

**ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC PROTECTION
SCRUTINY COMMITTEE
13th MAY 2016**

Present: Councillor A.P. Cooper (Chair)

Councillors: A. Davies, D.B. Davies, J.A. Davies, P.M. Edwards, D.C. Evans, I.J. Jackson (Vice-Chair), A. James, W.J. Lemon, A.D.T. Speake, W.G. Thomas, D.E. Williams

Councillor M.A.J. Lewis – Substitute for Councillor S.E. Thomas

Also in attendance:

Councillor A. Lenny – In attendance for Item 5

Councillor J. Thomas – In attendance for Item 5

Councillor H.A.L. Evans – Executive Board Member for Technical Services

Councillor T.J. Jones – Executive Board Member for Environmental & Public Protection

Also present as an observer:

Councillor J.D. James

The following officers were in attendance:

Mr. S. Pilliner – Head of Transport & Engineering

Mr. J. McEvoy – Road Safety & Traffic Manager

Mr. M. Hughes – Democratic Services Officer

Venue: Spilman Street Chamber, Carmarthen (10:00 – 11:55am)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor S.E. Thomas.

2. DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST

There were no declarations of personal interest.

3. DECLARATION OF PROHIBITED PARTY WHIPS

There were no declarations of party whips.

4. PUBLIC QUESTIONS

No public questions were received.

5. ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE TASK & FINISH GROUP FINAL REPORT 2015/16: CAR PARKING CHARGES

The Committee considered the final report of the Task & Finish Group it had established on 15th May 2015, to research different approaches to car parking charges that could be applied in the county. The recommendations contained within the report had been formulated by the Group following the consideration of a range of evidence over a series of meetings held between September 2015 and April 2016.

The Chair advised that he had received requests from Councillors A. Lenny and J. Thomas to ask questions in relation to this agenda item and that these would be presented at the commencement of this item.

Councillor J. Thomas asked the following question:

I understand that part of the brief was to ensure consistency throughout the County. I do not believe this has been achieved. For example there is free parking on a Sunday on the Eastern end of Carmarthen to serve three places of religion, yet on the western end of town another small car park is not free at any time on Sundays despite there being five places of religion in the area. I ask, how was the consistency aspect of the task and finish review approached?

The Chair thanked Councillor Thomas for his question and stated that the review had been about the whole of Carmarthenshire, rather than parking issues in a specific town. Consistency of charges had not been part of the review's scope and objectives, which had been endorsed by the Committee at a previous meeting. The Head of Transport & Engineering reminded the Committee that the Sunday exemptions in Carmarthen had originated as a result of consultation relating to an Off-Street Parking Places Consolidation Order in 2014 and that these had been agreed following a meeting between the then Executive Board Member and church representatives. There were 54 on-street free car park spaces on the western end of town.

Councillor A. Lenny asked the following questions:

My question regards the nature and scope of the research undertaken by the group. Why didn't they invite individuals or bodies (e.g. Chambers of Trade) to present evidence in person and visit other towns or counties as part of the research, rather than base their recommendations mainly on figures and reports (internal and external) presented by Carmarthenshire County Council's own officers without apparent challenge?

If the Task and Finish Group recommendations are based on little more than reports and figures presented by county council officers, would the Environmental and Public Protection Scrutiny Committee consider rejecting the report as it has failed to comply both with its remit and declared intention due to its limited research base, which has resulted in little more than recommendation of approval of the status quo?

The Chair thanked Councillor Lenny for his questions but rejected the suggestion that information presented by officers had been accepted unchallenged by the Group members. He informed the Committee that the Group had received submissions from the Carmarthen Town Forum as part of the review and that any information or data requested by the Group had been provided for it by the officers. The Head of Transport & Engineering informed the Committee that the Group had considered evidence of consultation undertaken with regards to changes to car parking charges in recent years. It included the formal consultation that had been undertaken through the budget strategy and further consultation held during the formal statutory process of making new traffic orders (e.g. Sunday charges).

The following issues were raised by the Committee in relation to the report:

It was suggested that there was a lack of local consultation undertaken by the Group and concern was also expressed that Carmarthen's higher parking prices were continuing to support other areas of the county. It was also suggested that footfall in Carmarthen had dropped dramatically within the past few weeks. The Head of Engineering & Transport referred the Committee to the body of evidence contained within the report which showed that the ticket sales across the county's towns had increased year on year between 2013 and 2015 on a like for like basis. Footfall data considered by the Group during the review was also showing an increase. He reminded the Committee that the reasons for the variation in ticket prices between towns were linked to the demographic and economic differences of those towns as well as infrastructure-related factors. Revenue from car parking was invested in highway-related services and parking facilities (e.g. supporting public transport, park and ride, highway infrastructure and car parking investment).

The importance of liaising with local members was highlighted and reference made to a successful pilot in Llanelli where a 2 hour limited waiting zone on Swansea Road had been trialled. It was asked whether this could be rolled out across the county rather than the 30 minute shop and drop option recommended by the Task & Finish Group. It was felt that if these bays were offered for a longer time period, it would help boost trade nearer smaller shops or market stalls.

However, it was also suggested that such an initiative would not be financially viable as the shop and drop option was aimed at locals rather than visitors from further afield who were more likely to spend a longer amount of time in the county's towns and spend money too.

Reference was made to footfall in towns and it was noted that an increase in footfall did not necessarily equate to economic prosperity, as witnessed in Llanelli town, where footfall had increased and yet shops were still closing down.

In response to a question relating to higher ticket charges, the Head of Transport & Engineering explained that the various national and regional strategies set the policy objectives. In setting charges for a town, the wider policy objectives were considered first followed by the demand for parking in that particular town. Demographic and economic factors were also considered as was the support required for public transport. He reminded the Committee of the problems experienced in Aberystwyth when there was no enforcement in place and town traders were requesting that enforcement measures be introduced. In setting charges, other issues such as the control of air pollution and the churn of spaces were also key considerations.

Reference was made to the challenge of online shopping for town traders which is why an option for free parking on a 'quiet' weekday evening (e.g. Thursday) was discussed by the Group. However, it was essential that town councils and chambers of trade supported such initiatives by opening late, if such ventures were to be undertaken.

Caution was urged in regards to free parking concessions on Sundays. It was suggested that offering free parking to one group in one town was disadvantaging another group in another town who were required to pay on a Sunday and that there needed to be consistency across the county in relation to this matter. The Head of Transport & Engineering reminded the Committee that each town was given free parking options on Sundays (e.g. Railway Station and Carmarthen Road in Llandeilo were free and there were no on-road restrictions on Sundays). He added that there were a range of opportunities that were being proposed by the Task & Finish Group including the free 30 minutes for shop and drop and additional free parking days for the county's towns.

Concerns were expressed about the number of disabled parking bays in car parks and that many were not fully utilised, thus taking up valuable parking spaces. Clarification was also sought as to the consultation undertaken in relation to the introduction of such bays in John Street Car Park, Carmarthen. The Head of Transport & Engineering and the Road Safety & Traffic Manager reminded the Committee that when charges for blue badges were introduced, this required a revision of parking orders which in turn required consultation to be undertaken.

As part of the review, it was noted that the car parks covered by the new orders had less than the recommended 6% of spaces dedicated to disabled drivers. An increase in the number of bays available was recommended as part of the introduction of the car parks order. The order was subject to statutory consultation and all relevant stakeholders (e.g. Town Council) were asked for their views.

It was asked whether the Group had considered the problem of blue badge holders parking in resident-only on-street parking zones, rather than pay for parking tickets. It was suggested that individuals were abusing the privilege of being blue badge holders. The Head of Transport & Engineering informed the Committee that representations were received from a member of the public in relation to on-street parking bays for blue badge holders and that the Group had made a recommendation in relation to the standardising of on-street parking bays. However, he reminded the Committee that resident parking permits did not guarantee a resident the right to park outside their property.

An explanation was sought for the term 'feasible' in relation to the Group's recommendation that 'where feasible, the Council introduced shop and drop bays in the county's towns'. The Head of Transport & Engineering clarified that this would vary from town to town and be dependent on the spaces available within town centres. In response to a further question, he confirmed that these would be on-street bays and not bays in existing car parks.

It was acknowledged that parking charges were used for a variety of reasons but it was asked whether more of the income could be directed to the maintenance of the car parks, as there was no reference to this in the report. It was claimed that many car parks were shabby due to the lack of grounds maintenance and in turn, this did not give the best impression of the county to visitors. The Head of Transport & Engineering informed the Committee that there was a service level agreement in

place with the Grounds Maintenance Service and that work on this matter was on-going.

In response to a question about the use of the Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) system, the Head of Transport & Engineering explained that currently, officers were awaiting clarification from the Welsh Government on the legality of using such technology in public car parks. He also acknowledged that safeguards needed to be in place in regards to data protection (i.e. in collecting number plate details) but that ultimately, this system could be used in all car parks, even those with multiple exits.

Concerns were expressed that the introduction of cashless payment systems would be discriminatory and not allow those without mobile phones to pay for parking. The Head of Transport & Engineering reassured the Committee that the cashless system would be one option for customers to use, alongside the traditional cash-only system.

The Committee then considered the Task & Finish Group's recommendations:

- 1) The County Council proceeds with on-going collection of data for footfall in key towns – *The Committee suggested that economic data also be collected as footfall in itself did not guarantee a positive economic benefit.*
- 2) The Carmarthenshire Integrated Parking Strategy be updated – *The Committee suggested that the Strategy be totally reviewed rather than simply updated.*
- 3) Consideration be given to the mix of short / long-stay bays in the Authority's car parks where there is high demand for short-stay parking – *The Committee suggested that consultation with local members be carried out prior to any changes. The Head of Transport & Engineering reminded the Committee that this would be the case as statutory consultation would be required if there was a formal change to parking orders.*
- 4) The accessibility of on-street parking bays designated for blue badge holders be reviewed and standardised according to the legislative requirements, where feasibly possible – *The Committee suggested that where possible, bays on one-way streets be positioned so that the driver could alight onto a pavement and not onto the road, thus reducing the potential danger to themselves and causing obstruction to other drivers. The Committee also suggested that a solution to blue badge holders parking in resident zones be explored further. The Head of Engineering & Transport informed the Committee that there was currently an exemption in Traffic Orders that allowed blue badge holders to park in such zones but that this could be amended, subject to a formal legal process being followed.*
- 5) Given the competitive nature of Carmarthenshire's current charges, the current pricing strategy be retained but that footfall in towns be kept under regular review and consultation be undertaken where future changes to parking charges are proposed – *The Committee suggested that more investment was needed in the service, particularly on the maintenance of car parks themselves.*
- 6) Town / Community Councils and Chambers of Trade be reminded of the free-parking day scheme and be encouraged to fully utilise this initiative – *The Committee agreed with this proposal.*

- 7) The free parking at the Council's Coleshill Car Park (Llanelli) at weekends be further promoted – *The Committee agreed with this proposal.*
- 8) The number of free parking days available to the County's towns be increased to 7 days per year but that the exclusion period be extended to cover the whole of November, as well as the whole of December – *The Committee welcomed the proposal but was of the opinion that the exemption be kept for the whole of December, rather than November as many towns held pre-Christmas festivities in November and that free parking days were often used to boost attendance at such events.*
- 9) The Council pursues the potential change in legislation with the Welsh Government and subject to clarification and affordability, proceeds with a phased programme of introducing an ANPR Pay on Exit system across its car parks – *The Committee agreed with this proposal.*
- 10) Where feasible, the Council introduces 'shop and drop' bays in the county's towns, in proportion to the size of the town and spaces available, for a limited waiting time of up to 30 minutes – *The Committee was of the opinion that this option needed to be feasible in each area so as not to discriminate against different towns and that consideration be given to 2 hours free on-street parking (with no return in an hour) rather than 30 minutes.*
- 11) The Council proceeds with introducing 'cashless payment' technology by undertaking a pilot in the County's key towns – *The Committee agreed with this proposal.*

The Committee **RESOLVED** that subject to the inclusion of its comments and additional suggestions, the report be received and referred to the Executive Board for its consideration.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL & PUBLIC PROTECTION SCRUTINY COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2016/17

The Committee considered its Forward Work Programme for 2016/17 which had been developed following the Committee's informal planning session held in April 2015. The following issues were discussed during consideration of the report:

In response to a comment regarding the suspension of staff in the Environment Department, the Executive Board Member for Technical Services informed the Committee that disciplinary proceedings were still on-going and that as promised in previous meetings, an update on the situation would be provided by the Director as and when these were completed.

It was suggested that the new Police & Crime Commissioner be invited to attend a future meeting of the Committee. The Chair suggested that it might be more appropriate that he meet with all members, rather than just the Committee itself but agreed to action this in due course.

It was requested that the latest information on the future of the waste disposal and recycling service, be included in the Waste Strategy update. The Executive Board

Member for Technical Services informed the Committee that work was on-going and that progress was being made in relation to the procurement of a new contract.

The Committee **RESOLVED** that its Forward Work Programme for 2016/17 be endorsed.

SIGNED: _____ (Chair)

DATE: _____