

EAST DEVON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of Licensing and Enforcement Committee held at Council Chamber, Blackdown House, Honiton on 16 July 2025

Attendance list at end of document

The meeting started at 10.00 am and ended at 11.45 am

7 Minutes of the previous meeting

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 3 June 2025 were agreed and signed as a true record.

8 Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

9 Public Speaking

Mr George Shorters, Chair of the East Devon Taxi Association addressed the Committee and noted that the latest inflation figure stood at 3.6%. As all costs continued to rise, the Taxi Association requested an increase to the fare tariff.

Mr Shorters also noted that the Government was providing grants to encourage people to buy electric vehicles, and requested that EDDC also take this into consideration.

The Chair thanked Mr Shorters for his contribution.

The Licensing Officer read out a statement submitted by Sparky's Taxis. The business was a long-standing small business in Honiton which relied on local trade. As the cost of living crisis continued, any increase in the fare tariff would negatively impact vulnerable people. Any drop in local trade, and subsequent drop in income, would have a significant effect on the business. This would also impact other local businesses which Sparky's relied upon.

10 Matters of urgency

There were no matters of urgency.

11 Confidential/exempt item(s)

There were no confidential or exempt items.

12 Taxi Report - Proposed maximum table of fares report

With the agreement of the Committee, the Chair advised that this item would be moved up the agenda to enable the seven members of the taxi trade present to leave once the report had been considered.

The Licensing Officer, Emily Westlake, presented the report which asked the Committee to consider whether an increase to the East Devon hackney carriage fare tariff was necessary at this time. If a fare increase was considered appropriate, the Committee

were asked to indicate their preferred option from the revised fare tariff tables set out at Appendix F to the report, and authorise the publication of a public notice setting out the proposed fare tariff in a local newspaper and at the Council Offices in line with the powers conferred by Section 65 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.

The Chair thanked the Licensing Officer for the considerable amount of work which had been undertaken to produce the report.

Responses to questions from Councillors and discussion included the following points:

- A small increase in the fare tariff would be preferable as there was a need to strike a balance;
- The Licensing Officer had consulted with the meter fitters who had advised that moving to calculating fares on a yardage basis would present no problem with re-calibrating meters going forwards, if the Committee was minded to agree that option;
- Meters must be re-calibrated by approved meter fitters, of which there were two for the District. Drivers had to pay a charge of approximately £25 and also take time out to travel out of the District which was a significant cost in terms of loss of working time;
- Regarding the option to charge less than the maximum agreed fares, it was noted that most drivers would generally charge the maximum fare and would not undercut other drivers and companies in the area;
- In response to a question regarding increasing the number of meter fitters in the area, the Licensing Officer would continue to pursue this. The Chair would be happy to add support by way of a letter if appropriate;
- The Licensing Officer would also continue to ask meter fitters to attend locations in East Devon to reduce the distance taxi drivers had to travel to have meters re-calibrated;
- The previous survey on the Guildford method of calculating fare tariffs had not yet been re-started. Licensing Officers continued to try to collate the necessary information themselves;
- It was noted that whichever system for calculating the fare tariff was used, within the taxi trade the members held differing views, depending on their own circumstances, as to whether the fares should be increased or not at the current time;
- Regarding the low response to the recent Guildford method consultation, it was noted that drivers did not trust that any information they provided would only be used for the purpose of introducing the method, despite assurances from Licensing Officers that this would be the case;
- Concern was raised that even a small increase in the current fare tariff would have a detrimental effect on customers and that this would then have a negative impact on the taxi trade;
- Should the Council move towards a policy of the taxi trade using only electric vehicles, the trade needed to be well supported at the present time to enable it to plan ahead for the cost of purchasing electric vehicles;

Having agreed that an increase to the fare tariff should be introduced, the Committee debated the appropriate level of the increase set out in the options shown in Appendix F to the report.

AGREED

1. That the Hackney Carriage fare tariff be increased as set out at version 3 of Appendix F of the report (increase of approximately 2% to all tariffs), and
2. That the requisite public notice of 14 days be given of the proposed increase as required by Section 65(2) of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976.

The Licensing Officer, Lee Staples, presented the report which provided an update on activities of the Licensing Service under the Licensing Act 2003, Gambling Act 2005, taxi legislation and general licensing including street trading and pavement licensing.

It was noted that guidance from the Gambling Commission was still awaited as part of the current review of the Gambling Act 2005.

The Committee noted the report.

14 **Licensing Act 2003 - Statement of licensing policy, summary review and request to move to a consultation**

The Licensing Officer, Lee Staples, presented the report which sought approval to conduct a consultation for the summary review of the Licensing Act 2003 Statement of Licensing Policy.

It was noted that only limited changes to the Statement of Licensing Policy were being proposed and that the Council was required to hold a consultation.

AGREED

That approval be given to conduct a consultation for the summary review of the Licensing Act 2003 Statement of Licensing Policy.

15 **New draft pavement licence policy and request to move to a public consultation**

The Licensing Officer, Lee Staples, presented the report. District Councils were handed responsibility for the issuing of temporary 'fast track' pavement licences via the Business & Planning Act 2020 in August 2020, to streamline the process of obtaining a pavement licence and help businesses during the Covid pandemic. The temporary pavement licences were limited in duration to 30th September 2024, and as such the Government subsequently made amendments via the Levelling Up & Regeneration Act 2023 to make the provisions of the temporary pavement licence regime permanent. As a result of these legislative changes, licences previously issued by Devon County Council under the previous Highways Act 1980 regime will also now only be issued by district councils.

In order to promote consistency between local authorities across Devon and Cornwall a Draft Pavement Licensing Policy has been produced by the Devon Licensing Officers Group, with the view to this policy being adopted in each local authority area. The policy will ensure that the Council carries out its pavement licensing responsibilities in a fair, equitable and consistent manner.

The Committee was asked to consider a proposal to move to a public consultation on a draft pavement licensing policy.

Responses to questions and discussion included the following points:

- Pavement licences are available to view on the public register on the website;
- Councillors who had concerns regarding the operation and enforcement of current pavement licences were advised to take this up with Estates and Streetscene;
- It was noted that any member of the public could comment on the consultation. The Council did not need a specific level of response to proceed, but all responses received would be considered;

- Town and parish councils would be made aware of the consultation.

AGREED

That, having considered the draft Pavement Licensing Policy, a public consultation be held on the draft policy and that, following the public consultation, the draft policy document be returned to the Licensing & Enforcement Committee for further consideration.

Attendance List

Councillors present:

B Bailey
I Barlow
K Bloxham (Vice-Chair)
O Davey
T Dumper
P Fernley
S Gazzard
T McCollum
M Rixson
S Westerman
J Whibley (Chair)

Councillors also present (for some or all the meeting)

R Collins

Officers in attendance:

Matthew Blythe, Assistant Director Environmental Health
Sarah Jenkins, Democratic Services Officer
Giles Salter, Solicitor
Lee Staples, Licensing Officer
Emily Westlake, Licensing Officer

Councillor apologies:

M Chapman
Y Levine

Chair

Date: