

LICENSING COMMITTEE



Report subject	To agree a draft New Pleasure Boat and Boatperson Policy for public consultation
Meeting date	11 December 2025
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>The current regime and processing of pleasure boat and boatperson licensing currently operate without the guidance of an established policy framework.</p> <p>The introduction of this draft policy as presented aims to provide a clear, consistent, and transparent basis for the assessment and determination of future applications. This will support decision-making, ensure regulatory compliance, and promote public confidence in the licensing process.</p>
Recommendations	<p>It is RECOMMENDED that:</p> <p>Members consider the draft policy document, agree any necessary amendments and approve the release of the amended draft for public consultation for a period of 6 weeks in 2026.</p>
Reason for recommendations	<p>Under Section 94 of the Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1907, the Council has the statutory authority to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Grant licences for pleasure boats and pleasure vessels that are let for hire or used to carry passengers for reward• License individuals in charge of or navigating such boats and vessels

Portfolio Holder(s):	Kieron Wilson, Portfolio Holder for Housing and Regulation
Corporate Director	Glynn Barton – Chief Operations Officer
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Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Decision

Background

1. The Council, acting as the Licensing Authority, has the power to grant licences for the operation of Pleasure Boats and for Boatpersons. Licences should only be issued to individuals who are deemed competent and capable of safely operating such vessels.
2. In relation to vessels, the Licensing Authority must ensure that any boat or vessel licensed is safe for passengers and users.
3. The Council is responsible for licensing boats and vessels operating within inland waters only, which include Poole and Christchurch Harbours. The policy and licensing regime does NOT include vessels taking passengers out of the harbour areas.
4. Licenses are currently issued for 2 categories of vessels which are defined as follows: -
 - Class B – Vessels crewed by a bosun carrying no more than 12 fare paying passengers.
 - Class C - self-drive boats that are hired out to the public.
5. Currently within the BCP Council area we issue licenses as follows:

Class B	22
Class C	8 – Covering 60 boats
Boatperson	6

6. This will be the first Pleasure Boat and Boatpersons policy for BCP Council.
7. Currently licences are issued in accordance with legacy processes and conditions inherited from predecessor councils.
8. In line with good practice, there is a need for a clear and consistent policy that outlines the requirements for such licences and the process by which applications will be assessed and determined.

9. All applications for licences after approval of this policy will meet the policy standards this will include new licences and existing licences at the point of renewal.
10. This is the second time a draft Pleasure boat policy has been presented to Licensing Committee for agreement. Previously on 7 December 2023 members agreed a policy for consultation however due to unavoidable delays public consultation did not take place and the policy did not progress any further.
[http://ced-pri-cms-02.ced.local/documents/s45778/To%20agree%20a%20draft%20Pleasure%20Boat%20and%20Boatperson%20Policy%20for%20public%20consultation.pdf?LO\\$=1](http://ced-pri-cms-02.ced.local/documents/s45778/To%20agree%20a%20draft%20Pleasure%20Boat%20and%20Boatperson%20Policy%20for%20public%20consultation.pdf?LO$=1)
11. Officers have since developed the proposed policy by meeting with stakeholders including the Harbour Master at Poole and internal officers who oversee Christchurch Harbour who have helped to shape this draft to a more robust document.
12. During 2025 Dorset Council have carried out a public consultation exercise of their Pleasure Boat Policy. Officers were mindful of the contents of this policy during the drafting process and wherever possible ensured our policy corresponds with Dorset Council requirements. However, it should be noted that the area covered by Dorset Council has a different geological profile and that their policy does not regulate activities which fall under the jurisdiction of the Weymouth, Bridport or Lyme Regis Harbourmasters.
13. Our policy has been developed in consultation with Poole Harbourmaster and is intended to cover pleasure boat licensing within both Christchurch and Poole Harbours.
14. The proposed policy remains within the remit of the statutory requirements and members are advised that BCP Council has a water safety group who are addressing wider water safety concerns such as use of personal watercraft devices launched from beach areas which either directly or indirectly then access the sea outside of the stated harbour areas.

Consultation

15. The Committee is asked to consider the draft Pleasure Boats and Boatperson Licensing Policy and determine whether any amendments are required prior to public consultation. The consultation will be hosted on the Council's online engagement platform, Have Your Say Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole (Have Your Say BCP).
16. All current licence holders, the local Harbour Master, and appointed boat inspectors will be contacted directly via email to inform them of the consultation and to encourage their participation and feedback.
17. The public consultation will run for a period of six weeks. Following the conclusion of the consultation, all responses will be collated and presented to the Licensing Committee for consideration and determination of the final policy.

Options Appraisal

18. Members are asked to consider the draft policy and proposed list of consultees and

- a. Agree the draft policy as presented **or**
- b. Agree any amendments to the draft policy **and**
- c. Agree to public consultation for 6 weeks of the agreed draft policy. This will take place in early 2026 to avoid the Christmas period.

Summary of financial implications

19. The funding for the preparation and consultation of this policy will come from within existing budgets and there are no financial implications arising from this report.

Summary of legal implications

20. There is no requirement to produce such a policy however good practice dictates that the provision of a policy will improve the application process and reduce the risk of complaint or appeal against refusal or revocation.

21. However, it should be noted that as with any decision or policy made by a Public Body, that decision or policy could be challenged by way of a Judicial Review Application to the High Court on grounds of illegality, irrationality and/or procedural unfairness. If such a challenge is made the Court has the power to quash all or part of a policy. In addition, significant costs could be incurred in defending any challenge. Whilst the risk of challenge will be mitigated as far as possible such a challenge could still be made.

Summary of human resources implications

22. There are no human resources implications arising from this report.

Summary of sustainability impact

23. By ensuring regular maintenance and inspection of boats/vessels we are supporting fuel efficiency which goes some way to reducing emissions which impact on air and water.

Summary of public health implications

24. Public safety will be supported by ensuring the boats/vessels are maintained in good order and anyone in charge or passengers meets the required standard for knowledge, and fitness.

Summary of equality implications

25. This is the first step in considering the policy and to approve public consultation. No decision will be undertaken regarding the policy until the consultation is complete and fully considered.

26. An Equality Impact Needs Assessment is being completed during the entire process and will be duly considered by the Equality Impact Assessment Panel prior to the outcome of any decision.

Summary of risk assessment

27. Passenger transportation of any means requires high standards to be achieved to protect public safety.

28. This policy sets out the standard expected for all boats/vessels and boatpersons who fall within the licenced regime administered by BCP Council.

Background papers

The Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1907 [Public Health Acts Amendment Act 1907](#)

Licensing for Boats and Boatperson guidelines [SWRPA boat guidelines](#)

Sound practice, safer waters (Inland Waters Small Passenger Boat Code) [Sound practice safer waters](#)

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Draft Pleasure Boat and Boatperson Policy 2025