

General Purposes and Licensing Committee – 5 September 2025

Licensing Performance Report

Purpose	For EMT to consider the report on the performance of the Licensing Service, prior to presentation to the General Purposes and Licensing Committee.
Classification	Public
Executive Summary	The report highlights the work of the Licensing Authority over the past 12 months and sets out the workplan for 2025-26
Recommendation	That the General Purposes and Licensing Committee notes the performance of the Licensing Service over the past year and supports the work plan for the forthcoming year.
Reasons for recommendation(s)	To ensure that General Purposes and Licensing Committee Members are brought up to date with events and data from Licensing Services.
Ward(s)	All
Portfolio Holder(s)	Cllr Dan Poole
Strategic Director(s)	Richard Knott – Strategic Director of Housing & Communities
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Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to inform Members of the General Purposes and Licensing Committee of the activities undertaken by the Council's Licensing Service to discharge their function during 2024/25.

Taxi licensing

Implementation of the taxi policy

2. In February 2025, the new Taxi Licensing Policy became effective following extensive consultation with members of the public, the business community and private hire trade. The policy was reviewed and updated following changes to legislation, best practice and statutory guidance and benchmarking of standards across Hampshire.
3. Proposed amendments were approved and adopted on improvements to driver, vehicle and operator standards including safeguarding requirements, acceptable standards for vehicles and testing, the convictions policy, and revised licence conditions.
4. Proposals which had a potential significant impact on the trade were thoroughly considered by Members and following review of the consultation responses approved and adopted that:
 - all new licensed vehicles must meet Euro 6 emission standards
 - there are no upper age limits or emission standards on vehicles currently licensed
 - wheelchair accessible vehicles are exempt from emissions and age criteria, and
 - from 1 April 2025, door signage was required to be affixed to each rear passenger door panel of a private hire vehicle.

Amendments to Appendix B – Conviction Policy

5. The Institute of Licensing (IOL) revised its Suitability Guidance at the end of 2024 to include information on offenders and offending, update thresholds and considerations for some offences when considering licence applications and placed an emphasis on risk-based decision making.
6. A report will be presented to members on 5 September 2025 seeking to incorporate this updated guidance into the Taxi Licensing Policy and to agree a consultation to this effect. The IOL guidance seeks to promote consistency in decision making across Licensing Authorities, continue to raise standards and assist in the protection of the public.

Licences for drivers, operators and vehicles

7. The trade was hit hard by the pandemic and was subsequently affected by fuel price increases and the recent cost of living crisis. However, as the table below shows, there has been significant increase in applications and licensed vehicles since 2022.

Licences issued per year	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Combined driver licences	219	193	233
Hackney carriage vehicles	99	103	102
Private hire vehicles	152	231	423

8. The team has seen an increase in vehicle licence applications from drivers outside of New Forest district, including Southampton and Bournemouth and as further afield as Reading. Legally, the Council is required to licence all drivers and vehicles which meet the required standard, irrespective of where they live (and potentially work).
9. There are many reasons why applicants and drivers that live and work outside of the district may choose to apply and be licensed by NFDC, which could include:
- NFDC licence Uber, whereas others do not and therefore those wishing to work for Uber may apply to us,
 - Efficiency of service often dictates where applicants apply, based on licence processing times. The Licensing Authority provide a good customer service, with quick response times and timely licensing processes.
 - Variations in standards, such as for new and existing vehicles. Implications of the New Euro 6 Policy will not be reflected in the figures, as this was only introduced in February 2025.

Driver Knowledge Tests

10. All new applicants must pass a knowledge test prior to gaining a driver licence and new and renewal drivers must complete safeguarding training. The driver knowledge test includes questions on the geographic area, taxi and private hire law, the highway code and English language and numeracy questions.
11. The team has moved from a paper-based test format to applicants carrying out the test digitally on a tablet. This has streamlined the driver knowledge process, reduced officer time in administering the test (as the marking process is automated), improves the experience for the applicant due to the improved format and significantly reduces paper usage.

Hardley depot

12. All licensed vehicles have assessments undertaken at the depot workshops on an annual basis and those vehicles which are 8 years and older are required to have twice yearly assessments. These assessments are required in addition to an MOT.
13. In February 2025, all vehicle testing carried out at Clay Meadow depot in Hounslow, moved to Hardley depot.
14. At the time of writing 255 vehicles have been inspected by mechanics at Hardley depot in line with the standards in the Policy on cleanliness, seatbelts, steering, bodywork, brakes, tyres and lights etc. and the improved design of this depot allows drivers to view the assessment on a TV screen whilst it is being carried out. Additional driver assessments are also carried out at Lymington depot.

Refusal and revocation of licences

15. In the period covered by this report (1 April 2024 to 31 March 2025) the following actions were taken for new applicants, existing drivers and renewal applicants where offences or conduct issues were considered in relation to the "fit and proper test".

New applicant	Delegated Powers or Committee	Action
1	Delegated powers	Refused based on previous revocation by a neighbouring authority

Review of existing licence	Delegated Powers or Licensing Sub Committee (LSC)	Action
2	Delegated powers	Both revoked with immediate effect.
4	LSC	Immediate revocation of licence (2 cases). Licence suspended for 3 months and driving course required. Licence suspended for 6 months.

- NB. Action is taken under delegated powers in consultation with the Chair or Vice Chair of General Purposes and Licensing Committee when it is considered that immediate action is required due to a risk to public safety.

Taxi driver appeal hearing

16. In May 2025, officers successfully defended an appeal at West Hampshire Crown Court, Southampton. The original decision was taken on 24 November 2023 by the Licensing Sub Committee to revoke his NFDC driver licence following a conviction for stalking. The decision was appealed and during this time period the appellant could continue driving the licensed vehicle.
17. At the first appeal on 12 September 2024, the District Judge at Southampton Magistrates Court upheld the revocation decision. However, the appellant submitted a further appeal, to the Crown Court.
18. The Judge at the Crown Court hearing, dismissed the appeal and the Council were awarded costs. The driver has been informed that he can no longer drive a vehicle licensed by the Council.
19. This has been a complex and lengthy case but shows the importance the Licensing Authority place in safeguarding residents and visitors who use the licensed taxi trade in the New Forest.

Fees and Charges

20. Licensing fees and charges are reviewed on an annual basis or when there are new policies which impact on the cost of delivering the service.
21. Fees and charges which are not statutorily set, are benchmarked against other Hampshire and neighbouring Licensing Authorities and reflect the cost of performing the licensing function without generating an income.
22. All fees and charges will be reviewed and presented to the General Purposes and Licensing Committee in January 2026 for consideration and implementation from 1 April 2026.
23. The Licensing Authority has a high collection and recovery rate for all fees and charges, due to a number of mechanisms in place to ensure licensable activities don't continue without payment. Gambling Licences are revoked following nonpayment of the annual fee and licences under the Licensing Act are suspended, which prevent licensable activities on the premises. In addition, fees for new licences must be received, before an application is progressed.
24. The Compliance Officer undertakes verification checks to ensure non licensed premises are no longer operating and takes appropriate action where required.

25. In addition, Southern Internal Audit Partnership undertake audits of the Licensing Authority processes for collection of fees to ensure they are complaint, robust and effective.

Licensing Act 2003

Applications under the Licensing Act

26. The following statistics provide a snapshot of trends, over the past 3 years.

Licences issued per year	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Temporary Events Notices (TENs)	682	768	787
Premises Licences and Club Premises Certificates (New, variations, and change DPS/PLH)	251	292	258
Personal licences applications (grant and changes)	159	169	148
Minor Variations applications (PL and CPC)	13	15	19
Review of Premises licence	1	0	0

27. There has been a continued increase in TENs applications over the past 3 years, mainly due to an upturn in the economy, following the pandemic, leading to a growth in the number of events, which may have been previously delayed, in addition to new events.
28. The number of new premises applying for licences and new personal licences remains fairly constant. Although a small number of premises licences are surrendered each year, new licences are granted which compensates for those lost.

Licensing subcommittee hearings

29. The following applications were considered by the Licensing Sub Committee.

Date	Nature of Application	Decision
6 December 2024	A new premises licence for a private school Objections received from Residents	Granted
31 March 2025	An application to vary the premises licence for a campsite. Objections received from local residents	Granted

30. The number of Licensing Act hearings in 2024/5 were low and are dependent on the following:
- The type of applications submitted,
 - Representations received from the public and how they feel the application will affect them,
 - Representations received from Responsible Authorities,
 - The type of premises applying for a licence or for variation,
 - Whether issues can be resolved through a staged approach,
 - Consideration of personal licence holders who have acquired relevant convictions.
31. Many new or varied licence applications require a detailed review by the Licensing Manager and negotiation with objectors, applicants and Responsible Authorities, to endeavour to resolve areas of concerns and conflict with the application. This can be time consuming, requiring additional information and the agreement of further conditions to be placed on the licence to be granted. This informal approach in reaching an amicable outcome prevents the need for a hearing and only when all options have been explored and agreement is not reached, will a hearing be required.

Other licences

32. The Licensing Authority has a number of other licensed activities which is responsible for, which are included below:

Licence	Currently licensed	Issued in 2024/25
Pleasure boat licences	16	5
Boatmen licences	11	4
New Lottery	137	12
Gaming machine notifications and permits	89	5
Gaming Premises Licences	12	0
Scrap metal site and collectors	17	2
Temporary road closures	-	46
House to house collections	-	27
Street collections	-	97

Workplan for 2025 – 2026

33. The Licensing Services priorities for 2025 – 26 are detailed in **Appendix 1** in the Service Plan.

34. Main priorities include the sub-contracting of the DBS application function to a third party, continue to update the Taxi Policy where appropriate when revised guidance is issued, annual review of fees and charges, whilst reviewing processes and procedures to ensure the best use is made of resources.

Corporate plan priorities

35. **Theme:** Prosperity
36. **Corporate Plan Objective:** supporting our high-quality business base and economic centres to thrive and grow.
37. **Service Objective:** Implementation of the Environmental and Regulation Service Plans.

Financial and resource implications

38. Delivery of the licensing work plan are met within the licensing budget.

Legal Implications

39. The Service Plan and work programme of the Licensing Authority is carried out in line with the Gambling and Licensing Policies and current statutory guidance.

Risk assessment

40. Risk assessments are in place for premises inspections by officers.

Environmental/climate and nature implications

41. Environmental implications are considered when reviewing policies which included the impact of licensed vehicles on air quality for the taxi Licensing Policy.

Crime and disorder implications

42. The Council as a Licensing Authority has a duty to uphold the licensing objectives when carrying out its functions, including the prevention of crime and disorder. The team work closely with internal council services and external partners to ensure the safety of our communities and to engage with businesses to ensure they operate in a compliant and safe way.

Equality and diversity implications

43. The licensing policies and processes in place (relating to alcohol licensing, gambling and taxi licensing) set standards to ensure that services are delivered which are responsive and protect the needs of

our communities. The Licensing Service works to protect the public, safeguarding children and the vulnerable. Policies provide a framework to support and regulate businesses consistently.

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Licensing Service plan
for 2025/26

Background Papers:

None