

Minutes of a meeting of the General Purposes Licensing Committee on Monday 9 February 2026

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Committee members present:

Councillor Mundy	Councillor Clarkson
Councillor Lygo	Councillor Ottino
Councillor Upton	Councillor Waite
Councillor Miles	Councillor Jupp
Councillor Muddiman (Chair)	Councillor Rehman (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Azad	Councillor Rawle
Councillor Taylor	

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Hannah Carmody-Brown, Committee and Member Services Officer
Alison Daly, Legal Advisor
Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager
Matthew Stead, Supervising Senior Licensing Officer
Nicholas Cox, Business Regulation Manager
Richard Adams, Community Safety Service Manager
Emma Thompson, Senior Licensing Compliance Officer
Katie Thorp, Senior Licensing Compliance Officer

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Sandelson and Yeatman sent apologies.

28. Declarations of interest

None.

29. Minutes of the previous meeting

The Committee resolved to **approve** the minutes of the meeting held on 22 September 2025 as a true and accurate record.

30. Addresses by members of the public

The Chair invited Mr. Sajad Khan, Secretary of the City of Oxford Licensed Taxicab Association (COLTA), to address the Committee.

START

Dear Members of the General Purposes Licensing Committee,

I acknowledge and express appreciation for Oxford City Licensing's proposal NOT to increase licensing fees this year. At a time when many sectors are facing rising operational costs, this decision is welcome and provides some relief to those of us working hard to sustain our livelihoods in the Hackney carriage trade. There are issues that impact us and vital that I must explain here.

Firstly, with the substantial increase in the number of private hire vehicles licensed by Oxford City Council and are now operating in Oxford due to the introduction of Uber, many within our trade had expected that licensing fees would be REDUCED. The logic behind this expectation is simple: a larger licensed fleet should, in principle, ease the financial burden on the licensing department. For the first time ever we have witnessed private hire license plate numbers go beyond the figure of 1000 (the exact number of Private hire vehicles licensed in Oxford is currently unknown). Over the past few months, a significant amount of private hire vehicles are being licensed in Oxford.

Secondly, as you will be aware, our trade continues to struggle immensely due to a severe and prolonged lack of work. The combined impact of changing travel patterns, closure of nightclubs and the deceitful competition from Uber and the overall decline in footfall across the city has left many drivers facing financial hardship. A reduction in licensing fees would therefore have provided meaningful support at a time when it is needed most.

Thirdly and equally important, is the fact that Oxford City licensing fee structure in comparison to South Oxfordshire council is considerably higher, especially for electric vehicles, which is counter-intuitive given the council's stated climate goals. The difference is large enough to impact driver finances. We pay significantly higher for our drivers and vehicle license fees:

- 1. For a yearly vehicle licence in Oxford, the owners of the standard Hackney Carriage (diesel) pay £472 a year and the LEVC (electric) owners pay £354 a year.*

For a 3 years driver's license in Oxford, drivers pay £452.40

- 1. For a yearly driver's license in South Oxfordshire, the owners of a standard taxi pay £389 a year (£83 less than Oxford) and the owners of any zero emissions capable, wheelchair accessible taxi pay £110 a year (£244 less than Oxford).*

For a 3 years driver's license in South Oxfordshire, drivers pay £395 (£57.40 less than Oxford)

This doesn't include the additional cost we pay towards the Safeguarding and Disability Awareness Course every 3 years, the fee for the DBS update service and the taxi medical.

I respectfully ask the Committee to take these concerns into account and to consider whether further support for the Hackney carriage trade may be possible, whether through fee adjustments, targeted relief, or alternative measures that recognise the critical role we play in providing a safe and reliable public transport service for Oxford's residents and visitors.

On a final point, as it's vital that the Committee are also made aware of the fact that, owners of the LEVC electric taxi are facing considerable challenges sourcing essential mechanical components, many of which have been on back order for months. Unsurprisingly, these delays are now directly affecting their ability to present their taxi for compliance testing at the ODS (Marsh Road), creating further disruption and operational difficulties. There must be a collective agreement between this Committee, the Licensing Department, and ODS to ensure that no LEVC cab is taken off the road unreasonably due to the ongoing shortage of mechanical components. This is particularly important where a vehicle remains roadworthy and does not present any safety risk.

Thank you for your time and I would welcome the opportunity to engage further on these matters and contribute to any future discussions.

Yours sincerely,

Mr. Sajad Khan

END

The Chair thanked Mr. Khan for his address and advised the Committee that officers would respond at the opening of item 8 on the agenda.

31. Councillor addresses on any item for discussion

None.

32. Miscellaneous Licensing Update Report

The Director of Planning and Regulation had submitted a report to review the feasibility of smoke free pavement licensing as requested by the Committee.

The Supervising Senior Licensing Officer provided a comprehensive summary of the report, noting it had been compiled at the request of the Committee in 2025. The Committee understood that any alterations to pavement licensing must comply

with The Business and Planning Act 2020, as amended by the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act 2023.

The Chair invited questions from the Committee.

Councillor Ottino commented that the report should have included feedback from organisations such as Turning Point in recognition of marginalised groups within Oxford who struggle with mental health challenges and addiction. Councillor Ottino emphasised his concern that a 100% smoking ban on pavements could further marginalise some groups by excluding them from social environments.

The Supervising Senior Licensing Officer acknowledged the request for feedback from relevant organisations and outlined that control of smoking on pavements can only be extended as far as the legal boundary of a licence.

Councillor Miles queried what the process for a consultation on this topic would be, to which the Supervising Senior Licensing Officer explained that the internal consultation team would be engaged to identify stakeholders, would be licence holders, councillors, and the public.

Councillor Upton requested a definition of a 'hospitality venue' in order to understand which premises would be included and excluded from the classification. In relation to paragraph 4 of the report, Councillor Upton also queried the national conditions which require reasonable provision of smokefree seating and smoking-allowed seating. Councillor Upton also asked how long it would feasibly take for a 100% smoke free policy to be implemented, if progressed.

The Supervising Senior Licensing Officer clarified that the definition of a 'hospitality venue' includes everywhere that sells food and drink. In relation to paragraph 4, the Committee heard that the national condition set by government outlines that there should be a discretionary condition for all venues to have some space for smoking. However, should the justification exist, then local authorities can deviate from this. Finally, the Supervising Senior Licensing Officer explained that each licence lasts for 2 years, therefore most renewals would be naturally occurring in August or September of 2026 and 2028, at which time a change could be implemented.

Councillor Rawle, in relation to enforcement resourcing, asked what is currently involved and what would be required additionally, should a 100% smokefree pavement policy be progressed. The Supervising Senior Licensing Officer provided a summary of existing capacity and enforcement action. The Business Regulation Manager also outlined that Oxford City Council has currently approved 104 pavement licences which are monitored between only 2 officers; Councillor Rawle suggested an additional officer may be needed.

The Chair invited the Committee to debate the recommendation.

Councillor Miles emphasised that the Committee must consider the justifications for 100% smoke free pavement licenses, with recognition that it would not be an immediate change and consultation would be required. Councillor Miles emphasised that she would support this direction of travel for public health reasons and noted that it aligns with the Oxfordshire Smoke Free by 2030 policy which this Council has endorsed. Specific mention was made to the negative impacts of passive smoking on children and the deterrence this can cause for families attending public spaces. The Committee heard that although few complaints have been lodged with the Council, it is likely that many do not complain, and the matter remains an issue which people respond to by voting with their feet when choosing where to frequent based on exposure to smoke. In relation to enforcement, it was noted that it would be a cost well spent in support of public health. Finally, Councillor Miles emphasised that the upcoming changes resulting from Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) should not be a deterrent from making decisions now, and regardless, a consultation should be pursued.

Councillor Taylor noted that this matter was not included in the current budget process, therefore increased enforcement capacity could not be realised soon. The Committee understood that Councillor Taylor opposed taking the process further and he noted that LGR would coincide with the natural renewal of many pavement licenses, as noted by officers, meaning that a change now did not seem logical. Councillor Taylor did however support consultation as a useful tool for the incoming authorities after LGR.

In response, Councillor Miles emphasised that the budget follows policy, therefore the impetus for policy change, such as this, must be established first. Councillor Miles suggested that the Committee could recommend starting the consultation process now, in support of future policy change, and also noted that the next budget is still up for a debate at the next Full Council meeting.

Councillor Ottino recognised the physical health issues relating to smoking but also expressed concern about the associated mental health issues. On this basis, he requested more information from relevant organisation to support understanding of the marginalised groups who struggle with tobacco addiction. Councillor Ottino supported the recommendation for a consultation to begin.

Councillor Mundy queried what the relevant increase in budget would be compared to what is spent now for the relevant enforcement. The Business Regulation Manager explained that pavement licenses have a set charge which is determined by central government, and the Licensing Authority has no leverage to change this; as such, alternative funding would be required for additional enforcement.

Councillor Rawle supported Councillor Ottino's requests regarding the proposed consultation, noting the issue of social isolation. The Committee also heard that indoor smoking bans likely considered similar arguments, yet have been imposed. In

regards enforcement, Councillor Rawle asked to what extent a policy like this may be self-enforcing, with reference to the impacts of signage, for example, and the potential self-policing. It was suggested that harsh enforcement may not be required, and more focus should be paid to culture change and raising awareness which require less resourcing. Councillor Rawle also emphasised that LGR should not stop the Council from taking actions and moving forward, noting groundwork for policy change should still be pursued.

Councillor Upton supported the need for a consultation and queried whether varying licence renewal dates would cause some inconsistencies in a new policy. In relation to enforcement, Councillor Upton also supported the idea that the policy would be somewhat self-enforcing.

Councillor Miles welcomed a consultation which collected views from organisations relevant to mental health and addiction support, also noting that a 100% smokefree pavement policy could create a more supportive environment for those dealing with addiction by encouraging decreased use of tobacco products. Councillor Miles supported the need for a culture change on the matter and recommended that the groundwork be attempted ahead of LGR.

Councillor Rehman clarified the number of existing pavement licenses with the officers and queried the funding for a potential additional officer to support enforcement. It was asked whether the licences are self-funding, which the Business Regulation Manager confirmed.

Councillor Miles and Councillor Rehman discussed the current funding arrangements for pavement licensing.

Councillor Lygo noted that the report should have included consultation from relevant organisations to better inform the Committee's debate and supported calls for a consultation. Councillor Lygo emphasised that any policy changes must be fair when considering venues with and without private areas for smoking.

Councillor Upton asked if the officers have sufficient budget at this time to begin a consultation. The Supervising Senior Licensing Officer recognised the volume of work being requested and noted that it would be possible, but within tight timeframes.

The Chair noted her support for 100% smoke free pavement zones and the challenges posed by passive smoking with reference to her personal experience.

The Chair sought advice on the upcoming vote. The Committee and Member Services Manager explained that the recommendation details why the existing arrangements

should be kept in place, therefore, if members wish to request a consultation, this would need to be removed from the recommendation as an amendment.

Councillor Lygo referenced his concern relating to ash trays positioned outside the Council building; this was determined as a matter for external discussions with Oxford Direct Services.

Councillor Miles proposed that the Committee agree to retain the existing arrangements with regards to smokefree pavement licence conditions and remove the reasons listed within the recommendation as set out in the report, and request that officers undertake a consultation process to seek views on the implementation of 100% smoke-free pavement license conditions; Councillor Upton seconded.

When put to a vote, 12 Members voted in favour, and 1 Member voted against. The recommendations, as amended, were agreed.

The General Purposes Licensing Committee resolved to:

1. **Agree to retain** the existing arrangements with regards to smokefree pavement licence conditions.
2. **Request** that officers undertake a consultation process to seek views on the implementation of 100% smoke-free pavement license conditions.

33. Miscellaneous Licensing Fees and Charges for the financial year 2026/2027

The Director of Planning and Regulation had submitted a report to seek agreement of the licence fees for 2026/27 where the Council has discretion over the level of fee charged.

The Business Regulation Manager introduced the report and provided a comprehensive summary, noting that the Committee were required to recommend to Full Council the approval of the licensing fees and charges for the next financial year. The Committee were informed that the statutory principle in relation to the setting of the fees is that they should be reasonable, proportionate, and not exceed the cost of the procedures and formalities of the relevant licensing scheme, including staffing, training, administration, testing, inspections, hearings, and regulation. The Business Regulation Manager explained that the fees have been revised and increased in line with inflationary pressures.

Councillor Ottino noted that the 10% increase sits above the inflation rate and therefore questioned how the increase was deemed reasonable. The Business Regulation

Manager outlined the increases in previous years and explained that the average is therefore only a 6% increase across the last 5 years.

Councillor Upton queried whether anyone in Oxford is currently licenced for ownership of a dangerous wild animal licence; it was confirmed that there are none currently.

Councillor Ottino queried whether the increases proposed reflect a large impact on the budget, to which the Business Regulation Manager could not comment on the budget process in its entirety.

The Chair invited the Committee to debate the recommendation; there were no comments.

On being proposed by Councillor Upton and seconded by Councillor Miles, the recommendation was put to a vote.

12 Members voted in favour and 1 abstained; the recommendation was agreed.

The General Purposes Licensing Committee resolved to:

- 1. Recommend** to Full Council the Miscellaneous Licensing Fees and Charges for 2026/2027 as set out in Appendix 1.

Councillor Lygo left the meeting.

34. Hackney Carriage and Private Hire, Road Closure Orders, Scrap Metal Dealers, Sex Establishments Street Parties and Commercial Events: Licence Fees and Charges for the 2026/27 financial year

The Deputy Chief Executive for Citizens and City Services had submitted a report to seek agreement on the licence fees for 2026/27 where the council has discretion over the level of fee charged.

The Chair invited officers to introduce the report and to provide a response to the earlier public address.

The Senior Licensing Compliance Officer (ET) introduced the report and provided a comprehensive summary, noting that the Committee were requested to agree to recommend to Full Council the approval of the general licensing fees and

charges for the next financial year. The Committee heard that for commercial events and events with no commercial element, including street parties, these fees have increased by around 4.3% to cover the authorities' costs due to inflationary pressures. The Senior Licensing Compliance Officer (ET) explained that scrap metal licensing fee setting is an executive function and are therefore determined by Cabinet. Finally, the Committee understood that there was no proposition to change fees relating to sex establishments and sexual entertainment value venues, or for Hackney and Private Hire licenses.

The Senior Licensing Compliance Officer (ET) also delivered a response to the earlier public address on behalf of the General Licensing Team Manager as follows:

START

The Authority acknowledges that there has been increase in private hire driver and vehicle applications. The increase occurred within a period of less than a year following the launch of Uber Operator in Oxford. It is too early to determine whether this increase is temporary or long-term, and the Licensing Team is monitoring the position very closely.

To manage the increased volume of Private Hire applications, the Authority has already taken steps to strengthen service capacity and meet the increased demand. This includes:

- *increased spending on processing and regulatory activity,*
- 2. *additional Officer levels,*
- *higher supplies and equipment costs and demand, as well as*
- *continued investment in taxi service improvements:*

We are now in the final stage of implementing the long-awaited Taxi online payments - which has required substantial Officers time and financial investment but will significantly improve efficiency for both the Hackney Carriage and private hire trades.

It is important to clarify that all licence fees are legally ringfenced by licence type. Income from private hire licences can only be used to regulate the private hire sector. While that income is supporting the additional work generated by the rise in private hire applications, the Hackney Carriage trade still benefits greatly whenever improvements, such as modernised processes and online payments, are made available to all licence holders fenced by licence type. Income from private hire licences can only be used to regulate the private hire sector. While that income is supporting the additional work generated by the rise in private hire applications, the Hackney Carriage trade still benefits greatly whenever improvements, such as modernised processes and online payments, are made available to all licence holders.

Should private hire income continue to increase beyond what is required to deliver an efficient, modernised, safe, and fully compliant service for a larger private hire fleet, then future fees and charges reviews would reflect that, including the possibility of reductions. At present, however, the increased application numbers are matched by

increased operational, compliance, and enforcement demands. The Authority will continue to monitor the situation.

To illustrate: Between 1 January 2025 and 1 January 2026, private hire driver numbers grew by 28% and private hire vehicles by 39%. During the same period, there have been significant increases in the following areas:

- subcommittee determinations committee determinations*
- compliance and enforcement work*
- local knowledge & safeguarding tests*
- customer enquiries*
- administrative workload*

In terms of support for the Hackney Carriage trade, the Council already provides a ULEV discount for Hackney Carriage Vehicles. This Committee has also recognised the financial pressures facing drivers by delaying the requirement for all Hackney Carriages to transition to ULEV vehicles, removing the requirement of financial investment, which would otherwise have taken effect this year. Our Environmental Sustainability Team continues to work to secure improved charging rates and arrangements for Hackney Carriages, meaning drivers currently pay significantly less than private motorists when using the Blink charging network.

With regard to comparisons to South Oxfordshire, their licensing system differs significantly. They do not cap Hackney Carriage numbers and licence around 500 Hackney Carriage vehicles, which spreads costs across a much larger fleet. In addition, a significant number of those Hackney Carriages operate non-traditionally, often working outside their own district through private hire operators. This means their compliance needs, enforcement expectations, and associated costs are very different from Oxford's model, where Hackney Carriages operate predominantly within the city and serve the local public. For these reasons, direct fee comparisons are not applicable traditionally, often working outside their own district through private hire operators. This means their compliance needs, enforcement expectations, and associated costs are very different from Oxford's model, where Hackney Carriages operate predominantly within the city and serve the local public. For these reasons, direct fee comparisons are not applicable.

The current fees & charges offer substantial discounts for Private Hire Vehicle Licences which are fully electric (not ULEV) at £208 and WAV's at £130. This is possible because the costs can be spread across a much larger number of private hire licences. The Hackney fleet is capped at 107 vehicles, limiting the ability to absorb a larger discount. The ULEV discount for Hackney Carriages could be increased, but only if the cost were offset by a proportionate increase in fees for non-ULEV Hackney Carriages, which is not considered appropriate at this time.

Concerning LEVC component delays, we have contacted ODS for their views. At present, no such issues have been raised with the Licensing Team by drivers or trade representatives, and ODS have not identified concerns that would affect our compliance testing arrangements.

Despite inflationary pressures and the increased operational costs outlined above, the Licensing Team is recommending no fee increases this year, in order to support the licensed trade.

Thank you.

END

Councillor Lygo rejoined the meeting.

The Chair invited questions from the Committee.

The Supervising Senior Licensing Officer and the Business Regulation Manager left the meeting and did not return.

Councillor Ottino queried why there was no suggested increase for sex establishments and scrap metal dealers. The Senior Licensing Compliance Officer (ET) explained that there has only been one sex establishment in the city since 2024 and the number of scrap metal dealers has decreased from 45 to 4 at present. As a result, there is no increased workload to justify increased fees associated with these licence categories.

Councillor Rawle queried the previous changes to taxi licensing charges. The Senior Licensing Compliance Officer (ET) noted only small increases in the previous year in line with inflation.

Councillor Ottino queried the rationale for why private hire one-year licences are cheaper than one-year Hackney Carriages licences. The Senior Licensing Compliance Officer (ET) explained that the Council issues two types of driver licence: Private Hire, and Hackney Carriage & Private Hire (dual). Holders of a dual licence are permitted to drive both Private Hire and Hackney Carriage vehicles, so they have more options in work that they conduct. As licensing fees are legally ringfenced by licence type, the larger number of Private Hire drivers allows costs to be more widely absorbed within that licence group. In contrast, the significantly smaller number of Hackney Carriage drivers means that fee reductions cannot be distributed as broadly, resulting in higher individual licence fees.

Councillor Rehman noted the experiences drivers are facing with ULEV MOTs and requested that this be investigated and reported on. The Senior Licensing Compliance Officer (ET) outlined that no issues have been reported by ODS to the Licensing Authority.

Councillor Rehman and Councillor Ottino discussed the variations between Hackney Carriage and private hire fees with officers.

The Chair queried why road closure fees had increased by a small amount, to the Senior Licensing Compliance Officer (ET) explained that they have become more popular since the last Coronation and are relatively low in cost in comparison to the officer work and time required. The Committee heard that each application requires a one-week consultation. The Senior Licensing Compliance Officer (ET) noted that the fee does not recoup the entire cost of the workload.

Councillor Miles queried whether the cost of street closure signage was included within the fee, to which the Senior Licensing Compliance Officer (ET) noted that it is set at an additional fee and available for rental from ODS. The Committee heard that there are no set conditions for the type of signage which must be used.

Councillor Rehman, noting the number of private hire licences now in Oxford since the introduction of Uber, suggested that more money for additional enforcement should be required. The Senior Licensing Compliance Officer (ET) provided a detailed summary of the extensive enforcement action which already takes place weekly, and which is planned for the next financial year.

Councillor Ottino queried the impacts of creating consistency between Private Hire and Hackney Carriage fees; officers were not able to definitively comment without data to hand.

On being proposed by Councillor Lygo and seconded by Councillor Clarkson, the recommendation was put to a vote.

12 Members voted in favour and 1 abstained; the recommendation was agreed.

The General Purposes Licensing Committee resolved to:

1. **Recommend** to Council to approve the Hackney Carriage and Private Hire, Road Closure Orders, Scrap Metal Dealers, Sex Establishments Street Parties and Commercial Events Licenses Fees and Charges for 2026/27 as set out in Appendix 1.

35. Dates of future meetings

The Committee noted the dates and times of future meetings.

The meeting started at 7.02 pm and ended at 8.25 pm

Chair
2026

Date: Wednesday 27 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

All other committees: immediately.

Details are in the Council's Constitution.

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