

Addendum Licensing and Regulatory Sub-Committee Virtual Procedural Rules

Procedure at Hearings before the Licensing Sub-Committee (“LSC”) in relation to matters under the Licensing Act 2003 as amended (“The 2003 Act”) **except** Interim Hearings (Summary Review of a Premises Licence) conducted pursuant to Section 53B of the Licensing Act 2003, as amended (separate Procedure) or as otherwise provided.

Hearings for Gambling Premises are dealt with under the Gambling Act 2005 as amended.

Introduction

The Licensing Act 2003 and the Licensing Act 2003 (Hearing) Regulations 2005 provide flexibility to Licensing Authorities in determining their own hearing procedures. Buckinghamshire Council has decided to hold such hearings remotely in accordance with these procedural rules.

Administration in Relation to the Hearing

Prior written notice of the hearing will have been given to the interested/relevant parties.

- (a) Where a party has informed the Council that they will not be attending or be represented at the hearing it may proceed in their absence.
- (b) Where a party has not replied to the notice, does not attend and is not represented then the LSC may proceed with the hearing in that party’s absence or adjourn the hearing if it is considered necessary in the public interest to do so.
- (c) If a party has indicated they will attend but does not appear, that party must inform the Council of any delay - with reasons - and in consideration thereof the LSC can decide to proceed with the hearing or adjourn to later the same day or another time. If a party is more than 15 minutes late and has not contacted the Council with details of any delay – the LSC shall proceed with the hearing unless it is in the public interest not to do so and shall adjourn the hearing to later on the same day or another date.

If the hearing is held in a party’s absence, the LSC will still consider the application, representation or notice made by that party.

A hearing can be dispensed with if all parties give notice that they consider a hearing unnecessary. If this is the case the application/notice will be dealt with by way of a determination.

Representations can be withdrawn by prior notice up to 1 working day before the hearing or orally at the hearing.

At the hearing, any party can be assisted or represented by any person whether or not that person is legally qualified.

Account can be taken of documentary or other information produced by a party in support of their application, representation or notice (as applicable) if provided either at least 1 working day before the hearing or - with the consent of all other parties - at the hearing, in which case sufficient copies are required to be provided for all relevant parties. Any party wishing to call another person (other than a person representing them) to make oral representations must provide details of this to the Council within the time stated in the Notice of Hearing which the Council will serve on the Parties. At the beginning of the hearing the LSC will consider any such requests and confirm whether permission is granted for that person to speak.

The LSC may disregard any information which is not considered relevant to the application/representation/notice and the promotion of the licensing objectives.

The purpose of a hearing is to enable those with a right to appear to amplify their written application or representation and to test the case of their opponents. It is also to assist the LSC to gather evidence and understand the relevant issues. The parties (including other persons on their behalf) will be allowed an equal reasonable period of time to address the hearing and ask questions. The Chairman may set a maximum period of time on how long each party may speak, progressing without undue delays and ensuring that there is a fair hearing. Where the representations made relate to the same or similar issues, a spokesperson should be appointed where possible to speak on behalf of any person who has made a written representation.

The Decision of the LSC will be made after the close of the hearing when the LSC retires with the Democratic Services Officer and the Legal Advisor to the sub-committee in a private session to consider all the evidence and submissions made at the hearing.

The decision of the LSC will be communicated to all parties by way of a written Decision Notice issued by Legal Services. They will endeavour to serve the notice within 5 working days of the hearing and if there is to be a delay in issuing such a notice; the licensing officer will communicate with all parties. The notice will be dated and set out the provisions of the right to appeal to the Magistrates Court.

The LSC may depart from this procedure (as varied/amended from time to time based on changes to law and practice) if it considers reasonably necessary and proportionate.

Access to Information

The Council can hold and alter the frequency and occurrence of hearing without requirement for further notice.

These Regulations make provision for local authority members and officers, and the public, to have access to documents without attending council buildings and it will be sufficient for local authorities to publish the documents on their website. This includes notices, agendas, reports, background papers and minutes. The Proper Officer will give the requisite notice to the public of the time of the hearing, and the agenda, together with details of how to join the hearing which will be available on the website.

Time and Place of Hearing

All hearings will be held remotely, including by (but not limited to) telephone conferencing, video conferencing, live webcast, and live interactive streaming unless a party can show good and sufficient reason why the hearing should be held in person. Where a party has notified the Council that they wish to attend a remote hearing but are unable to access the hearing remotely, for whatever reason, the Council will endeavour to make provision for them to be able to view the hearing at Council offices. The Council will use Microsoft Teams to hold virtual hearings and will invite external participants to virtual hearings, if any, via email or telephone. Virtual hearings will be webcast where the hearing is held in public via a link published on the meeting webpage.

The Constitution states that when reasonably practical, a sub-committee hearing should be held at the Council facility which is closest to the premises or issue that is the subject of the hearing. However, this requirement is disapplied in respect of remote hearings.

During the Hearing

It is a requirement for such hearings that:

- a) proper notice is given, with all papers served timeously on the authority and published online;
- b) the actual parties to the hearing are able to participate;
- c) any member of the public can see or hear, albeit not participate in, the hearing.

Although held in a virtual format, hearings dealing with new licences or variations to existing licences will follow the standard procedure. Panel Members may ask questions of any party at any time. Questions are usually taken after each person has spoken. It is helpful to undertake a document check at the start of the hearing.

In terms of issues that may arise during the hearing the following rules apply:-

Quorum for Hearings

The rules for quorum will still apply. This is 3 Councillors for a licensing or regulatory sub-committee. It is also considered good practice to have a reserve member, in case of interests. The constitution states that if a quorum is not present within 15 minutes of the scheduled start of the LSC or such longer time as allowed by the Chairman, the business of the hearing will be adjourned. The Chairman may allow for flexibility around the start time of the hearing where there are any technical issues.

In the event of any apparent failure of the technology the Chairman should immediately determine if the hearing is still quorate. The Chairman could adjourn for 10-15 minutes to allow the connection to be re-established. If an individual remote participation fails the Chairman may call a short adjournment. As the hearing must have 3 members present, the hearing will be reliant on the lost connection being re-established to ensure all members are present for the entire discussion in order to hear all of the facts and vote on the matter.

Only 3 members are permitted on LSC for each hearing (as per Section 9 of the Licensing Act 2003 and the Constitution Terms of Reference for the LSC). The reserve member is present in case an interest arises at the beginning of the hearing or one of the 3 members identified as being on the LSC fails to attend the virtual hearing. It is only those 3 members who have been identified as being on the LSC for that hearing who can ask questions of the other parties.

A reserve member would not be able to participate if the technology fails for one of the members present as whilst they would be listening they will not have taken an active role nor been included in the process/asked to see if they have any questions etc.

Attendance at hearings and webcasting

A roll call or introductions will be made at the start of the hearing to record those present. There is no requirement for councillors to sign their names on the attendance sheets when attending a virtual hearing. The Democratic Services Officer will maintain a list of attendance throughout the hearing.

To be classified as a 'member in attendance' and attend the hearing remotely, the following conditions must be satisfied;

- a) Councillors sitting on the Sub-Committee must be able to hear and be heard and (where practicable) see and be seen by parties in attendance at the hearing.
- b) This full requirement also extends to parties attending to exercise a right to speak at the hearing.
- c) All other members of the public must as a minimum be able to hear and if practicable see the proceedings.

In practice this means that if councillors and speaking members of the public can be heard and hear each other and other members of the public not speaking can hear, this would fulfil the requirements of holding a virtual hearing.

Members of the press and public may only be excluded from a hearing in accordance with the Access to Information Rules.

The Regulations state that hearings being open to the public include access by remote means. Such access includes (but is not limited to) video conferencing, live webcast, and live interactive streaming and where a hearing is accessible to the public through such remote means the hearing is open to the public whether or not members of the public are able to attend the hearing in person. For clarity, a hearing recorded and then posted online after the event would not satisfy this requirement.

In the event that the live webcast fails and cannot be resumed the hearing will be opened and adjourned to allow for it to take place at a later date (the date and time of which will be fixed prior to the matter being adjourned).

The people on the Teams call who are present throughout the hearing are the Members of the Sub-Committee, any officer supporting the hearing and those who have submitted valid representations, applicant and/or legal representative. The public gallery, where Members can sit and observe the hearing alongside members of the public, is the webcast version.

Conflicts of Interest

Councillors should consider if they have an interest, and, if required, seek advice from the Monitoring Officer, or their deputy, before the hearing starts. If a Councillor appointed to a licensing hearing considers that their interest is prejudicial they should notify Democratic Services as soon as possible so that an alternative councillor can be appointed to the licensing hearing.

Members of the LSC must consider beforehand if they need to declare any personal interests and

whether their personal interest is also a prejudicial interest in which case they will not be able to attend the hearing. Members who have any Disclosable Pecuniary Interests will not be able to attend the hearing either. Members should also consider beforehand if they have or would be considered to have predetermined the matter in which case they should also distance themselves from the determination of the matter and not attend the hearing.

Minutes of hearings

The Minutes of hearing will be published on the website.

Questions

Parties can ask questions of other parties in accordance with the procedure below. The Chairman can stop a party asking questions if they feel the questions are unnecessary. Parties are expected to treat other parties with respect and any form of harassment or excessive questioning will not be tolerated. In such cases the Chairman will ask the party to discontinue that type of questioning. The Chairman can require any person (including any of the parties) who is disrupting the proceedings to leave the hearing.

Order of business (as normal)

1. The Chairman will open the hearing and start the introductions of the LSC and Officers and ask each party to introduce themselves. The Chairman will confirm that if a party is not present their representations/application will have been read and will be considered in reaching the decision.
2. The Chairman will address any interest arising under the Code of Conduct.
3. The Chairman will consider any submitted requests from a party for permission for another person to appear at the virtual Hearing and any other procedural matters. If necessary, the sub-committee will retire to deliberate before making a decision.
4. If all parties present confirm that they have seen and understand the procedure to be followed at the virtual hearing and agree they are ready to proceed then the hearing **shall commence as set out from para 9 below.**
5. The Chairman will remind everyone that the purpose of the virtual hearing should be borne in mind at all times i.e.
 - to enable those with a right to appear at the virtual hearing to advance their point of view and concerns and to test the case of their opponents and
 - to assist the LSC to gather evidence and understand the relevant issues.
6. The Chairman will confirm what advance papers have been received and that these have been read and therefore there is no need to repeat these matters.
7. The Chairman will make clear that parties should only address the LSC in relation to matters previously raised/submitted. Late evidence to be submitted at the hearing will only be considered by the LSC with the consent of all parties present.
8. The Chairman will then outline the procedure to be followed by reading out the order of oral presentations **unless** all parties present have confirmed that they have seen and understood the

procedure and are ready to proceed with the virtual Hearing.

9. The Chairman will ask the Applicant whether they wish to make any amendments to their application with a view to addressing issues raised by the representations.
10. Order of oral presentations:-
 - a. The Licensing Officer will present their report outlining the details of the application/notice and representations received.
 - b. Any party may question the Licensing Officer.
 - c. The Members may question the Licensing Officer.
 - d. The Applicant will present their case and call any witnesses.
 - e. Any other party may question the Applicant.
 - f. The Members may question the Applicant.
 - g. The Responsible Authorities, who made representations. will present their case in turn and call any witnesses.
 - h. Any party may question the Responsible Authorities.
 - i. Any Members may question the Responsible Authorities.
 - j. Each Interested Party will present their case in turn and call any witnesses.
 - k. Any other party may question the Interested Party.
 - l. The Members may question the Interested Parties.

Once they have made their representations under the requirements of the constitution they will need to switch off their microphone and not participate any further in the hearing unless they are asking any questions or wish to sum up. No speaking is timed.

11. Before moving onto the next party at any time during the procedure above, the Chairman will check there are no further points the current party wishes to make or any further questions that need to be put to that party.
12. There may be a discussion at the hearing, on a without prejudice basis, where each party will be asked to address/give their views on any proposed conditions and suggest any other appropriate conditions to assist the Sub-Committee. Any agreed conditions may be incorporated into the Decision Notice if the application is successful. However, the LSC are to determine any final conditions that will apply to the licence.
13. Each party will be invited to make closing submission in the order as set out in paragraph 10.
14. The Chairman will then close the hearing and the LSC will meet (privately) virtually together with the Democratic Services Officer and Legal Advisor for the matter to be determined.
15. The LSC will come to a decision which will be sent to the Applicant and all other parties' who submitted relevant representations within the time limits set out in this procedure and Regulations together with details of the right of appeal.

When can the Chairman be interrupted?

There are circumstances allowed for in the Constitution where the Chairman can be interrupted such as:-

- Technology is not working effectively.
- Officer needs to provide advice.
- Point of order or personal explanation

or any other area where the Constitution or Chairman allows.

Disturbance during proceedings

The Constitution states that if anyone interrupts proceedings the Chairman will warn the person concerned and if they continue to interrupt the Chairman will order their removal from the virtual hearing room. There may be circumstances where the person needs to be removed immediately, for example if they are being inappropriate, and the Chairman can do this by muting their microphone. If there is a general disturbance making orderly business impossible, the Chairman may adjourn the hearing for as long as they consider necessary.

Adjournments

People will remain on the call with mics muted and cameras off until the hearing starts again. The Chairman may also want to consider having a comfort (screen) break for longer hearings. If there is a problem with the technology the Chairman should pause the hearing until that issue has been resolved. However, this does not stop a hearing going ahead because a person does not have access to the required technology in the first place. If technology fails for a wholly remote hearing, and the hearing is no longer open to the public, any decisions made could be challenged as unlawful which renders the whole hearing incapable of proceeding and therefore the Chairman should adjourn until the remote hearing can be restored within a reasonable period, or at a time and date fixed by the Chairman. Any interested party eligible to speak who attends to exercise their right to speak and is unable to do so renders only their item incapable of proceeding unless they are happy to submit their comments through a written representation.

The Council will try and achieve the best possible outcome.

Deliberations and Exclusion of the Press and the Public

Under Regulation 14 of the Licensing Act 2003 (Hearings) Regulations 2005 the licensing authority may exclude the public from all or part of the hearing where it considers that the public interest in doing so outweighs the public interest in the hearing or part of that hearing taking place in public. In addition there may be information in the agenda pack pertaining to the hearing which will be exempt from publication or discussion in public under Schedule 12A of The Local Government Act 1972 as amended. In these circumstances the public will be excluded from part or the whole of the hearing as appropriate.

At the conclusion of the hearing, the LSC together with the Democratic Services Officer and Legal Advisor, will remain in a private virtual meeting in order to deliberate on the decision. Interested parties will then be notified of the outcome of the hearing in writing after the meeting in accordance with required timescales.

Each Member in remote attendance must ensure and verbally declare that there are no other persons present who are not entitled to be (either hearing or seeing) consideration of such items, and/or recording the proceedings.

They may depart from this procedure (as varied/amended from time to time based on changes to

law and practice) if it considers it necessary and/or equitable to do so.

NOTE

IN PRODUCING THIS PROCEDURE, THE FOLLOWING HAVE BEEN CONSIDERED: -

- Licensing Act 2003 *as amended* - and Explanatory Notes
- National Guidance
- The Licensing Act 2003 (Hearings) Regulations 2005 as amended.
- The Human Rights Act 1998.
- Local Government Act 1972 as amended.