

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
**GENERAL PURPOSES COMMITTEE
MINUTES**

Date: Wednesday, 4 December 2024

Time: 6.00pm

Place: Council Chamber

Present: Councillors: Ellie Plater CC (Chair), Sandra Barr (Vice Chair), Myla Arceno, Peter Clark, Alistair Gordon, Coleen Houlihan, Claire Parris and Anne Wells

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00pm
End Time: 6.25pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Stephen Booth, Akin Elekolusi, Mason Humberstone, Lin Martin-Haugh and Tom Wren.

Apologies were also received from Councillor Simon Speller, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Health and Licensing.

There were no declarations of interest.

2 MINUTES - 9 OCTOBER 2024

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the General Purposes Committee held on 9 October 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

3 LICENSING ACT 2003 - REVIEW OF STATEMENT OF LICENSING POLICY 2025-2030

The Head of Environmental Health and Licensing presented the draft Statement of Licensing Policy, which was required under Section 5 of the Licensing Act 2003. The policy, which set out the Council's approach to its regulatory duties, was due for renewal as the current policy expired in February 2025. The proposed policy covered the period from 2025 to 2030, with no significant changes in intent or direction, but minor amendments had been made.

Key updates included:

- The policy had been reformatted to align with the Council's corporate policy template.
- Typographical errors from the previous version had been corrected.
- Contact details had been updated.
- References to 'Challenge 21' had been updated to 'Challenge 25'.

The draft policy underwent a 28-day consultation, receiving two responses:

1. The Planning Department suggested wording amendments.
2. The Portman Group recommended the inclusion of a text regarding their regulatory work and code of practice, specifically encouraging retailers to sign up for and adhere to their retailer alert bulletins to remove irresponsible products and promotions.

While the Portman Group's recommendation for imposing conditions on premises licences regarding irresponsible alcohol promotion was not included, as it is difficult to enforce, the policy now reflected the consensus from the Hearts and Beds Licensing Group, ensuring consistency with neighbouring local authorities.

The committee was asked to approve the draft policy and recommend it to the Cabinet for further consideration.

Members commented on the Portman Group's recommendations on mandatory conditions for licensees regarding responsible alcohol sales and suggested that Stevenage could take a pioneering approach, especially considering the emphasis on responsible selling within the alcohol industry. The Head of Environmental Health and Licensing responded that while the recommendation had not been included due to enforcement challenges, the policy encouraged licensees to voluntarily engage with the Portman Group's retailer alert bulletins. This aligned with the approach taken by the Herts and Beds Licensing Group and other neighbouring authorities, maintaining consistency across the region.

Responding to a question regarding vapes, the Head of Environmental Health and Licensing clarified that vapes were not currently covered by the Licensing Act. However, illegal sales could lead to a licence review under crime and disorder grounds, with enforcement relying on police or trading standards responsible authorities.

A member asked for clarification on public awareness of the consultation process. The Head of Environmental Health and Licensing confirmed that the consultation was publicised via social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook for the final 10 days of the 28-day consultation period. Despite those efforts, only two responses were received, from the Portman Group and the Planning Department. A full list of consultees was included in Appendix C of the report.

The Chair asked a question regarding the Council's current position regarding the Licensing Authority's role as a responsible authority under the Licensing Act 2003. The Head of Environmental Health and Licensing clarified that while the Licensing team currently administered licence applications and reviews, they did not act as a responsible authority, unlike Environmental Health, the Police, or Trading Standards. This was due to resource constraints within the small Licensing team. However, recent discussions had explored the feasibility of adopting this role by separating the administrative and enforcement functions within the team.

It was noted that examples from other councils, such as Barnet and North Kesteven,

demonstrated an interchangeable model, where different officers took on the administrative or responsible authority role as needed. Legal advice indicated that this approach would be permissible, provided there was no conflict of interest. This would allow the Licensing team to contribute evidence or representations in reviews initiated by other responsible authorities without compromising their administrative duties.

It was suggested that the Committee could recommend incorporating this change into the current policy review. To facilitate this, amendments would need to:

- Include a formal recommendation allowing the Licensing team to act as a responsible authority.
- Update wording in the draft policy to reflect this change and ensure no conflict of interest.
- Finalise the wording collaboratively between the Head of Environmental Health and Licensing and the Chair prior to the Cabinet report.

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report and the inclusion of two new recommendations. It was therefore **RESOLVED**:

- That the General Purposes Committee agrees the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Licensing Act Statement of Licensing Policy 2025-2030.
- That the General Purposes Committee recommend the Stevenage Borough Council draft Statement of Licensing Policy to Cabinet.
- Authority be given to the Head of Environmental Health and Licensing in consultation with the Chair of General Purposes Committee, to amend or add to the suggested draft conditions set out below, prior to the report going to Cabinet:
 - That the Licensing Officers be approved to act on behalf of the Council as a Responsible Authority as prescribed in the Licensing Act 03. (13.4 & 69.4).
 - That the wording in the policy be amended accordingly (to remove any conflicting wording).

4 **GAMBLING ACT 2005 - REVIEW OF GAMBLING STATEMENT OF LICENSING PRINCIPLES 2025-2028**

The Acting Licensing Manager highlighted the Council's duty, under Section 349 of the Gambling Act 2005, to publish a Statement of Licensing Principles every three years. The current policy expired in March 2025, and the proposed Statement of Principles for 2025–2028 was presented, with the following key points:

The Committee heard that there were no changes to the overall intent or direction of the policy.

The key updates included:

- Reformatting of the policy to align with the Council's corporate policy template.
- Updated contact details and information about responsible authorities.
- Future engagement with the Gambling Harms Alliance and Hertfordshire Public Health in developing the statement and local area profile.

The Acting Licensing Manager advised the Committee that the statement included a Local Area Profile highlighting areas in Stevenage where gambling-related harm could be realised. It identified the town centre, leisure park, and High Street as the primary locations for licensed gambling premises. Those areas were situated in the Bedwell Ward, which had the highest levels of deprivation in Stevenage, driven by income inequality and crime.

The Committee heard that the Licensing team actively monitored all licensed gambling premises, focussed on those in the town centre, to ensure compliance with the Gambling Commission's operating licence conditions and social responsibility code. Currently, there was no evidence suggesting that gambling-related harms were significant in Stevenage or that the Commission's objectives were not being upheld.

The Acting Licensing Manager informed the Committee that the draft policy underwent a 28-day consultation, receiving five responses from GamCare, GambleAware, the Hertfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board, the Local Planning Authority, and Hertfordshire Public Health. All feedback was reviewed, and the relevant amendments were incorporated into the draft statement.

The Committee was asked to agree to the proposed Statement of Principles 2025–2028 and recommend its progression to Cabinet for approval.

Members commented that the areas detailed within the Local Area Profile spanned both Bedwell Ward and Old Town Ward.

Responding to a question regarding the sale of lottery tickets, the Acting Licensing Manager advised that shops selling lottery tickets were regulated under the Gambling Act, but the Council would pass any reports of sales to under-16s to the Gambling Commission, which actively followed up such intelligence through measures like test purchasing.

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report. It was therefore **RESOLVED:**

- That the General Purposes Committee agrees the proposed Stevenage Borough Council Gambling Act Statement of Principles 2022-2025.
- That the General Purposes Committee recommend the Stevenage Borough Council draft Statement of Principles to the Cabinet.

5 **URGENT PART I BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part I Business.

6 **EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC**

Not required.

7 **URGENT PART II BUSINESS**

There was no Urgent Part II Business.

CHAIR