

1 NOVEMBER 2024

NEW FOREST DISTRICT COUNCIL

GENERAL PURPOSES AND LICENSING COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the General Purposes and Licensing Committee held on Friday, 1 November 2024

* Cllr Neil Tungate (Chairman)

* Cllr Richard Young (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

* Steve Clarke
* Jack Davies
* Philip Dowd
* Allan Glass
* David Harrison
* David Hawkins

Councillors:

Nigel Linford
* Colm McCarthy
* Dave Penny
* Alvin Reid
Janet Richards

*Present

Officers Attending:

Christa Ferguson, Tanya Coulter, Debbie Everett, Joanne McClay and Joe Tyler

Apologies

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs Linford and Richards.

4 MINUTES

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 13 May 2024 be signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

5 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No Declarations of Interest were made by any Members in connection with any Agenda Item.

6 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

There was no public participation.

7 GAMBLING ACT 2005 POLICY REVIEW

The item was introduced by the Environmental and Regulation Service Manager who provided a brief overview of the report.

It was explained that the Gambling Act of 2005 required the Council to publish a Statement of Principles that must be reviewed every three years to ensure that it remains current and reflects any changes in legislation or statutory guidance.

The Gambling Act of 2005 set up the Gambling Commission who, Members heard, were responsible for the higher-level national impact of gambling as well as the policies on operating licenses, personal licenses and remote gambling.

The Committee were reminded that the Licensing Authority, as well as the licensing holder, were responsible for promoting and upholding the licensing objectives within the District. The objectives being the prevention of gambling being a source of crime or disorder, ensuring that gambling is conducted in a fair and open way, and protecting children and other vulnerable persons from being harmed or exploited from gambling.

The Council's Statement of Principles acts as a local framework to guide gambling practices, to identify the licensing objectives, to state the aims, to list the consultees, and to tackle any occurrences of illegal gambling.

Members were informed that there had been 12 betting premises in the District at the time of the last review, however there were now only 10. Furthermore, there was now only one adult gaming centre in the District. A register of licensed gambling premises was available at all times to the public. It was acknowledged that changes in gambling formats and behaviours, with a general switch to online betting and gambling for many, explained that reduction in those using physical premises.

The Committee were informed that there had been no amendments to the policy and no legislative changes since the last review nor were there any substantial changes to local conditions. Only minor amendments had been proposed to factors such as location considerations, planning and building control signposting and enforcements measures.

It was explained that a consultation had been completed, with three responses, two of which were from local town councils and one from a solicitor acting on behalf of the Betting and Gaming Council. The responses were positive in their feedback and supportive of the Council's Statement of Principles.

The proposed changes to the Statement of Principles was to provide further clarity on the policy and aid in understanding the document.

The Licensing Manager reported that the District's gambling premises were very well regulated and that no complaints had been received since the last review and therefore the review was put to the Committee for their recommendation to Council.

The committee were positive in their views on the reviewed Statement of Principles and, following the Officers' overview, members posed questions and made comments.

It was acknowledged that the implementation of safeguards for vulnerable people was imperative, and Officers reassured members that staff in physical premises were trained to help individuals that may be vulnerable by signposting them to support services.

Following a question on the efficacy of gambling machines, it was explained that the Gambling Commission and Trading Standards would regularly check machines in physical premises to make sure that they are performing as the regulations

required. It was briefly explained that different machine types had different categorisations and thresholds for winning outputs and that each of these would require a requisite permit. The Local Authority were also able to check premises records for occurrences of individuals being turned away or complaints being registered. The Betting and Gaming Council also undertake research on prevention treatment and support for people prone to addictive gambling.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee recommend to Full Council that the Gambling Policy be approved.

8 POLLING DISTRICTS AND POLLING PLACES REVIEW 2024

The item was introduced by the Assistant Director – Governance who provided an overview of the report. It was explained that the Council were required by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 to review the polling places and districts within its area. This review must be completed by 31 January 2025.

Members were reminded that a full, detailed review of polling districts and places was undertaken as part of the boundary review and changes leading up to the 2023 district elections. From this, there were very limited proposed changes to the polling places agreed at that time and no changes to the polling districts.

A number of informative responses had been received following a consultation throughout September 2024 and members were notified that several, detailed representations were received regarding the Waterside School and Bashley Village Hall. It was explained that alternative places were assessed as part of the Returning Officer's consideration of the responses. Alternative places considered, such as the Scout Hut near Waterside School, were not deemed suitable due to accessibility issues and the risk of flooding. Members were informed that the National Association of Headteachers provides advice to schools on the use of school buildings for elections. It was heard that the Council provides additional staff at schools used as polling places to assist with the process on election day and that work would continue to take place in collaboration with schools on future election days.

Following the Officer's overview, members asked questions and made comments.

On the use of schools as polling places, it was acknowledged that the use of these public buildings was positive but that there may be some disruption to the routine of families and pupils. Members commented on the positive opportunities that arise from using schools as polling places, such as the chance to provide education to school pupils on the importance of voting and the format of elections. To this, the Committee heard that four to five schools a year would contact the Elections team and request election packs including practice equipment in order to run dummy-polls in classes.

Comments were made on the accessibility of some polling places in the District and Officers noted these remarks, reassuring members that work would continue with the Council's street scene teams to check the accessibility of polling places and identify any risks on polling day to this effect. Officers could also report access issues to the landowners of the relevant polling places.

On using places of worship or buildings that may sell alcohol, the Committee heard that it was difficult to balance the views of voters when it comes to their preference and views on venue. This is considered by Officers however and they would always provide all information to any individual who may prefer to submit a postal vote or arrange a proxy. Work was ongoing on encouraging these different forms of submitting votes so that the electorate have the best options available to them.

RESOLVED:

That the Committee recommends to Full Council that:

1. There should be no changes to the polling districts.
2. The changes to polling places as set out in the Table at Appendix 1 be agreed.

9 DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

That the dates of future meetings be agreed.

CHAIRMAN