
Licensing Committee

MINUTES of the Meeting held in the Council Chamber, Swale House, East Street, Sittingbourne, ME10 3HT on Wednesday, 11 February 2026 from 7.00 pm - 7.14 pm.

PRESENT: Councillors Derek Carnell (Chair), Lloyd Chapman, Simon Clark, Carole Jackson, Mark Last, Tara Noe, Chris Palmer and Tony Winckless (Vice-Chair).

PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Councillors .

OFFICERS PRESENT: Steph Curtis, Tim Neal and Jo Thomas.

OFFICERS PRESENT (VIRTUALLY): Mark Tucker.

APOLOGIES: Councillors Lloyd Bowen, Alex Eyre, Charlie Miller, Lee-Anne Moore and Mark Tucker.

721 **Emergency Evacuation Procedure**

The Chair outlined the emergency evacuation procedure.

722 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 16 October 2025 (Minute Nos. 399 - 403) were taken as read, approved and signed by the Chair as a correct record.

The Chair accepted the Minutes of the Licensing Sub-Committees held on 30 September 2025 (Minutes Nos.352 – 356), 20 November 2025 (Minutes Nos. 478 - 482); 24 November 2025 (Minutes Nos. 483 – 487) and 17 December 2025 (Minutes Nos. 580 – 585).

723 **Declarations of Interest**

No interests were declared.

724 **Public Session**

There were no registered speakers.

725 **Annual Licensing Update Report**

The Licensing Manager introduced the report, which outlined the responsibilities of the Licensing Team, activity during 2025 and proposed priorities for 2026.

Members were advised that licence numbers had increased across most categories compared to 2024, particularly street trading for events, and that four premises licence reviews had been undertaken during the year. It was noted that the team also carried out a significant amount of advisory and enquiry-based work that was not easily captured through statistics.

Members were informed that an Internal Audit review had confirmed sound controls in place, with one medium-priority action completed and remaining low-priority actions due to conclude by the end of March. Attention was drawn to future priorities, including

monitoring forthcoming legislative changes such as proposals within the Tobacco and Vapes Bill and potential national minimum standards for taxi and private hire licensing.

Members were asked to note the report and were invited to suggest any additional information for inclusion in future reports.

The Chair then invited questions and comments from members. Comments included:

- Concern was raised in relation to paragraph 2.9 of the report regarding compliance visits, noting that although an increase had been anticipated, current workload pressures meant visit levels were expected to remain unchanged.
- It was observed that the number of licensed premises continued to rise and was likely to increase further as a result of forthcoming legislative changes, including proposals within the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, and clarification was sought on how future capacity and compliance activity would be planned for.
- Reference was made to figures within the appendix relating to hackney carriage and private hire driver knowledge tests, with concern expressed about the low pass rate shown.
- It was suggested that the results raised questions about the preparedness and suitability of applicants, noting that candidates had access to tools and resources to familiarise themselves with local routes and requirements prior to undertaking the test.

In response, the following points were noted:

- It was explained that increasing the level of compliance and enforcement activity would be dependent on additional staffing resources, which would be considered as part of future service planning.
- Members were advised that proposed legislation, including the Tobacco and Vapes Bill, was expected to be accompanied by new burdens funding, which could support additional resourcing if new licensing responsibilities were introduced.
- It was noted that the Licensing Team had been restructured in recent years, including the addition of administrative support, but that workload pressures had continued to increase, particularly following the introduction of new legislative requirements such as pavement licensing.
- Officers confirmed that resourcing levels continued to be kept under review, including whether there was a need for additional enforcement capacity to enable more proactive compliance visits, alongside a significant level of reactive work already undertaken.
- In relation to hackney carriage and private hire driver test results, it was explained that failures were not limited to route knowledge and often related to safeguarding requirements, for which applicants were provided with study materials and were required to achieve a full pass.
- It was highlighted that the structure of the test was demanding, covering multiple sections, and that many applicants were more successful on a second attempt once they were familiar with the format.
- Officers noted that changes introduced in previous years, including allowing applicants to retake individual sections rather than the full test, had helped to improve pass rates.

Chair

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All minutes are draft until agreed at the next meeting of the Committee/Panel