

LICENSING COMMITTEE

ABERDEEN, 21 January 2026. Minute of Meeting of the LICENSING COMMITTEE. Present:- Councillor Al-Samarai, Convener; Councillor Delaney, Vice-Convener; and Councillors Clark, Crockett, Graham, Henrickson, Lawrence, MacGregor and McLeod.

The agenda and reports associated with this minute can be found [here](#).

Please note that if any changes are made to this minute at the point of approval, these will be outlined in the subsequent minute and this document will not be retrospectively altered.

EXEMPT BUSINESS

1. The Convener proposed that the Committee consider item 10.1 (Landlord Registration - New) with the press and public excluded from the meeting.

The Committee resolved:-

in terms of Section 50A(4) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973, to exclude the press and public from the meeting during consideration of the above item, so as to avoid disclosure of information of the classes described in the following paragraph of Schedule 7(A) to the Act:- article 16 (paragraph 14).

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST AND TRANSPARENCY STATEMENTS

2. Members were requested to intimate any declarations of interest or transparency statements in respect of the items on today's agenda, thereafter the following was intimated:-

- (1) The Convener advised that she had a connection in relation to agenda item 9.1 (Short Term Let (New Operator) – Park Cottage, 201 Victoria Street) by virtue of her being a Ward Member where the application is located and for knowing one of the objectors. Having applied the objective test, she did not consider that she had an interest and would not be withdrawing from the meeting.

DEPUTATION BY RUSSELL MCLEOD ON BEHALF OF THE TAXI GROUP MEMBERS ON THE TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE CAR CONSULTATION GROUP - RELATING TO ITEM 8.1 (TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE POLICY)

3. The Committee received a deputation from Russell McLeod on behalf of the Taxi Group members on the Taxi and Private Hire Car Consultation Group relating to item 4.1 (Taxi and Private Hire Policy). Article 9 of this minute refers.

Mr McLeod sought clarification on a number of items contained within the report. He indicated that were a number of people driving the review of the policy, making reference to local press reports and social media posts since December 2025, openly encouraging

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people to take part in the public consultation a month before the Committee had yet to decide if they agreed with the recommendations.

He expressed concern that it appeared that a decision had already been publicly made and that the Committee had been bullied and harangued into making the decision to undertake a public consultation exercise on the policy.

He explained that in 2015, the Street Knowledge Test was removed for Private Hire drivers and at that time, there was already legislation going through Parliament that would eventually allow local authorities to decide if they wanted a Street Knowledge Test for Private Hire drivers, therefore the Council waited for this legislation to be passed in 2017 and thereafter the Licensing Committee adopted the current policy which required that both Taxi and Private Hire drivers required to pass the Street Knowledge Test, although there was no public consultation undertaken.

Mr McLeod indicated that narrative from the lobbyists always centred around problems at Taxi Ranks, the Airport, the Railway Station and certain "pinch points on Taxi Ranks at weekends, making the test for Private Hire drivers easier or removing it did not in any way address this issue.

He advised that as this policy review directly involved Aberdeen's Taxi Trade, he sought clarification as to why there had been no direct engagement with the trade stake holders, not even at the Taxi and Private Hire Consultation Group meetings.

He wished to remind the members that it was only a year since the independent Taxi Demand survey was presented to this Committee, and its conclusions that there was no significant unmet demand.

He made reference to the 100+ increase in drivers and vehicles since then, therefore there was no need to make any fundamental change if there was no significant unmet demand in November 2024.

He explained that it was the taxi group members opinion that if the Committee were of a mind to make fundamental changes, then another demand survey to justify such action would need to be undertaken, otherwise not only could it be open to legal scrutiny, there was also likely to be a moral question that would need answered.

He reiterated that in the past year, since the Street Knowledge Test was amended, over 100 new drivers had studied and committed their time to join.

In this regard, he intimated that any major changes to the Street Knowledge Test would have a significant economic impact on the existing 1000 drivers and would benefit only one operator, an operator who had operated in Aberdeen for just over a year, who was clearly informed of the policy when their application was granted, but who had done nothing but push the same mythical narrative since.

In terms of the report he made the following points:-

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- Aberdeen international Airport (AIA) dictated who could and could not work at the airport and any taxi could work at AIA provided they were willing to collect the £7 from the customer and pay back to AIA. Current city drivers would have the ability to work at both AIA and the city;
- The Taxi Group members see nothing wrong with the current age of vehicle restrictions. Aberdeen had always prided itself on the quality of its fleet and once a valid vehicle was licensed and provided it passed its twice annual test, there was no age restriction. LEZ restrictions must be taken into account when considering any change to the age of vehicle policy;
- Advertising on a Private Hire vehicle, was covered by legislation therefore it was not in the local authority's remit to change it; and
- Aberdeen's taxi trade should have been consulted prior to recommendations being presented to committee.

The Committee resolved:-

to note the deputation.

DEPUTATION BY CHRIS DOUGLAS - RELATING TO ITEM 8.1 (TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE POLICY)

4. The Committee received a deputation from Chris Douglas in relation to item 4.1 (Taxi and Private Hire Policy). Article 9 of this minute refers.

Mr Douglas advised that it was his understanding that when a policy was reviewed, the local authority was required to clearly define the scope of the review and take a substantive review on the policy as a whole, and not only on those clauses that have not been reviewed for some time, as this could be seen as procedurally unfair.

He indicated that Appendix 1 stated, in the first paragraph, that the policy was approved by the Licensing Committee on 26 October 2022, with an implementation date of 1 April 2023, and amended on 4 December 2025, which suggested the policy was both relatively recent and already amended.

He sought to clarify when the individual clauses within this policy were last reviewed, and how long ago that review took place.

He made reference to the policy, noting that it contained 29 clauses, grouped into four clear categories, which were taxi vehicle conditions; private hire vehicle conditions; shared taxi and private hire vehicle conditions and driver conditions.

He explained that these covered matters such as, but not limited to zoning, vehicle age, wheelchair accessibility, advertising, CCTV, and of course the Street Knowledge Test.

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He intimated that it was important for the trade/stakeholders to have clarity about exactly which clauses were now being reconsidered, and why, given that there had also been no stakeholder engagement.

He made reference to the report, which in the case of 'Zoning', suggested that views were sought on combining the current city and airport taxi zones, so that all taxis were licensed for the whole council area. He indicated that it was his understanding that this related directly to clause 5.1.2 of the policy, which applied to taxis, noting that the clause referred to city taxis, identified by yellow plates, and airport taxis, identified by green plates. He advised that the wording referred to pre-booked work, but it did not explicitly include private hire vehicles, even though private hire vehicles could and do operate also at the airport through pre-booking. He suggested that it would be helpful that it clearly state which clause was being considered; what it currently said and which vehicle types it applied to.

In terms of 'vehicle age limits', Mr Douglas intimated that the report stated that wheelchair accessible vehicles must be no more than 10 years old at first licensing, and other vehicles, no more than 5 years old, and asked whether those limits remain appropriate. He explained that those requirements appeared across multiple clauses including clause 5.1.5 for taxis, clause 5.2.1 for private hire vehicles, and clause 5.1.3 for wheelchair accessible vehicles. He sought confirmation whether the recommendation was aimed at taxis, private hire vehicles, wheelchair accessible vehicles only, or all three, noting that without clarity, consultation risked becoming confused and misleading.

In relation to 'advertising', Mr Douglas indicated that the report noted that advertising was permitted on taxis, with some exceptions, but not on private hire vehicles, and suggested seeking the views on both the existing exceptions and on allowing advertising on private hire vehicles. He explained that this appeared to relate to clause 5.1.8 for taxis and clause 5.2.4 for private hire vehicles and therefore sought clarity given that these clauses served very different parts of the trade.

In terms of the 'Street Knowledge Test', Mr Douglas revealed that clause 5.4.1 currently applied equally to taxi drivers and private hire drivers and the report suggested seeking views on whether the test should remain for both; be amended for private hire or removed entirely for private hire applicants. He explained that what was being discussed today was being framed as a taxi problem, yet many of the proposed changes focussed only on private hire, which was not the same thing, acknowledging that Public hire taxis served ranks and on-street demand and that Private hire vehicles were pre-booked.

He advised that if the issue being described was a lack of taxis available at ranks at peak times, then lowering standards for private hire drivers did not solve that problem and it addressed a different market entirely.

He intimated that what the Committee had done was working well to increase the amount of licenced drivers in the city.

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He made reference to the Street Knowledge Test Review Working Group that was established some time ago, explaining that the ongoing standards that had been put in place were delivering great results. He advised that movement around the city had improved significantly post covid, demand had increased and the taxi trade had responded.

He estimated that in December 2025 alone, the industry serviced over 50,000 more bookings than in previous periods which did not suggest that the system was failing, therefore suggested that if the test was working, if standards were improving, and if availability had increased, then there was no need to weaken one of the core mechanisms (the Street Knowledge Test) which ensured competence.

Mr Douglas advised that operators needed confidence that when a driver joined their booking office (whether taxi or private hire), the driver met a clear, consistent standard, given that no operator wanted two different levels of competence and there were no passenger benefits from lower expectations.

He explained that the if the issues being raised related to service quality, high demand, or availability, then the answer was more training, better targeting of policy, and smarter regulation, not less or none.

Mr Douglas intimated that history showed that deregulation did not increase competition in the long term, noting that initially, it allowed more drivers and operators to enter or flood the market, but over time, large firms with deep pockets undercut smaller local operators, drove prices down to unsustainable levels, and ultimately aimed to dominate the market, which in itself, was the very definition of a monopoly.

He advised that what followed would not be a better service, but less investment, lower standards, and fewer local businesses, explaining that it would become a race to the bottom and lowering the barrier to entry for private hire drivers would not increase the number of yellow-plate taxis working ranks at peak times at all. He indicated that these were two separate functions, one was pre-booked and the other was immediate, on-demand public hire.

He suggested that if the Council and indeed the public wanted more taxis at the ranks, then the solution lay within taxi policy itself, therefore there was a need to look honestly at what constrained the growth of public hire taxi vehicles, including vehicle specifications, wheelchair accessibility requirements, inspection regimes and costs that disproportionately affected taxis compared to private hire drivers.

Mr Douglas intimated that at present, it was easier and cheaper to operate a private hire vehicle, given that non-Wheelchair Accessible Vehicles avoided certain aspects of inspections, such as ramp gradient requirements, which were essential for taxis but irrelevant for private hire saloons. He advised that the reality was that this pushed drivers toward private hire, not public hire, acknowledging that the amount of private hire cars was increasing.

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He indicated that deregulating private hire further would not fix the perceived taxi rank shortages, it would erode the taxi sector entirely and once that sector was gone, the very problems regulation was meant to prevent, would return in a far worse form. He suggested that proper regulation was the answer and always had been and which was currently in place.

Finally Mr Douglas revealed that the common-sense approach had already been achieved by the Council and the evidence suggested that the system was working. He advised that the focus now should be on refining the taxi and private hire policy where necessary, supporting investment and maintaining consistent standards, but not undoing progress that had already been made to erode the industry for one operator's commercial gain.

The Committee resolved:-

to note the deputation.

MINUTE OF PREVIOUS MEETING OF 8 OCTOBER 2025

5. The Committee had before it the minute of its previous meeting of 8 October 2025, for approval.

The Committee resolved:-

to approve the minute.

MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE LICENSING SUB COMMITTEE OF 28 NOVEMBER 2025

6. The Committee had before it the minute of the Licensing Sub Committee meeting of 25 November 2025, for approval.

The Committee resolved:-

to approve the minute.

MINUTE OF MEETING OF THE TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE CAR CONSULTATION GROUP OF 8 DECEMBER 2025

7. The Committee had before it the minute of meeting of the Taxi and Private Hire Car Consultation Group of 8 December 2025.

The Committee resolved:-

to note the minute.

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COMMITTEE BUSINESS PLANNER

8. The Committee had before it the Committee Business Planner as prepared by the Chief Officer – Governance.

The Committee resolved:-

to note the Business Planner.

TAXI AND PRIVATE HIRE POLICY - CORS/26/004

9. The Committee had before it a report by the Executive Director for Corporate Services which presented the current Taxi and Private Hire Policy for consideration and sought determination of whether a formal review process was required for all or parts thereof.

The report recommended:-

that the Committee –

- (a) agree that a formal review of the Taxi & Private Hire Policy is undertaken subject to a public consultation;
- (b) determine which parts of the policy would warrant specific attention in the consultation exercise; and
- (c) instruct the Chief Officer - Governance to report back to the Licensing Committee with the results of the public consultation on 20 May 2026.

The Committee resolved:-

- (i) to approve recommendations (a) and (c); and
- (ii) to agree that the whole policy would be included within the consultation exercise.

SHORT TERM LET (NEW OPERATOR) - PARK COTTAGE, 201 VICTORIA STREET

10. The Committee had before it a report by the Private Sector Housing Manager, which advised that the application was before the Committee for the reason that 7 letters of objection was submitted to the Private Sector Housing Team.

As a preliminary matter, Doug Yeats, Senior Private Sector Housing Officer advised that a late letter of objection and additional information (House Rules) from the applicant had been submitted, therefore the Committee required to consider whether they be accepted into the proceedings.

The Committee resolved:-

to accept the late submissions into the proceedings.

Mr Yeats advised that the necessary upgrading works had not been completed.

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The Committee heard from Stephen Forsyth and George Taylor, on behalf of the applicant who spoke in support of the application and responded to questions from members.

Sven Dahle, Eugenia Marinou, Tamara Morrison, Bill Harrison (on behalf of Dyce/Stoneywood Community Council) and Carrie Harrold were in attendance and spoke in support of their letters of objection and responded to questions from members.

All parties were given the opportunity to sum up.

Councillor Henrickson moved, seconded by Councillor Graham:-

that the Committee grant the licence, subject to contact details of the applicant's property management team being submitted to neighbours.

Councillor Crockett moved as an amendment, seconded by Councillor MacGregor:-

that the Committee refuse the licence on the ground of possible undue public nuisance.

On a division, there voted:- for the motion (4) – the Vice Convener and Councillors Graham, Henrickson and Lawrence; for the amendment (5) – the Convener and Councillors Clark, Crockett, MacGregor and McLeod.

The Committee resolved:-

to adopt the amendment and therefore refuse the licence on the following ground:-

Where the licence applied for related to an activity consisting of or including the use of premises, those premises were not suitable or convenient for the conduct of the activity having regard to the possibility of undue public nuisance.

SHORT TERM LET (NEW OPERATOR) - 24 CLASHRODNEY AVENUE

11. The Committee had before it a report by the Private Sector Housing Manager, which advised that the application was before the Committee for the reason that two letters of objection were submitted to the Private Sector Housing Team.

Doug Yeats, Senior Private Sector Housing Officer advised that the necessary upgrading works had been completed.

The applicant was not in attendance, nor represented.

The Committee resolved:-

to defer consideration of the application until the next meeting on 25 February 2026.

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VARIATION TO LATE HOURS CATERING LICENCE - MCDONALD'S, KITTYBREWSTER RETAIL PARK

12. The Committee had before it an Information Sheet by the Chief Officer – Governance which advised (1) that an application had been submitted for a Late Hours Catering Licence with operating hours of 23:00 – 05:00 operating Drive Thru and McDelivery only (2) indicated that the existing operating hours were 23:00-00:00; and (3) explained that the variation was out-with Committee policy for Late Hours Catering Licences which had a maximum closing time of midnight, Monday to Sunday for all premises out-with the City Centre and Beach Area (except 24 Hour Superstores and Petrol Stations).

The Committee heard from Craig McLean, Area Supervisor, McDonalds who spoke in support of the application.

The Committee resolved:-

to grant the variation to the licence.

In accordance with the decision taken at Article 1 of this minute, the following item was considered with the press and public excluded.

LANDLORD REGISTRATION (NEW) - (AGENDA ITEM 10.1)

16. The Committee had before it (1) an information sheet by the Chief Officer - Governance; and (2) a letter from the Chief Superintendent, Police Scotland, c/o North East Division, dated 22 September 2025.

The applicant was not in attendance, nor represented.

Sergeant Webster was in attendance and spoke in support of Police Scotland's letter of representation.

The Committee resolved:-

to refuse the registration on the grounds that the applicant was not a fit and proper person.

CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION

The press and public were excluded from the meeting for consideration of the following item which contained confidential information in terms of Section 50A 3(b) of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973.

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**REQUEST FOR EXEMPTION FROM WHEELCHAIR ACCESSIBLE VEHICLE POLICY
- (AGENDA ITEM 11.1)**

17. The Committee had before it (1) an information note prepared by the Chief Officer – Governance, which advised that the licence holder was seeking an exemption from the Wheelchair Accessible Vehicle policy; and (2) correspondence relating to the exemption request.

The applicant was in attendance and spoke in support of his request.

The Committee resolved:-

to approve the request for exemption from the Wheelchair Accessibility Vehicle Policy.

- **COUNCILLOR GILL AL-SAMARAI, Convener**