehicles fail its compliance test, they would immediately be removed from commission until repairs were undertaken. Mr Khan further stated that LEVC vehicles could only be repaired by LEVC approved mechanics, prompting drivers to seek repairs outside of Oxford, resulting in longer wait time and temporary loss of income for affected drivers. Despite discussions with ODS, no definitive resolution had been reached.

The Licensing Officer and Mr Khan answered final questions from the Committee.

Having discussed with the relevant Cabinet Member prior to this meeting, the Chair wished to put on record that the Council's current rate of progression in electric vehicle uptake exceeded 30%.

The Committee acknowledged the challenges voiced in the representations made at this meeting. The Committee reflected on the reasons that led to the introduction of the policy in 2019 and recognised the pressing issues of climate change and the general health and well-being of the city.

The Committee thanked Mr Khan and members of COLTA for their valuable contributions.

Councillor Lois Muddiman, on being seconded by Councillor Mark Lygo, proposed to delay the requirement for all Taxis to be ULEV by January 2026, and put to the vote.

The General Purposes Licensing Committee resolved to:

1. **Request** that the Chair of the General Purposes Licensing Committee calls on the Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies on behalf of the Committee:
 - i. Urging the provisions of services and mechanic staffing required to carry out maintenance and service work for low emission and/or electric vehicles;
 - ii. Delegate the Licensing Officers to deliver a report setting out key actions undertaken for update at the Committee's next meeting.
2. **Request** that the Chair of the General Purposes Licensing Committee calls on the Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships on behalf of the Committee to:
 - i. Incorporate in the City Centre Action Plan (CCAP) a systematic dissemination of effective city-wide messaging to educate the public on useful taxi information (such as distinctions between Hackney Carriages and Private Hire Vehicles) and thereby bolstering support for the trade;
 - ii. Request a report from Licensing Officers setting out key actions undertaken for update at the Committee's next meeting.
3. **Agree** to delay the introduction of ultra-low emission standards for Hackney Carriage Vehicles licensed by this Authority by:
 - Delaying the requirement for all Taxis to be ULEV by one year (January 2026)
4. **Agree** the amendments be recommended to Council for adoption.

Cllr Humberstone re-joined the meeting.

21. Commercial Events, Hackney Carriage and Private Hire, Road Closure Orders, Scrap Metal Dealers, Sex Establishments and Street Parties: Licence Fees and Charges for the 2024/25 financial year

The General Purposes Licensing Committee considered a report from the Executive Director for Communities and People seeking agreement of the licence fees for 2024/25 where the Council has discretion over the level of fee charged.

Joshua Curnow, Supervising Senior Licensing Officer presented the report, highlighting the changes in fees to cover the authority's costs with inflation, namely an 8% uplift for commercial events and events with no commercial element, including street parties, sex establishments and sexual entertainment venues, and a 7% to 8% uplift for Hackney Carriage and Private Hire licensing. It was noted that where an application met the test of being a community or charitable event with no commercial gain, the fee could be waived by the authority to support the event. He further advised that licensing for scrap metal dealers and collectors was an executive function and had been submitted to Cabinet for consultation in December 2023 for Council approval in February 2024.

In response to a question from the Committee, the Licensing Officer clarified that fees indicated in red text within the appended report signified a reduction, removal or introduction of new charges which had replaced outdated services. These adjustments were made to some fees, including Right to Work (RTW) and Disclosure and Barring Services (DBS) online checks, to streamline administrative processes for the benefit of both the authority and applicants.

Councillor Louise Upton asked a question relating to road closures for temporary events such as the Christmas Market. The Licensing Officer clarified that one fee was required for the closure of a road, while licensable fees related to activities of trader stalls were subject to legislation outside the scope of the recommendations proposed.

Councillor Katherine Miles raised a question regarding school street closure for timed period. The Licensing Officer indicated that this matter was outside the remit of the authority as it fell under the responsibility and control of the County Council.

The General Purposes Licensing Committee resolved to:

1. **Agree** the licence fees and charges for 2024/25 as set out in the Appendix 1 and recommend them to Council.

22. Miscellaneous Licensing: Fees and Charges for the 2023/24 financial year

The General Purposes Licensing Committee considered a report from the Executive Director for Communities and People seeking agreement of the licence fees for 2024/25 where the Council has discretion over the level of fee charged.

David Stevens, Principal Team Lead, introduced the report.

Councillor Katherine Miles proposed an amendment to the pavement licence provision, suggesting the addition of a discretion to incentivise establishments committed to maintaining a smoke-free environment.

Councillor Mark Lygo endorsed the proposed reduction in pavement licence fees for smoke-free establishments. He raised concerns regarding its enforcement within the authority. The Legal Adviser responded that this was a matter of debate for the General Purposes Licensing Committee. The Principal Team Lead raised a point regarding the short-term feasibility of the proposed amendment and the need for fee approval by Council at its Budget meeting in February 2024. He suggested a future report setting out the necessary steps and requirements for implementing the proposed amendments for the consideration of the Committee.

Councillor Lois Muddiman expressed her support for the proposal and suggested extending the provision to include vape-free environments.

Following further discussions, the General Purposes Licensing Committee resolved to:

1. **Agree** the licensing fees and charges for 2024/25 as follows:
 - i. Approve the proposed Fees & Charges for Miscellaneous Licensing Services, with the exception of Pavement Licenses and Street Café Licenses, as set out in Appendix 1.
 - ii. Set future Fees under the new pavement licence provisions in the Levelling-Up and Regeneration Act 2023 (when they come into force) at the upper limits of £500 and £350, as set out in Appendix 2.
 - iii. To continue to charge £100 for Street Café Licenses, and to increase the annual fees for new licence to £250 and annual fees for existing licence to £175.
 - iv. Apply increases made in iii. above from a date consistent with that set by the pavement licence implementing legislative provisions.
2. **Request** the Business Regulations Team to prepare a report setting out the feasibility and implementation requirements for an amendment to the pavement licence provision to include an incentivised fee for smoke-free and vape-free establishments, for consideration of the Committee at its next meeting in May 2024.
3. **Recommend** the agreed fees and charges for 2024/25 to Council for adoption.

23. Minutes of the previous meeting

The Committee agreed to **approve** the minutes of the meeting held on 25 September 2023 and extraordinary meeting held on 4 December 2023 as true and accurate records.

24. Dates and times of meetings

The Committee noted the dates and times of future meetings.

The meeting started at 6.15 pm and ended at 7.48 pm

Chair

Date: Monday 20 May 2024

When decisions take effect:

Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired

*Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal
decision notice is issued*

All other committees: immediately.

Details are in the Council's Constitution.