

CODE OF PRACTICE FOR THE DETERMINATION OF LICENSING MATTERS

1.0 INTRODUCTION

1.1 **This code applies** to all licensing decisions including:

- Decisions of the Licensing Committee.
- Decisions of any Licensing Sub Committee.
- Delegated decisions within the terms of reference of the above bodies.

All decisions made by the above bodies will be referred to within this code as decisions of the licensing authority.

1.2 This code also applies at all times when Members are involved in the licensing process. This includes taking part in decision making meetings of the Council in exercising the functions of the licensing authority and on less formal occasions such as meetings with officers or the public and consultative meetings. It applies as equally to licensing enforcement matters, reviews, or site specific issues as it does to licensing applications.

1.3 This code of practice applies as follows:

- Sections 1-2 apply to all Members.
- Sections 3-8 apply particularly to Members of the Licensing Committee.
- Sections 9-10 apply to officers.
- Sections 11-13 deal with monitoring and review

1.4 **The aim of this code** of good practice is to ensure that in the licensing process there are no grounds for suggesting that a decision has been biased, partial or not well founded in any way.

1.5 **If you have any doubts** about the application of this Code, you should seek early advice, preferably well before any meeting takes place from the Monitoring Officer.

1.6 If you do not abide by this Code you may put the Council at risk of proceedings on the legality or maladministration of the related decision.

1.7 If you make or are involved in a licensing application, you should:

- Notify the Monitoring Officer in writing of your own application (or that of a relative or employer where known) or where you are employed as an agent.
- Consider whether it is advisable to employ an agent to act on your behalf in dealing with officers and any public speaking at a licensing hearing.
- Ensure that you have arranged for a substitute to attend the hearing in your place.

2.0 BIAS AND PREDETERMINATION IN THE LICENSING PROCESS

- 2.1 Section 25(2) of the Localism Act 2011 sets out that a decision maker is not to be taken to have had, or to have appeared to have had, a closed mind when making a decision just because –
- (a) the decision maker had previously done anything that directly or indirectly indicated what view the decision maker took, or would or might take in relation to a matter, and
 - (b) the matter was relevant to the decision.
- 2.2 The above section was enacted to clarify that predetermination occurs where someone has a closed mind, with the effect that they are unable to apply their judgement fully and properly to an issue requiring a decision. The section makes it clear that if a councillor has given a view on an issue, this does not show that the councillor has a closed mind on that issue, so that if a councillor has campaigned on an issue or made public statements about their approach to an item of council business, he or she will be able to participate in discussion of that issue in the council and to vote on it if it arises in an item of council business requiring a decision.
- 2.3 Having said this, the words ‘just because’ in Section 25 suggest that other factors when combined with statements made etc. can still give rise to accusations of predetermination so care still needs to be taken.
- 2.4 Given the requirement that Members of the Licensing Committee or Sub Committee should exercise an independent mind and decide proposals in accordance with the relevant licensing considerations, Members must not favour any person, company, group or locality or commit themselves to a particular point of view on a licensing decision prior to its full consideration at the Licensing Committee or Sub Committee.
- 2.5 **Do not** make up your mind or give the impression of making up your mind (particularly in relation to an external interest or lobby group) prior to the decision making meeting and of your hearing the officer’s presentation and the evidence and arguments on both sides.
- 2.6 **Do** be aware that you are likely to be biased or pre-determined where the Council is the landowner or applicant **if** you have been or are perceived as being, a chief advocate for the proposal. This will not necessarily arise from being a member of the proposing board or the Executive but through a significant personal involvement in preparing or advocating the proposal by which you may be perceived as being unable to act impartially or determine the proposal purely on its licensing merits and in the public interest.
- 2.7 **Do remember** that you are, of course, free to listen to a point of view about a licensing proposal, give procedural advice and agree to forward any comments, but should then refer the person to the appropriate licensing officer.
- 2.8 **Do not** use any political group meetings prior to the Licensing Committee or Sub Committee meeting to determine how you or other Councillors should vote. There is no objection to a political group having a predisposition, short of

predetermination, for a particular outcome or for you to begin to form a view as more information and opinions become available, but decisions can only be taken after full consideration of the Licensing Officer's report and documents and information considered at the Hearing.

3.0 MEMBERSHIP OF PARISH COUNCILS, AREA COMMITTEES AND OUTSIDE BODIES

3.1 This section concerns the position of Members of Leeds City Council who are also Parish Councillors or members of an outside body.

3.2 **Do** consider yourself able to take part in a licensing debate and vote on a proposal at a meeting of the Parish Council or outside body where it is a consultee provided:

- You make it clear that that you are keeping an open mind and may vote differently at the licensing hearing when full details are available.
- You do not commit yourself so far to a particular point of view that you cannot be considered as open to persuasion at a licensing hearing when the proposal is decided.

4.0 SPOUSE/PARTNER COUNCILLORS

4.1 There may be occasions when the spouse or partner of a Member, usually a member for the same Ward, is also a Member of the Licensing Committee or Sub Committee. That Member might quite properly refer constituents who wish to make representations to his or her spouse or partner rather than be directly lobbied. Generally the fact that the spouse or partner Councillor has been approached will not affect your ability to speak and vote at a licensing hearing.

4.2 **Consider** if your spouse or partner is so closely involved with the support for, or opposition to, an application that a member of the public might reasonably think that the involvement is such that you must be biased or have predetermined the application.

5.0 CONTACT WITH APPLICANTS AND OBJECTORS

5.1 In order to maintain impartiality, it is preferable that Members are not involved in pre-application discussions but there will be occasions when this can be unavoidable. The following guidance is given.

- **Do not** agree to any formal meeting with applicants, or groups of objectors where you can avoid it. Where you feel that a formal meeting would be helpful in clarifying the issues, you should not arrange it yourself, but request the Licensing Officer to do so. The officer will then ensure that those present are aware that any discussion will not bind the Council and maintain a written file record of the meeting.
- **Do** refer those who approach you for advice to officers.

- **Do** follow the rules on lobbying.
- **Do** report any significant contact with the applicant or other parties to the Monitoring Officer explaining the nature and purpose of the contacts and your involvement and ensure that this is recorded on the licensing file.
- **Do not** attend a presentation by an applicant unless an officer is present and/or it has been arranged by an officer.
- **Do** ask relevant questions for the purpose of clarifying your understanding of the proposals but do not express any strong view or state how you or other members might vote.
- **Do** make it clear that the presentation is not part of the formal decision making process and any view is both personal and provisional since not all relevant information will be to hand and the views of interested parties will not have been obtained.

6.0 MEMBERSHIP OF A LOBBY GROUP

- 6.1 Lobbying by Councillors is a legitimate activity but in the case of Members of the Licensing Committee or Sub Committee significant care needs to be taken to avoid any challenge of bias or predetermination or an allegation of bringing the Council into disrepute.
- 6.2 **You may** take part in a matter than involves issues upon which your lobby group has simply campaigned as long as your involvement has not resulted in you being biased and/or predetermining the matter.
- 6.3 **Do** weigh up the following factors where your lobby group has expressed a public view on a matter and consider whether a reasonable member of the public, knowing the relevant facts, would think that you are biased or have pre-determined a matter. The factors are:
- the nature of the matter to be discussed
 - the nature of your involvement with the lobby group
 - the publicly expressed views of the lobby group
 - what you have said or done in relation to the particular issue
- 6.4 **Do not** lead, be part of the management of, or represent an organisation whose primary purpose is to promote or oppose licensing proposals. If you do, you may have fettered your discretion (be biased/pre-determined) and have to withdraw.
- 6.5 **Do not** become a member of an organisation whose primary purpose is to promote or oppose specific licensing proposals or those within a limited geographical area as you may be perceived as having fettered your discretion (be biased/pre-determined).

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- 6.6 **Do** join general interest groups which reflect your areas of interest and which concentrate on issues beyond particular licensing proposals such as a local Civic Society but where that organisation has made representations on a particular proposal, you should make it clear to both the organisation and the Committee that you have not made up your mind on each separate proposal
- 6.7 **Do** remember that if the local branch of a general interest group has been vociferous or active on a particular issue or you are closely associated with the management or decision making process of that organisation such as being the Chairperson or a member of the Board or Committee, it will become increasingly difficult to demonstrate your ability to judge the matter with an open mind and you may consider that you are biased and/or pre-determined and should withdraw from the meeting.
- 6.8 **Do not** excessively lobby fellow members regarding your concerns or views or attempt to persuade them that they should decide how to vote in advance of the hearing at which the decision is to be made. It is difficult to define 'excessively' but you need to consider whether a member of the public, knowing the facts would think that, through your representations, the lobbied member was no longer able to take a view on the matter in the public interest but had predetermined it.
- 6.9 **Do not** publicly support a particular outcome on a proposal or actively campaign for it if you wish to take part in the decision making process. It would be very difficult for you to demonstrate that you had the necessary degree of impartiality to properly weigh the arguments presented and the decision would be open to challenge. Again it is a question of maintaining the fine balance between a predisposition where your mind is not totally made up and a predetermination. This would, however, not prevent you from expressing the views of your constituents provided you are capable of determining the application in accordance with the law.

7.0 SITE VISITS

- 7.1 Site Visits can play a legitimate part in the decision making exercise but must be limited to inspections by viewing and as a fact finding exercise. They are not to be used to determine a proposal prior to a hearing. Due to the tight timescales involved in licensing decisions, site visits must be viewed as an exception rather than the rule.
- 7.2 When undertaking a site visit Members should also have regard to the following paragraphs of the Code of Practice for Determining Licensing Matters:
- ✓ Paragraph 2 - Bias and Predetermination in the Licensing Process.
 - ✓ Paragraph 5 - Contact with Applicants and Objectors.

7.3 THIS SECTION APPLIES TO MEMBERS REQUESTS FOR A SITE VISIT

- 7.3.1 If a Member feels, on receipt of the report on an application, that a site visit would be beneficial, s/he should first discuss their concerns with a Principal Licensing

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Officer. Officers have powers to request additional information from parties, which can then be discussed at the hearing. This information may resolve the issues without the need for a site visit. If a Member still feels that a site visit is necessary then, in the interest of fairness, it is preferable that concerns should be expressed at the scheduled hearing since Members may find that the applicant, interested parties or responsible authorities can provide verbal information to the satisfaction of the Members present.

- 7.3.2 Views of the parties present must be canvassed and considered before a site visit is agreed since that is likely to result in a delay to the decision making.
- 7.3.3 In the case of a Sub Committee hearing, three Members or a 2:1 majority must be in favour of a site visit for arrangements to be made. The same three Members will be expected to undertake the requested site visit and attend the hearing for the application, which will be re-convened at a later date.
- 7.3.4 In the case of a meeting of the Licensing Committee, a majority of the Members present must be in favour of a site visit.
- 7.3.5 The same Members will be expected to undertake the requested site visit and be able to attend the re-convened meeting which will consider the application subsequent to the site visit.
- 7.3.6 **DO** raise the need for a site visit at a hearing and be prepared to give reasons why it is of real benefit. The reason will be recorded in the Minutes.
- 7.3.7 **DO NOT** request a site visit unless there is a real benefit from viewing the site. This might arise where:-
- Particular site factors are significant in terms of the weight attached to them relative to other factors or the difficulty of their assessment in the absence of a site inspection.
 - There are significant policy or precedent implications and specific site factors need to be carefully addressed.
 - Relevant factors cannot be fully ascertained from any supporting information or the plans submitted to the Licensing Officer and available at the hearing, to Members satisfaction.

7.4 THIS SECTION APPLIES TO SITE VISITS AS PROPOSED BY OFFICERS

- 7.4.1 The Principal Licensing Officer may suggest the Committee or a Sub Committee undertake a Site Visit without prior discussion at a hearing, where in the professional opinion of the Officer there is a real benefit from viewing the site.
- 7.4.2 In such cases, officers will approach Members seeking a date for the site visit and hearing – usually in the form of an e-mail in the first instance.

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- 7.4.3 The e-mail should set out the proposal for a site visit, the reasons behind the request; the projected benefit for Members; the address of the premise; the type of application and set out the arrangements for the visit.
- 7.4.4 Some site visits can only be conducted at night in order to gauge an accurate impression of the proposal being discussed. On occasion the site visits will also include a viewing of the site 'in performance'.
- 7.4.5 In other cases it is usual for the site visit on an application to commence at 9.30 am (departing from the Civic Hall) and for the formal meeting to commence at 11.00 am in the Civic Hall to determine the application. As such it is anticipated that hearings will not conclude until the afternoon.
- 7.4.6 Having made proposals for a site visit, officers will seek confirmation from the Members able to attend that they are happy to undertake the proposed site visit.

7.5 ON THE SITE VISIT

- 7.5.1 **DO** ensure that any information gained from the site visit is reported back at the subsequent hearing.
- 7.5.2 **DO** ensure that you treat the site visit as an opportunity to seek information and to observe the site. It is not to be used to determine a matter prior to the hearing.
- 7.5.3 **DO** ask the officers at the site visit questions or seek clarification from them on matters which are relevant to the site inspection.
- 7.5.4 **DO** be prepared to listen to and ask questions of fact from the Applicant or other parties.
- 7.5.5 **DO** be aware that Officers will make all parties aware of the site visit. All parties may attend subject to being granted access by the owner (see below). If only one party is present be particularly careful only to obtain information and ensure that that information is repeated at the public meeting where the other parties have a right to comment on it.
- 7.5.6 **DO** be aware that access to the site is at the discretion of the owner. The owner can legitimately refuse access to objectors and even Members. If access is to be refused consider whether it is still appropriate to undertake the visit.
- 7.5.7 **DO NOT** be drawn into arguments or detailed discussions on the individual merits of an application or give the impression that you have made up your mind.
- Note that** the decision can only be made at the Licensing Hearing and you should make this clear to any applicant or other party.
- 7.5.8 **DO** note comments of the applicant or other parties which are made solely for the purpose of making members aware of any specific local circumstances and issues relevant to the application site.

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- 7.5.9 **DO NOT** express opinions or views to anyone which can suggest bias or predetermination. As indicated above, you should make it clear that formal consideration of the proposal will take place in public at the subsequent hearing/meeting.
- 7.5.10 **DO NOT** enter a site which is subject to an application otherwise than on a formal site visit although this does not prevent you from viewing the site from the highway or other publicly accessible area.

8.0 TRAINING

- 8.1 Members making licensing decisions must attend two training sessions each and every year:
- a Licensing Update session, to receive guidance in relation to regulations and procedures; and
 - a Governance and Conduct session, for training on disclosable pecuniary interests and the Members' Code of Conduct.
- 8.2 Failure to undertake either or both sessions will result in the Elected Member being unable to sit on the Licensing Committee or Sub Committee. Therefore, **do not** participate in decision making on licensing matters if you have not undertaken mandatory training.
- 8.3 **Do** try to attend any other specialised training session provided, since these will be designed to extend your knowledge of licensing law, regulations, procedures and Policies beyond the minimum required and assist you in carrying out your role properly and effectively.
- 8.4 **Do** revisit a sample of implemented licensing decisions to assess the quality of the decisions. Such a review should improve the quality and consistency of decision-making, thereby strengthening public, confidence in the licensing system, and can help with reviews of planning policies.

9.0 OFFICERS

- 9.1 Councillors and officers have different but complementary roles. Both serve the public but Councillors are responsible to the electorate whilst officers are responsible to the Council as a whole. Officers are employed by the Council and not by individual Councillors and instructions can only be given through a decision of the Council, the Executive or a Panel or Committee. A successful relationship can only be based on mutual respect, trust, courtesy and understanding of each others positions.
- 9.2 The role of the Legal officer is to assist the committee in gathering evidence and understanding all relevant issues in order for Members to make a decision, and to advise on the sub committees' legal duties under the relevant legislation and on the admissibility of evidence.
- 9.3 As and when appropriate legal advice should be given or repeated in open session for all parties to be made aware of.

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- 9.4 The role of the Governance Officer is to facilitate the smooth running of the hearing; advise on the Rules of Procedure and Regulations relating to hearings; make notes of the proceedings and reasons for granting or refusing applications; and ensure that decision letters are sent to all parties as soon as possible after the hearing.
- 9.5 The role of the Licensing Officer attending the hearing is neutral. They will make no recommendations to the Committee and attend hearings only to provide a summary report of the application, giving details of the representations received and any relevant legislative or policy considerations. However there is a separate but distinct officer role which is exercised by Liaison and Enforcement Officers from Entertainment Licensing who may make representations on applications or seek reviews. The roles of these officers and the Licensing Officer processing applications and hearing reports are (and must remain) separate.
- 9.6 **Do not** put pressure on Licensing officers to put forward a particular recommendation.
- 9.7 **Do** recognise that officers are part of a management structure and only discuss an application, outside of any arranged meeting with those officers who are authorised to deal with the application at Member level.
- 9.8 **Do** recognise and respect that officers involved in the processing and determination of licensing application must act in accordance with the Council's Employee Code of Conduct. As a result, officers reports will be presented on the basis of their overriding obligation of professional independence.

10.0 RELATIONSHIP WITH THE EMPLOYEE CODE OF CONDUCT

- 10.1 The Council has an approved Employee Code of Conduct. That Code applies at all times when officers are involved in the licensing process. This includes decision making by officers under delegated powers and attendance at meetings whether those are formal decision making meetings or informal meetings with members or the public.
- 10.2 Officers must apply the rules in the Employee Code of Conduct at all times. If they do not they may put the Council at risk of proceedings on the legality of any related decision, and may put themselves at risk of disciplinary action.
- 10.3 Generally licensing officers have little discretion in making licensing decisions. However there may be situations where they are called upon to exercise discretion such as deciding whether an objection is relevant. Other officers such as those employed by Environmental Health or Development have discretion on whether to object. Legal officers and committee clerks remain in the room with Members when decisions are made.
- 10.4 In all cases officers must avoid any improper conduct or occasion for suspicion of the appearance of improper conduct and should:-

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- Ensure that they have given notice of any financial interest in any contract which has been or is proposed to be entered into by the Council.
- Not accept gifts, entertainment, hospitality or any benefits in kind as set out in the Employee Code of Conduct.
- Declare to their Director by completing the Register of Interests Form any personal interests which may conflict with licensing applications such as:
 - § any involvement with an outside organisation which has an interest in any licensing application;
 - § any financial interest in any licensing application; and
 - § any other interest where others may think that a conflict of interest may arise. Examples of such situations include where the officer lives adjacent to any licensed premises or visits the premises in a personal capacity on a regular basis.

10.5 Officers should also consider whether their spouse, partner or close relative has a financial or other interest in a licensing application which may give rise to the suspicion of the appearance of improper conduct and where the officer may therefore need to declare an interest.

10.6 Where an officer has declared an interest he or she should not participate in the processing of a licensing application but should instead refer the matter to his or her Manager who will arrange for another officer to discharge the duties.

11.0 PROCEDURES AT LICENSING HEARINGS

11.1 The Licensing Committee and Sub Committee Procedure Rules (Part 4(n) of the Constitution), set out the procedure for hearings before the Licensing Committee and Sub Committees.

12.0 MONITORING AND REVIEW

12.1 The Monitoring Officer shall monitor the following, and will report annually to the Corporate Governance and Audit Committee in relation to these matters:-

- the number of appeals upheld;
- any external inspection reports in respect of relevant issues; and
- any ombudsman complaints or reports in respect of relevant issues.

13.0 BREACHES OF THE CODE OF PRACTICE

13.1 Failure to comply with this code of practice may lead to a finding of maladministration by the Ombudsman or could lead to a decision being challenged in the courts.

13.2 Allegations of a breach of this code of practice by Officers will be referred to the relevant Director for consideration under the Council's Disciplinary Procedure.

