



East Cambridgeshire District Council

Minutes of a Meeting of the Licensing Committee

Held at The Grange, Nutholt Lane, Ely, CB7 4EE at 10:00am
on Wednesday 19 November 2025

Present:

Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith
Cllr Christine Colbert (Substituting for Cllr Cane)
Cllr Lee Denney
Cllr Lavinia Edwards
Cllr Mark Goldsack
Cllr Keith Horgan
Cllr Julia Huffer (Chair)
Cllr Mark Inskip
Cllr Alan Sharp (Substituting for Cllr Goodearl)
Cllr John Trapp
Cllr Christine Whelan

Officers:

Patrick Adams – Senior Democratic Services Officer
Stewart Broome – Licensing Manager

One member of the public was present in the public gallery.

16. Apologies and substitutions

Apologies for absence were received from Cllr Charlotte Cane, Cllr Martin Goodearl and Cllr Gareth Wilson. Cllr Christine Colbert attended as a substitute for Cllr Cane. Cllr Alan Sharp attended as a substitute for Cllr Goodearl.

17. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

18. Minutes

The Committee received the Minutes of the Licensing Committee meeting held on 10 September 2025.

It was resolved unanimously:

that the Minutes of the Licensing Committee meeting held on 10 September 2025 be confirmed as a correct record and be signed by the Chair.

19. Chair's announcements

There were no Chair's announcements.

20. Review of Licensing Fees

The Licensing Manager, Stewart Broome, presented a report, AA97 previously circulated, which set out the statutory fees the Council charged for specific licences under the Licensing Act 2003, Gambling Act 2005, and Business and Planning Act 2020. The report also set out the fees for the period 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2027 in respect of those licensing and licensing related activities where the authority has the discretion to determine the relevant fees.

The Licensing Manager explained that the purpose of licensing fees was to cover the Council's costs. The authority had become responsible for processing the taxi licences for a national provider and this had resulted in a large increase in the amount of licensing fees received. The efficient way in which the Council processed these licences meant that the Council needed to reduce its fees, backdated to April 2025, to ensure that it did not make an unlawful profit.

It was noted that the figure in Table 3, regarding the difference between the fees for 2025/26 and proposed fees for 2026/27 should be -£90 for the "New and renewal 1yr for all (excl. stickers)" under the Private Hire Vehicle Licence heading, instead of £0.

In reply to Cllr Mark Goldsack, the Licensing Manager explained that the licensing team had grown in size from 4 to 11 officers in order to process approximately 2,000 additional taxi licence applications from a national operator who had decided to ask the Council to issue its licences. Due to economies of scale the Council was now in a position to reduce its fees. The Licensing Manager also explained that the national operator specialised in providing journeys for children and vulnerable adults via a publicly awarded contract.

In reply to Cllr John Trapp, the Licensing Manager explained that the Council could not charge charities for the issuing of licences for activities such as street collections. The authority was not able to increase the fees charged to businesses to cover the cost of issuing licences to charities and as a result the Council would never be able to recover 100% of its costs. In the past the authority had been recovering approximately 77% of its licensing costs. However, after taking responsibility for issuing taxi licences to a national operator it was estimated that 97% of the overall budget costs would now be recovered.

In reply to Cllr John Trapp, the Licensing Manager reported that the national operator was aware of the Local Government Review. He expected that the

licensing arrangement that had been set up would continue under the new unitary authority.

In reply to Cllr John Trapp, the Licensing Manager explained that after undergoing a DBS check, taxi drivers were then subject to a further check every four months to ensure nothing had changed.

In reply to Cllr Mark Inskip, the Licensing Manager reported that the Council had considered the risk of the national operator deciding to be licensed by an alternative authority. The Council was obligated to process the licensing applications that it received and it needed to be flexible to respond to changes in demand. In reply to Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith, the Licensing Manager acknowledged that it was possible that other providers could also ask the Council to process their applications and the authority would have to consider hiring additional staff. The Council had been successful in hiring and training staff to carry out the additional work. Licensing officers could work effectively from home when processing taxi licence applications.

In reply to Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith, the Licensing Manager explained that the Council was responsible for any taxi licensing hearing relating to any of the additional licences granted. However, there was a good standard of compliance with the drivers employed by the national operator and so this had not been an issue.

In reply to Cllr Keith Horgan, the Licensing Manager explained that if the report's recommendations were agreed, the reduction in fees would be back dated to April 2025 and as a result operators would either receive a credit note or a refund. It was hoped that in most cases a credit note would be issued as this was easier to administer. It was estimated that about £50,000 would need to be refunded. The Licensing Manager stated that licensing authorities were not able to agree a contract with its customers to share the risk of changing circumstances. The Council had developed a good working relationship with the national provider and would continue to monitor the situation and manage any risk.

In reply to Cllr John Trapp, the Licensing Manager explained that the Council adjusted its fees to pay for the costs of its licensing service, with the aim of not making a profit or a loss. In the past discretionary fees were not usually adjusted on a single year's figures. Instead, the Council would only adjust its fees if there was a clear trend. In reply to Cllr Lee Denney, the Licensing Manager reported that a deficit or surplus of 15% was seen as acceptable.

Cllr Julia Huffer proposed and Cllr Keith Horgan seconded the recommendations in the report. Three separate votes were taken and

it was unanimously resolved to:

- A)** Note the statutory fees that East Cambridgeshire District Council is required to charge in respect of the specified licences under the Licensing Act 2003 and Gambling Act

2005, and agree to set the discretionary fee elements of the Gambling Act 2005 and the Business and Planning Act 2020 at the maximum level permitted, as set out in Appendix 1, Appendix 2, and Appendix 3.

- B)** Agree to implement the fees in paragraph i) (or if subject to statutory amendment, the relevant amended fees) on the 1 April 2026.
- C)** Instruct Officers to implement, as appropriate, any other statutory fees that may be brought into force during the 2025/2026 financial year.
- D)** Instruct Officers to include the agreed fees in the 2026/2027 annual fees and charges report that is presented to full Council.

it was unanimously resolved to:

- A)** agree to implement the proposed fees relevant to those licences and licensing related activities where the authority has the discretion to determine the fees, as set out in Appendix 4 and Appendix 5, on the 1 April 2026.
- B)** agree to implement the proposed fees relevant to Animal Welfare licensing, as set out in Appendix 6 on the 1 April 2026.
- C)** instruct Officers to include the fees in the 2026/2027 annual fees and charges report that is presented to full Council.

It was unanimously resolved to:

- A)** agree to implement the proposed fees relevant to hackney carriage and private hire drivers, and private hire operators, as set out in Appendix 7 with immediate effect, and instruct officers to adjust payments made from 1 April 2025 to these new levels.
- B)** instruct Officers to conduct the necessary consultation required by section 70 of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 on the reduced vehicle fees contained in Table 3, and should there be no objections, permit Officers to adjust payments made from 1st April 2025 to the unopposed levels.
- C)** instruct Officers to include the fees in the 2026/2027 annual fees and charges report that is presented to full Council.

21. Hackney Carriage Fares – Consideration of Request from Trade to Increase Fares

The Licensing Manager presented this report, AA98 already circulated, which invited the Committee to consider increasing the fares payable by members of the public to use an East Cambridgeshire District Council taxi following a formal request from members of the taxi trade. He explained that consultees had expressed concerns regarding the cost of living and the competition from online applications. Out of the 14 respondents, seven supported the proposals, three objected but recognised the need for an increase and four opposed any increase. 44 of the 91 hackney proprietors had their opinion represented and 37 of these 44 supported the proposal. The Committee had decided to go out to consultation at its last meeting on 10 September 2025. The Committee now needed to decide whether to agree the proposed increase, as detailed in the consultation exercise or whether the responses received justified amending the proposed fares.

In reply to Cllr Christine Colbert, the Licensing Manager explained that the meters would automatically change their rate after 880 yards. A laminated sheet could be provided to taxi drivers to assist with any calculations but as most journeys were at least a mile the rate for the first 880 yards did not apply to the vast majority of journeys.

In reply to Cllr John Trapp, the Licensing Manager explained that the Council could not take speed limits into account when determining fares. He did not consider waiting time to be a significant issue for most of the journeys made in the district.

In reply to Cllr John Trapp, the Licensing Manager explained that private hire vehicles operating through an online application were permitted to park outside a train station and wait for a customer who had contacted them via the application. They could be prosecuted for openly soliciting trade without using the application.

In reply to Cllr Mark Goldsack, the Licensing Manager explained that the alternative options in tables 2 and 3 in the report were options for councillors to consider if they believed that the evidence for the consultation was sufficient to reject the increases laid out in table 1 that had been consulted on. Cllr Mark Goldsack suggested that the options in tables 2 and 3 should not be agreed, as unlike the proposed increase in table 1, they had not been consulted on. Cllr Mark Inskip also supported the proposed increases in table 1 and suggested that it was right to include details of the options in tables 2 and 3 in the report. The Licensing Manager explained that any increase had to come into effect no later than 3 December 2025, which provided insufficient time for any additional consultation exercises.

In reply to Cllr John Trapp, the Licensing Manager explained that if the Committee agreed to increase the fares as proposed, the district's hackney carriages would be charging an average amount, compared to the fares charged by taxis operating in neighbouring districts. In reply to Cllr Lee

Denney, the Licensing Manager reported that fares had not been increased since 2022, whilst the cost of new vehicles had increased greatly during that time, along with insurance and maintenance costs. The Committee had considered these points at their meeting in September and decided that a 20% increase was viable and should be consulted on.

In reply to Cllr Christine Colbert, the Licensing Manager explained that the reference to an £8 start rate by JR Cars was a misunderstanding, as Hackney Carriages operating in the district had never had an £8 start rate.

The Committee moved into debate.

Cllr Christine Ambrose Smith stated that fares had not been increased in three years and a decent taxi service needed modern vehicles. Due to inflation and rising costs she supported the right of taxi operators to have the right to increase their fees. Cllr Mark Goldsack agreed, stating that the Council had consulted on the proposed increase in table 1 and the majority of those consulted supported those increases. Cllr Julia Huffer also supported the proposed increase and was impressed by the number of responses received as a result of the consultation.

Cllr Alan Sharp accepted that taxis operating via an online platform had the right to compete in an open market but expressed concern that they were not always operating as they were permitted to. Cllr Mark Inskip agreed and stated that he would prefer to use the professional service provided by a hackney carriage fare.

Cllr Mark Goldsack proposed and Cllr Christine Whelan seconded the recommendation in the report. A vote was taken and with 10 votes in favour, 1 against and no abstentions

it was resolved to:

Instruct officers to vary the existing Table of Fares using the proposed Table of Fares contained in Table 1 in the report, to take effect from Friday 3 December 2025.

22. Licensing Manager's update

The Licensing Manager reported that the service had increased in size to respond to the extra demand. It was doing excellent work and the Committee could expect a more detailed report before the end of the municipal year.

it was resolved:

That the Licensing Manager's update be noted.

23. Forward agenda plan

The Committee received its Forward Agenda Plan. The Chair stated that meeting scheduled for Wednesday 10 December might not be going ahead.

it was resolved:

That the Forward Agenda Plan be noted.

The meeting concluded at 12:06 pm

Chair.....

Date.....