

## Minutes of a meeting of the General Purposes Licensing Committee on Monday 10 February 2025

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### Committee members present:

Councillor Mundy (Chair)	Councillor Clarkson (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Lygo	Councillor Ottino
Councillor Qayyum	Councillor Upton
Councillor Waite	Councillor Miles
Councillor Jupp	Councillor Sandelson
Councillor Max Morris	Councillor Muddiman
Councillor Yeatman	Councillor Rehman
Councillor Azad	

### Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Alison Daly, Team Leader Lawyer  
Nicholas Cox, Team Manager Business Regulation  
Joshua Curnow, Supervising Senior Licensing Officer  
Katie Thorp, Senior Licensing Compliance Officer  
Matthew Stead, Senior Licensing Officer  
Hannah Carmody-Brown, Committee and Member Services Officer

### Apologies:

No apologies were received.

## 9. Declarations of interest

Councillor Mundy informed the Committee that he had spoken on the phone with Mr. Khan, the public speaker, earlier in the day to discuss procedure for the meeting. The Committee were assured that the content any opinions on relevant issues were not discussed.

## 10. Fees & Charges

Joshua Curnow, the General Licensing Team Manager, and Katie Thorp, the Supervising Senior Licensing Officer, were present throughout the meeting to present the report and respond to questions.

The Deputy Chief Executive for City and Citizens' Services had submitted a report to seek agreement of the licence fees for 2025/26 where the Council has discretion over the level of fee charged.

The Chair invited the General Licensing Team Manager to present the report.

The General Licensing Team Manager informed the Committee that the report seeks approval for the General Purposes Licensing fees and charges for the 2025/26 financial year. For commercial events, and events with no commercial element, fees have increased around 4% to cover costs. However, where an application meets the qualification of being a community or charity event, the fee is waived. The General Licensing Team Manager further explained that decisions regarding fees for scrap metal dealers are executive functions and therefore taken by Cabinet. Further fees included within the report were also summarised and the Committee heard of an average 4% increase across these.

The General Licensing Team Manager informed the Committee that he had received little time to formulate detailed responses to the public address and would respond to questions as best as possible. The Committee were informed, in relation to matters which would be raised by the public speaker, that between 2018 and 2023 no increases were made to taxi licensing fees.

The Chair welcomed Mr. Khan, the public speaker, to address the Committee. Mr. Sajad Khan, Secretary of C.O.L.T.A, made a public address to the Committee as follows:

*I am writing this letter to object to the level of increase in the Hackney Carriage Licence fees proposed today by licensing.*

*I fail to understand how the officer can warrant or justify this amount of increase.*

*Especially in the light of:*

- 1. Uber gaining an operator's license and how that will impact an already struggling trade.*
- 2. Botley Road closure. Not opening till October 2026.*
- 3. Closure of nightclubs in Oxford.*

4. *The investment in 2026 to purchase the electric taxi.*

*So now was not the appropriate time to propose this level of increase of the fees.*

*It's not just about licensing duties or enforcement (lack of). What about the review of taxi ranks. We have been asking since 2021 for a review of the Gloucester green taxi rank in terms of appropriate signage at the coach station and at the rank itself including markings on the Gloucester green rank. To date, nothing has been done. It's been 4 years. That's a serious delay which has been impacting our trade.*

*Both of the increases in February 2024 and today have been proposed at times when the trade has been pressured by licensing.*

*Last year February 2024 when we asked for an extension on the emission standards policy, we had an 8% increase in the fees.*

*Again today, the increase proposed is 4% alongside what would have been a discussion on the quantity control report and the potential killing off our trade.*

*As of December 2024, UK RPI was 3.5%. The Licensing Authority is proposing an increase of 4%. I fail to understand why this increase is above the RPI rate. There have been no reasons given for this level of increase apart from 'inflationary pressures'. What specific duty constitutes this level of increase?*

*We believe the cost of administrating the Licensing Department has decreased not increased as everything is done online, and the service provided by the Licensing Department in some cases has got progressively worse not better because of the delays in renewing license applications. This means the driver is off the road whilst the applications team and the licensing officers communicate with each other or exchange documents.*

*I have also attached photos of taxis queueing up at the Taxi ranks during what should've been a busy period but very quiet. Included are a couple of photos of an illegal 'rank' of private hire vehicles including out of town taxis on St. Aldates. This proves that the level of enforcement is poor and the private hire operator in question has not been challenged or the behaviour of their drivers.*

*As such, we object to this level of increase and would urge the committee to seek a revised increase of 2.5% which would be reasonable in light of the above concerns.*

The Chair thanked Mr. Khan and invited any questions from the Committee.

Councillor Rehman queried how often enforcement trips are conducted, when the last check took place, and how many times this occurs on average per year. Based on data to hand, the General Licensing Team Manager outlined that 140 hours of 'out of hours' compliance and enforcement checks occurred in the 2024/25 financial year. The Supervising Senior Licensing Officer confirmed that the most recent check took place on the Friday prior to the meeting. A comparison to previous years was not possible as historic data was not available in the meeting.

Councillor Upton sought clarity on the fees and charges increases since 2018 to which the General Licensing Team Manager explained that a 4% increase is proposed this year.

Councillor Upton invited Mr. Khan to offer more information regarding the impacts caused by delays in application approvals. Mr. Khan positively noted the impact of online applications for efficiency but also emphasised the difficulty these can cause for those who experience difficulties using technology. For these parties, Mr. Khan works to provide support through the applications process. Additionally, the Committee heard that some questions on the application request irrelevant or misleading information which can slow down the application process and require it to be returned to the Council, causing further delays.

Councillor Miles requested firstly clarity on the pricing controls used for Hackney Carriages in comparison to private hire vehicles and secondly, further information on actions being taken to address loitering of private hire vehicles.

Councillor Clarkson asked how Oxford City Council compares to other Licensing Authorities in regards charges for Hackney Carriages and private hire vehicles.

Councillor Ottino queried whether staffing costs have reduced since the introduction of online applications.

The General Licensing Team Manager explained that varying legislation and licensing compliance processes apply to Hackney Carriages and private hire vehicles which dictate the varying charges associated. In respect of loitering and illegal ranks of private hire vehicles, the Committee heard that it is not within the remit of the Licensing Authority to act as many of the vehicles in question are from out of town, and therefore not under the licensing conditions of Oxford City Council. To work around this, multi-agency relationships with other Oxfordshire Authorities and Thames Valley Police are maintained to support joint enforcement activity. Finally, in regards costs in comparison to other authorities, the General Licensing Team Manager did not have comparative details available but noted that Oxford City Council charges less than South and Vale District Councils, but more than Cherwell District Council.

In response to concerns about utilising online applications for taxi licenses, the General Licensing Team Manager explained that the move was made to improve customer

experience and noted that 100% of applications are assessed within 3 working days which he understands to be above national average. The General Licensing Team Manager acknowledged Mr. Khan's grievances and noted application delays are unavoidable when more clarity is required from the applicant. He provided statistical examples to demonstrate the efficiency of the Licensing Authority's service.

Councillor Qayyum queried whether recent years without fee increases were linked to Covid, and whether therefore, the proposed increases now are linked to service demands. It was also asked whether reviews take place to check the validity of fees.

Councillor Morris asked Mr. Khan what financial pressures Hackney Carriage drivers are facing and what positive steps he believes the Licensing Authority could take to mitigate these.

Councillor Rehman noted that during Covid taxi drivers could not work but were still required to pay licence fees. Therefore, he asked whether some of the financial benefit now being received by the Council could be passed back to taxi drivers in efforts to support them. Additionally, he sought to clarify whether private hire vehicles are required to return to a base between trips, rather than loitering.

*Councillor Lygo left the meeting.*

The General Licensing Team Manager explained that since 2020 fees have increased in line with the cost the Council endures for the services and functions provided. This includes salaries and costs which are less visible, such as training. The Committee were assured that the Licensing Authority does not operate to produce profit, rather that it only seeks to cover costs. Secondly, in relation to costs during Covid, it was also explained that the Licensing Authority provided exemptions for financial assistance, and grants to the taxi trade where available. Finally, in relation to private hire vehicles, the Committee heard that they cannot contravene traffic law, nor can they wait in "prominent positions" making themselves available for immediate hire.

In regards online applications, the General Licensing Team Manager informed the Committee that the online application service costs around £11.5k annually, not accounting for set up and officer time. At present, no profit has been made from this investment and the Committee were assured that the initial cost of onboarding existing licence holders to the online Disclosure and Barring Services system 'TaxiPlus' was not shouldered by license holders.

*Councillor Lygo rejoined the meeting.*

Mr. Khan responded to Councillor Morris' earlier question and described a miserable and dire situation on the taxi ranks in Oxford City at present, explaining that few customers are available as fewer people are arriving on trains to Oxford Station. As a

recommendation for positive steps, Mr. Khan suggested that the Licensing Authority look to install new taxi ranks to help boost the trade.

The General Licensing Team Manager responded, noting that Oxford City Council is fully supportive of additional ranks, however the authority to install new ranks falls to Oxfordshire County Council. The General Licensing Team Manager noted that discussions with Oxfordshire County Council were taking place regarding updated signage for the Gloucester Green rank. Furthermore, the Licensing Authority has previously supported installation of a new rank at the John Radcliffe Hospital and recently supported the early-stage proposal for a new rank on Cowley Road but had not seen any formal proposal for a day-time rank on Queen Street. It was also clarified that Hackney Carriages are not restricted to fares secured from taxi ranks, as they can also complete private bookings and are the only vehicle that can lawfully 'ply for hire' within the Oxford City District.

The Chair also clarified with the Committee that any new taxi ranks would be at the behest of the County Council.

Councillor Yeatman asked whether there are any existing assessments of the impact of Uber which could be utilised to assess possible impacts in the local area.

Councillor Lygo queried whether any follow up is being conducted with Oxfordshire County Council regarding taxi ranks.

Councillor Miles referred to the Central Oxfordshire Movement and Place Framework and recommended the Licensing Authority be involved. She also questioned road closure fees in the report and asked why non-commercial road closures, such as for street parties, are proposed to have a higher increase in tariff compared to commercial examples, noting this as inconsistent and disproportionate.

In response, the General Licensing Team Manager explained to Councillor Yeatman that whilst Uber hold an operator license with Oxford City Council, it has not been used. In relation to studies of impacts, he noted not being aware of any, but that Uber's introduction should not be considered differently to the introduction of any other large operator, which has been experienced over time. The Committee heard that the main difference with Uber is that it operates across regional areas and is not managed by one local authority.

In regards Hackney Carriage ranks, the General Licensing Team Manager confirmed it would be useful to follow up with Oxfordshire County Council, specifically in relation to the need for improved signage at the Gloucester Green rank.

In response to Councillor Miles query on road closure fees, the General Licensing Team Manager explained that if considered via percentage difference then her

observations were accurate. However, the Committee heard that this increase percentage results from a £1 increase, rather than a direct percentage comparison and for non-commercial road closure. It was explained that administration process places a cost on the Council, and therefore cost recovery drives the fee increase.

The Chair asked, in relation to the ultra-low emission early adoption fees, whether there is a lower fee for Hackney Carriages and whether this would rise after the date on which all Hackney Carriages are required to transfer to electric. Additionally, the Chair specifically asked Mr. Khan, in relation to the images he provided, whether anyone has reported the issues of private hire vehicles at St. Aldates, and whether he would welcome changes to the difference between ULEV and non-ULEV fees.

The General Licensing Team Manager stated it was the Committee's prerogative to suggest any changes to fees for ULEV Hackney Carriages.

Mr. Khan, in relation to private hire vehicles on St. Aldates, explained that queues have extended so far, and customers often see private hire vehicles and assume they are cheaper. As a result, Hackney Carriages remain in queues whilst waiting for jobs. In regards complaints, the Committee heard that drivers are encouraged to take pictures and note details of dates and times to pass on to the Licensing Authority. On the fees for ULEV Hackney Carriages, Mr. Khan noted interest in the Committee's discussion.

The Chair invited the committee to discuss views on ULEV charges and queried whether another report on the financial credibility would be desired. The Committee briefly debated the timings of this in relation to future budgets. Several councillors expressed a preference to adjust the early adopter discount to included ULEV compliant vehicles following January 2026 and noted a preference that the fees should be reviewed again next year.

Councillor Miles sought clarity on how and when Hackney Carriage licenses are charged. The General Licensing Team Manager clarified that it is an annual charge which is made each year, no earlier than 28 days prior to the date of renewal. The Committee were recommended not to amend the existing charge, and rather to propose a new charge that is valid from the transition deadline including any renewal application being allowed a discount.

Councillor Miles proposed a motion to consider the amendment as recommended by the General Licensing Team Manager and the chair seconded the motion.

The Committee voted in favour of this amendment.

The Committee resolved to:

- **Agree** the licence fees and charges for 2025/26 as set out in appendix 1 and recommend to Council for adoption.
- **Propose** an additional discounted fee for ULEV Hackney Carriage Vehicles, who renew their licences after the 1<sup>st</sup> January 2026 ultra-low emission vehicle deadline, as they will no longer be considered 'early adopters'. The new discounted fee is £354.00 and is titled: Hackney Carriage (ULEV Standard Discount - post 1st January 2026).

*Mr. Khan left the meeting.*

## **11. Hackney Carriage Quantity Control Policy Review**

The item was withdrawn.

The Chair informed the Committee that the report was not in a suitable position to be presented or discussed.

## **12. Miscellaneous Licensing Update**

*Nicholas Cox, the Business Regulation Team Manager and Matthew Stead, the Supervising Senior Licensing Officer, joined the meeting.*

The Head of Planning and Regulatory Services had submitted a report to update the Committee on progress with Miscellaneous Licensing matters previously raised with or by the Committee.

The Chair invited the Supervising Senior Licensing Officer to present the report.

The Supervising Senior Licensing Officer outlined the main updates since the last meeting. Firstly, that pavement licenses have become permanent and that the number of pavement licenses for cafes has increased from 11 in 2016 to 91 this year. The Committee were assured that further enforcement actions are being taken, and businesses now have the security of a two-year licence. It was also explained that all applications are now completed online to streamline the process and ensure ease for both businesses and council officers.

Secondly, the Supervising Senior Licensing Officer referred to a request at the previous meeting of the Committee for a report on the feasibility of incentivising smoke and vape free areas. It was explained that due to new legislation in recent months, there had not been sufficient staffing capacity to complete this. The Committee were assured that national requirements for smoke free seating areas already exist and that whilst few

complaints have been received relating to breaches of this in Oxford City, officers do regularly ensure advice is offered to businesses and enforcement action takes place as appropriate. The Committee were reminded that the report asks whether they wish to pursue the possibility of incentivising smoke free pavements licenses any further.

Finally, in relation to street trading and traffic management controls, the Committee were informed that a lot of work has been undertaken within the County Council partnership and communication pathways which has focused on regularising street trading locations in the town as an ongoing project. The Supervising Senior Licensing Officer explained that this would protect traders and the Council in the future. The programme to review and regularise each trading site has now been scheduled to conclude in March 2026, a year later than originally planned.

In regards the Development Review Group, the Business Regulation Team Manager informed the Committee that all avenues have been exhausted in efforts to regularise street trading locations and therefore, it is proposed that the Committee instruct officers to pursue the development review group in order to progress the project. It was explained that most applications will take 12 to 18 months, and the next meeting is on 19 February 2025. The Committee also heard that a lead councillor would be required to sponsor this application, and the request was made to the Committee for nominations.

The Chair sought clarity of what the role would involve to which the Business Regulation Team Manager noted that the nominated councillor would be required to be aware and provide advice in line with corporate objectives.

Members of the Committee discussed the request and a preference for a councillor with County Council awareness and responsibility was noted alongside suggestions that either the relevant Cabinet member or Chair of the Committee should assume the role. It was noted that the nomination should be someone in post beyond May 2025.

The Legal Adviser explained that the recommendation should be to delegate authority to the officer to appear before the review group. To this, Councillor Miles recommended that the Committee delegate the officer to make representations to the review group on the matter.

As the relevant Cabinet member, Councillor Upton volunteered for the role.

The Legal Adviser commented that it would be advisable to recommend a position, rather than a named individual. For instance, the Chair or Vice-Chair of the Committee, to which the Committee agreed.

It was agreed that Councillor Mundy as Chair of the Committee, and Councillor Clarkson, as Vice-Chair of the Committee, would assume the role on the Development Review Group as required.

The Supervising Senior Licensing Officer outlined final highlights from the report, and the Chair invited the Committee to ask any questions.

Councillor Lygo sought clarity on the members of the Development Review Group to which the Business Regulation Team Manager referred to Committee to information to the intranet.

Councillor Ottino queried how much of an incentive the reduction in cost of a pavement licence from £500 to £350 really is, to which Councillor Upton agreed and emphasised that there must be balance public health and the abilities of businesses to thrive. She further asked whether there is a capacity to make areas entirely smoke-free.

On Councillor Ottino's question, the Supervising Senior Licensing Officer agreed that the incentive may not be considerable enough but noted that this would be a political decision. The Committee heard that if the incentivisation was adopted, it would likely generate more work for officers in relation to complaints and enforcement. In response to Councillor Upton's query, it was confirmed that in theory, the policy could be altered to make areas entirely smoke free as local authorities have the powers to make this decision. However, concern was expressed that this decision could divert smokers to concentrate in alternative areas, contributing to noise pollution.

Councillor Miles queried the feasibility of recommending that smoke free pavement licenses be restricted to daytime periods only in support of public health objectives and ambitions for a smoke-free Oxfordshire. She particularly focused on the effects on children.

Councillor Muddiman asked whether incentivisation could occur through surcharge in licence fees, rather than reductions.

The Supervising Senior Licensing Officer informed the Committee that they could restrict smoking to during daytime periods per national guidance provided reasonable justification exists. On the suggestion of surcharges, it was explained that licence fees are already charged at maximum levels, and to introduce surcharges would require a reduction in the normal fee levels.

Councillor Lygo emphasised that consultation on the technicalities of daytime restrictions would be important to ensure that beneficial changes were implemented. He referred to a local example to demonstrate the issues that can be created from smoke free zones and recommended that businesses be consulted.

The Chair requested any success stories from other authorities to which the Supervising Senior Licensing Officer committed to conducting research.

Councillor Muddiman informed the Committee of a recent statistic relating to the impacts of passive smoking on lung cancer and noted her support for suggestions of daytime smoke free zones.

Councillor Rehman supported the concerns shared about smoke free zones but noted that the movement of smokers to new areas is a matter of personal choice for which the Council cannot control.

In response to earlier discussions, the Legal Adviser informed the Committee that information regarding the Development Review Group is available on the intranet and provided details of the membership.

In relation to smoke free zones, the Committee discussed a recommendation to support the idea of daytime restrictions on smoking. Councillor Miles proposed a request for officers to explore the option of smoke free daytime restrictions to pavement licenses and bring back a report to the Committee outlining the feasibility of this. The Committee debated this, and Councillor Ottino expressed his opposition and sympathy to those who struggle with addiction to smoking; therefore, he recommended supportive rather than prohibitive measures be considered. Councillor Lygo also expressed opposition and requested more time be taken to conduct research and consultation. Councillor Upton expressed support for the amendment.

The Chair clarified that the recommendation would only be to support the research and report on the possibility, and not any implementation.

Councillor Miles emphasised that her proposed recommendation is focused on the vision of the city for children and businesses in the future, also accounting for the growth in vaping. Councillor Rehman supported this idea and concurred that the recommendation would be exploratory in nature.

The Supervising Senior Licensing Officer returned to a previous query regarding success stories from other local authorities and informed the Committee that three Councils impose smoking bans with varying conditions including South Tyneside, Manchester and Middlesbrough. On the prospect of a total smoking ban, it was noted that a large enforcement requirement would also require consideration, and the times of the bans would be critical to any success.

The Committee discussed a deadline for the report to which the Business Regulation Team Manager emphasised that work on the report could not commence before April.

In response, the committee agreed that a realistic timeframe would be to request the report for the meeting of the Committee in September 2025. The Chair emphasised that sufficient time should be taken to conduct the research well.

The Committee resolved to:

1. **Note** the current position and planned officer actions regarding the matters within this report.
2. **Request** a report from officers outlining the feasibility of increasing restrictions to smoking in areas covered by a pavement licence. This was requested for review at the meeting of the Committee on 22 September 2025.

### **13. Miscellaneous Licensing Fees & Charges**

The Head of Planning and Regulatory Services had submitted a report to seek agreement of the licence fees for 2025/26 where the Council has discretion over the level of fee charged.

The Business Regulation Team Manager presented the report to the Committee, outlining the purpose to seek agreement for the fees and charges for the year 2025/2026. The Committee were directed to appendix 1, containing details of the proposed changes to the fees and charges. The Committee were informed that minor increases have been applied to cover the Licensing Authority's costs and inflationary pressures. The Committee also heard a summary of the license conditions relevant to the report.

The Chair invited the Committee to ask questions.

Councillor Ottino expressed dissatisfaction with the larger increases in this report compared to those within the General Purposes Licensing report and queried whether inflation was the only driving factor behind this. He requested an explanation of the 400% increase. Councillor Muddiman and the Chair shared these concerns.

The Business Regulation Team Manager confirmed that in the year 2021/22 there were no increases, but that in consecutive years they have been increases which have averaged to around 4.2% over the last five years. It was explained that the increase in this report is to ensure lower fees in previous years are made up for, and that a debt provision project team has been established to ensure that the current level of 0 debt is maintained. The Business Regulation Team also predicted that a lower increase would be proposed next year.

Councillor Muddiman sought further clarity on the 400% increase noted within the report to which the Business Regulation Team Manager explained was an anomaly as the fee is attached to a 2-year period for renewal meaning the cost of a licence is split

across two years. In the past the renewal period was for 1 year (£100.00) whereas now it would be for 2-year period (£350.00) a modest increase of (£75.00 per year). New applications are charged at £500.00.

The Chair sought to confirm that the charges, as proposed, seek to only cover costs and are not revenue generating. This was confirmed by the Business Regulation Team Manager.

Councillor Ottino again queried why the fees in this report have a much higher percentage increase in comparison other reports, considering that the effects of Covid applied universally. The Business Regulation Team Manager assured the Committee that this is the cost of managing the whole process of the function and explained that it would cover the resources and time required to manage street trading.

Councillor Rehman sought clarity around whether the fees for specific licenses are applied across the department, or whether costs are isolated to specific categories of license. The Business Regulation Team Manager explained that these fees only apply to licences and fees which fall under the category of miscellaneous licensing.

The Committee resolved to:

- **Agree** the licence fees and charges for 2025/26 as set out in the Appendix 1 and recommend them to Council.

**14. Minutes of the previous meeting**

The Committee resolved to **approve** the minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2024 as a true and accurate record.

**15. Dates and times of meetings**

The Committee noted the dates and times of future meetings.

**The meeting started at 6.28 pm and ended at 8.40 pm**

Chair .....  
2025

**Date: Wednesday 21 May**

*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*

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