



South Tyneside Council

item 2

**Licensing and Regulatory Committee
10 July 2026**

**Licensing and Regulatory Committee Minutes
30 January 2026**

Present: Councillors Porthouse (Chair), Clare, P Dean, S Dean, Herbert, K Maxwell, Myers, Proudlock, Smith, Stonehouse and Traynor.

Laurence Waldock (Operations Manager- Licensing), Judith Shewan (Operations Manager - Trading Standards), Leah Stafford (Democracy Support Officer).

There were no members of the press/public in attendance.

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes of 12 December 2025

Agreed: That the minutes of the previous meeting be agreed as a true and accurate record.

3. Illegal and Unsafe Apparatus

Judith Shewan, Operations Manager - Trading Standards, delivered a report that advised the committee of an ongoing investigation concerning the seizure of a large quantity of illegal apparatus which did not comply with UK safety standards.

Intelligence from the North East Regional Organised Crime Unit's Disruption Team and a Government Agency Intelligence Network Co-ordinator led South Tyneside Trading Standards team to a Boldon premises. The intelligence stated that a premises on Bensham Street, in Boldon Colliery, was suspected to have supplied industrial equipment to a cannabis shatter lab discovered by police outside of South Tyneside.

An inspection was conducted at the Boldon premises where Trading Standards Officers used their powers to enter the site. Once inside, a significant number of apparatus was discovered, including extractor kits that are often used in cannabis shatter labs.

During an inspection of the equipment, it was found that it had been imported from China. The equipment not only posed a serious safety risk, not only due to its intended use in illegal drug production but also because it failed to comply with UK safety standards.

As a result, two vans full of illicit discoveries were seized - with a value of around £120,000 placed on the extractor kits. Officers also found and seized just over 5,000 illegal single use vapes worth around £40,000, which were also being stored at the property.

Due to the extremely dangerous and devastating consequences of what can go wrong with cannabis shatter labs, as was the case of the Benwell explosion in 2024, an investigation was now underway to identify anyone who was believed to be involved in the purchase and supply of these products.

Images were provided within the report which showed some of the equipment seized.

A Member appreciated the work of Officers in finding this, and asked if there was a procurement trail, or any indication of who they were going to sell this to. The Officer explained that this equipment was far too dangerous to be on the market, therefore they weren't sure what the intention was.

A Member queried if they had found any individuals involved in this, the Officer stated they did, and the next steps was a formal interview, and then prosecution.

A Member asked if the building owner would be taking any responsibility toward this, the Officer stated that the building was on an industrial estate and was a rented property therefore they would need to liaise with the company.

Agreed: That the report be noted.

4. Department for Transport Taxi Consultation

Laurence Waldock, Operations Manager - Licensing, delivered a report which updated Members on a government consultation regarding the taxi and private hire trade.

The purpose of the report was to update Members on a government consultation being undertaken by the Department for Transport and that the report was necessary to enable the Licensing Authority to continue to meet its statutory obligations in respect of taxi legislation.

Members were informed that the Department for Transport was seeking feedback on the potential benefits and challenges of making all Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) in England responsible for taxi and private hire vehicle licensing. It was noted that the consultation focused on the impact that this proposal would

have on local authorities, the taxi and private hire trade, and passengers.

The Committee was advised that the Government had previously committed to consulting on giving all Local Transport Authorities responsibility for taxi and private hire vehicle licensing and that this had been outlined in the English Devolution White Paper.

It was noted that both taxis and private hire vehicles played a vital role in local transport. Taxis were able to ply for hire in the street or at authorised stands and were available for immediate hire, whilst private hire vehicles were required to be booked in advance through a licensed operator.

Members were advised that the way in which taxis were regulated was rooted in the Town Police Clauses Act 1847, which provided the powers to regulate taxis and defined who should undertake this role. It was noted that the regulation of private hire vehicles had followed the same approach.

The report explained that, in most parts of England, councils were currently responsible for regulating the taxi and private hire sector, with the exception of London, where the Mayor and Transport for London were responsible for licensing. In areas with a single tier of local government, responsibility lay with the relevant unitary council, while in two-tier areas responsibility rested with district councils. As a result, there were currently 263 licensing authorities in England administering the taxi and private hire sector. It was noted that if devolved, the taxi licensing process would be administered by 70 Local Transport Authorities. Outside of London, Local Transport Authorities were currently county councils and unitary authorities.

Members were informed that, as outlined in the English Devolution White Paper, concerns had been raised regarding the challenges caused by out-of-area working, where taxi drivers obtained licences away from the area in which they intended to work. It was noted that these concerns had also been highlighted by Baroness Casey in her National Audit on group-based child sexual exploitation and abuse report.

The Committee was advised that the Department for Transport believed that administering taxi and private hire licensing across the larger footprint of Local Transport Authorities would simplify the way the sector provided the services that passengers demanded and would enhance compliance and safety.

Members were informed that all taxi licensing functions assisted the Authority in fulfilling its statutory duties and that the service made a significant contribution to the Council's ambitions to protect residents and create a level playing field for legitimate businesses. It was noted that there could be significant financial implications, as the taxi licensing element of the licensing function operated on a

cost recovery model. Members were also advised that there could be far-reaching legal and governance considerations should responsibility be devolved to Local Transport Authorities.

Members were advised that the consultation was live until 1 April 2026 and that the Licensing Authority would be completing a consultation response reflecting the position of South Tyneside Council, in conjunction with the Lead Member with responsibility for transport. It was further noted that a regional response would be co-ordinated through the North East Licensing Steering Group. The Committee noted the content of the report.

A Member asked whether clarity could be provided on how taxi drivers would be affected, noting that this could involve individuals working in South Shields but could potentially be based anywhere. The Officer responded that there were cross-boarder drivers in South Tyneside already, approximately 500 cross-border drivers in Middlesbrough. The Officer explained that the proposed changes aimed to address this, although it may present challenges for South Tyneside. It was added that drivers would still be required to undergo DBS checks, The Member commented that this was concerning as South Tyneside regulates their drivers closely and provide regular training, other Local Authorities may not uphold this standard. The Officer explained that there were national standards to set a minimum.

A Member commented that they had concerns regarding the regulation of taxi drivers and questioned whether sufficient oversight would be maintained. The Officer replied that national standards would apply, whilst local authorities would continue to have an important role in the licensing regime, including enforcement and administrative functions.

A Member asked if South Tyneside had an approved taxi firm list, the Officer responded that all firms had met standards, specifically in South Tyneside Nearby and Blueline had thousands of cars and were well practised.

A Member raised concern over the amount of litter on the roadside that would increase if there were more taxis in the Borough, the Officer reassured that this wouldn't necessarily mean more cars were going to be coming into Borough, and that it would economically balance.

A Member asked about the economic climate and whether the proposals would have a significant impact. The Officer responded that the taxi trade had not fully recovered since COVID-19, estimating that activity remained approximately 25% below previous levels. The Officer added that there had been a shift in the town centre, with increased food delivery activity.

A Member commented on the viability of taxi services in ST and raised concerns about whether demand would return to previous

levels. The Officer responded that taxi services had adapted and that demand had changed, with more emphasis on deliveries and flexible working patterns.

A Member asked whether the consultation had received any feedback from the trade. The Officer responded that no significant feedback had been received, although other Local Authorities had feedback regarding safeguarding concerns.

A Member queried whether cross-border working created difficulties if a taxi driver committed a crime and whether responsibility would rest with the borough that had licensed them. The Officer replied that cross-border hiring did present challenges, as drivers licensed in one area could operate in another. However, the Officer noted that existing legislation permitted this and that the proposals sought to address such inconsistencies.

A Member asked how the proposals would affect drivers' income and whether they would be required to obtain additional licences. The Officer responded that drivers might need to apply for additional licences, depending on the outcome, although this would be subject to final guidance. It was noted that increased compliance requirements could have financial implications for drivers.

A Member commented that taxi firms were already under financial pressure and questioned whether additional regulation would place further strain on the industry. The Officer acknowledged the concern and stated that any changes would need to strike a balance between safety and economic sustainability.

A Member queried whether planning or licensing regulations would need to be updated in response to increased vehicle numbers. The Officer replied that this would be reviewed as part of the wider policy considerations and that local authorities would continue to monitor the situation.

A Member commented that there had been an increase in vehicle numbers and questioned whether this was sustainable. The Officer responded that, whilst vehicle numbers had increased, demand had also changed, and ongoing monitoring would be required.

A Member asked whether the introduction of national standards would reduce the Council's control over licensing fees and enforcement. The Officer replied that councils would retain a degree of control, particularly in relation to fees and enforcement, although national standards would establish a baseline framework.

A Member commented that achieving the right balance between economic viability and regulatory control would be key moving forward.

5. Chair's Urgent Items

There were no urgent items to consider.