

Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Tuesday 5 April 2022

Minutes

Attendance

Committee Members

Councillor Jeff Clarke (Chair)
Councillor Jonathan Chilvers (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Richard Baxter-Payne
Councillor Sarah Feeney
Councillor Jack Kennaugh
Councillor Bhagwant Singh Pandher
Councillor Jerry Roodhouse
Councillor Tim Sinclair
Councillor Andrew Wright

Portfolio Holders

Councillor Andy Crump, Portfolio Holder for Fire & Rescue and Community Safety
Councillor Wallace Redford, Portfolio Holder for Transport & Planning
Councillor Isobel Seccombe OBE, Leader of the Council

Officers

David Ayton-Hill, Assistant Director - Communities
Ian Marriott, Delivery Lead Commercial & Regulatory
Isabelle Moorhouse, Democratic Services Officer
Jon Rollinson, Principal Strategy & Policy Officer
Mark Ryder, Strategic Director for Communities

Public Speakers

Richard Harrington
Councillor John Holland
Bob Reeve

1. General

(1) Apologies

Councillor Jackie D'Arcy who was substituted by Councillor Sarah Feeney
Councillor Dave Humphreys who was substituted by Councillor Jack Kennaugh
Apologies for Councillor Jenny Fradgley were received in the meeting, and she was substituted by Councillor Jerry Roodhouse

(2) Disclosures of Pecuniary and Non-Pecuniary Interests

None.

2. Public Speaking

Councillor John Holland who was one of the members who initiated the call-in made the following statement:

“We had caused a lot of changes after the election last May and many people may not be aware that we had a massive consultation about so resident parking schemes under the previous council. That led the Cabinet to decide but just before the election that there will be no increase in the resident parking charges.

I think if you go into an election on that basis that after the election, as a matter of trust and honour that you should honour that decision that you went into the election on. But my main point is the reason we have resident parking schemes, came about after the recession of the 1980s and the need to revitalise our town centres and to encourage people to live in the town centre, and there are several reasons for that. Obviously, they people become customers of town centre businesses but perhaps more importantly residents look after the place and they don't put up with any disturbance or hooliganism, they call the police get sorted out and town centres then become a very safe place in the evening; so that as well as a daytime economy you can develop an evening economy and it clearly has worked in many town centres now to encourage people in on the basis that there would be resident parking permits of reasonably priced and to then ‘jack’ the prices up in my view is a breach of trust and very counterproductive.

I think that we should therefore honour the charges that we went into the election and honour the major point that the town centres limited parking, obviously as contested space, the spaces for customers of business are for residents but not for people who park all day who can use the car parks provided by district and borough councils. What we actually need is a joined-up parking strategy jointly between the districts and boroughs and the County Council and resident permits being available for parking in either place. We have moved backwards on this we used to have one set of traffic wardens in forcing both car parks and street now we have two rival teams and are really think that what we need now is rather than the proposers of went through Cabinet which were a bit muddled and confused,

discounts for electric cars when you can't charge an electric car in the street and so on, I think we need a proper to end up parking strategy with the districts and boroughs and ourselves and we need to honour the prices that we told town centre residents they would expect to pay.”

Mr Bob Reeve spoke against the report and made the following statement:

I am here representing Concerned Rugbeians against Parking Permit Proposals. As such, I wish to place on record at the outset, that Rugby residents strongly object to the proposed increases to parking permit charges. After a residents meeting held on 16th March 2022, I wrote to David Ayton-Hill (who attended our meeting) highlighting 10 specific areas of contention / objections to the details/conclusions in the Working Group report. To date we are still awaiting a response to that letter.

I am also aware that Mr Tim Roberts a resident in Claremont Road has written a lengthy letter challenging the methodology used by the Working Group in order, it would appear, to simply justify the recommended pricing structure. Since our meeting on 16th March I have spent some considerable time reviewing the documentation that was provided to the working group, upon which it is assumed that they had to make their recommendations and I wish to make the following comments:

Your report refers to the on-street parking orders pursuant to sections 45 and 46 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984, I draw your attention to Sub section (3): In determining what parking places are to be designated under this section the authority concerned shall consider both the interests of traffic and those of the owners and occupiers of adjoining property,

Question: What consideration did the Working Group give to the fact that the parking permit scheme was originally encouraged by Rugby Borough Council to address the issue of visitors to the town or train commuters using the side streets to park free of charge, rather than using the train station parking facilities or town centre car parks. There was never any suggestion that the permit scheme was in in way providing an unfair parking advantage over other car users, as alluded to in the report. RBC encouraged residents to adopt the parking scheme in order to provide parking for the residents, where in most cases there is no alternative off-road parking at the rear of their predominantly terraced houses within the Benn Ward.

Your report also provides details of when a local authority may keep the money raised from parking charges, which in summary states: They may only use the surplus that results as a by-product of setting the level of charge that is necessary for “relieving or preventing congestion of traffic”.

The Act further states: Any charges must be based on evidence and reasoning as to why that level is necessary to relieve or prevent congestion of traffic. We therefore strongly object to the proposed increases for parking permits, when:

- a. no evidence has been provided to prove such measures will relieve or prevent congestion,
- b. the recommended permit cost uplift would result in a revenue increase of approximately £450,000, and
- c. it is also noted that there is already a substantial surplus sum reflected in Warwickshire County Council accounts.

We also contend that WCC would be acting illegally if the Cabinet endorses the recommendations made by the Cross-Party Working Group in sections 2 and 3 and further contend the recommendation at 2.12.

For the reasons already discussed, inflation alone cannot legally be used as a reason to increase parking permit charges.

In summary, there is an ever increasing concern by Rugby residents that the scope and level of parking permit charges appears to be driven more by the need for council to raise money, rather than by the proper management of parking, and despite the legal limitations that they must comply with and we are also particularly frustrated by the apparent lack of any proper management and scrutiny by the council regarding the quality of service that NSL is supposed to contractually provide. Thank you.

Mr Richard Harrington spoke against the Cabinet report and made the following statement:

Good afternoon, everybody. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to speak today. I represent the residents of Benn Ward as well as speaking on behalf on concerned Rugbeians Against Parking Proposals. I would like to talk about the cost of the permits and how this will affect residents in Rugby and Warwickshire. During my speech today, I will be asking questions which we are still waiting to be answered as well as explaining why residents are frustrated by the amount of parking permits have gone up by.

So firstly, why is the cost of the permit £63 to administer? This seems very high when Coventry is only charging £20 per permit and it's all electronic. This figure seems so high. On this figure you're saying this scheme costs around £850,000 a year to run. Also, when speaking to David Ayton-Hill this cost was worked out to £70 but when a consultant was employed to check this, they advised you £63. How much was the consultant to the taxpayers in Warwickshire? The biggest question is how much profit is NSL making out the council and residents of Warwickshire as part of the

Marson Group, the company made £271 million pounds. This is a scandal. This scheme is meant to protect residents against people parking outside their houses as we live near train stations or town centres. The Council made a surplus of £2 million last year. This need to be brought back into local control to like Rugby Borough and things like that because we are going to get the money back into local residents. Also, in the Rugby Observer in 2014, they said there was going to be a £500,000 saving for the council when NSL took over. Where has this money gone? Currently inflation is 6.1%, energy prices increased by 54%, food prices have gone up by 5.4%. There's people out there choosing between heating and eating.

The local council is supposed to represent our interests, to increase it by 100% for the first car and for the second cars and visitors 200%, I don't think anyone gets that sort of pay rise. It seems to council doesn't want to increase prices within inflation but just wants big figures instead. I know you have delayed the increases for 12 months which will help so thank you, but this increase needs to be scrapped altogether. Another issue to raise is the council's lack of communication and joined-up thinking. Last time you tried to increase it to 220% via sending out information out via postcards which people threw away. If it wasn't for the campaigning against the 'unfair stealth tax', you might have got increase through first time.

In conclusion price rise needs to be scrapped as you make £2 million profit from the whole scheme, why do you need any more out of residents? I feel there's too many questions unanswered. There's no transparency on prices and costs. It feels the council is out of touch with residents. So answer these questions today if possible, there needs to be more communication between residents and Council. It seems the Council on making the same mistakes as last time. Hopefully can make the right decision today for residents of Warwickshire by scrapping the price rise. Thank you for your opportunity speed say thank you for listening.

The Chair thanked the public speakers for their comments.

3. On-street Parking Management - Cross Party Working Group Recommendations

Councillor Sarah Feeney stated that she did not get an answer when she asked why it is £63 per resident, it was implied that some of it was because of enforcement but this was legally impossible. Without seeing the benefits of the financial data, it looked like the council would make £850,000 out of the scheme. She stated that this implied a lot of staffing for a simple scheme. EV (electric vehicle) charging points cannot be put on terraced streets so those residents cannot charge their car at home; the discount was being offered for something that could not be provided. The increase in pricing did not consider the residents' ability to pay and the areas that have parking permits were struggling to pay for fuel and food already. Councillor Feeney said that a lot of residents in her area had to own a car because there was no public transport to their places of work. The equality impact assessment did not consider residents paying more who earned less. There was not enough space on people's streets to park outside their house; all residents that she spoke to in her area complained about parking. She suggested that needs being met, and numbers should have been looked at before increasing permit prices. Residents stated that they did not want to be in the scheme if parking outside their house could not be guaranteed. Councillor Feeney concluded that as the permits were electric, residents were confused with how to issue their visitor permit to different visitors. The price increase should be explained before implemented.

Councillor Wallace Redford stated that the working group's recommendations were amended by Cabinet and the price increases were postponed for 12 months. As well as the statutory consultation responses on the permit changes, the additional issues which have been raised will

be considered in the report back to Cabinet for them to consider all the issues raised. He stated that if most residents on a street wanted to leave the parking permit scheme, then they could.

Councillor Jerry Roodhouse reminded that committee about his statement at March's Cabinet regarding the cost of living increasing. The working party was not a good one and did not address the issues presented like scrutinising the cost. The compulsory consultation will be part of a TRO (traffic regulation order) but this was not clear in the Cabinet meeting. He queried whether the issues raised at the Cabinet meeting would be implemented in the consultation. Councillor Roodhouse said that assurances would be needed, that the TRO consultation would not just be a 'blanket approach' to parking. HMO (houses of multiple occupation) residents had issues with finding a car parking space and there should be an appeal for people who could not pay the price increase. Councillor Roodhouse concluded that the price increases could have been done better to support vulnerable residents and still meet corporate objectives.

Councillor Izzi Seccombe stated that the parking permit system was first implemented in 2007 and there had only been one price increase in 2015. They always considered the costs and consequences that price increases had on people. Cabinet thought about the affordability of on-street parking and this was why it was delayed by 12 months. It was also delayed because of the cost of living increases and Covid-19's impact on the town centres. She continued that parking permits were brought in when residents requested them so they would have a place to park on or near their street. The electronic permit system is being introduced to improve accessibility so that residents and visitors could access the parking permit system when they need to. Cabinet approved their decision after agreeing on an extra consultation to look at issues not included in the TRO consultation. Councillor Seccombe noted that even with the increase, Warwickshire County Council's permit prices were low compared to other local authorities. She concluded that the permit price was to manage parking county-wide.

Councillor Tim Sinclair noted that the report stated that the £2 million surplus in the parking account came from other funding streams and not just on-street parking permits; the resident parking scheme was running at a loss. All working group members agreed that the permit scheme should cover itself, they debated how much the increase should be by. He stated that the EV discount was good as it promoted greener travel. The price increase would equal to 14p a day for car parking. The consultation would include residents to investigate the consequences for the price increase for them. Councillor Sinclair noted that the call-in requested a 'full parking survey' but he issued one in this own division looking into on-street parking, that cost him £6000 from his delegated budget and he was still waiting for the results after four months. Councillor Sinclair suggested that Councillor Feeney could use some of her delegated budget to do an on-street parking survey in her area instead of a county-wide one which could be a waste of time and money. He reiterated that Councillor Redford said that residents could leave the permit scheme if they wanted to and no evidence had been shown that residents would struggle with the electronic system for visitor permits.

Councillor Feeney stated that the call-in focused on the £850,000 that the permit scheme produced then the £2 million surplus. There had never been any documents that showed what the scheme costs; lines and signs had been put in as part of the cost, but the lines had not been repainted for a while. She reiterated that parking enforcement paid for itself and the point of parking permit schemes was so residents could park outside their house; however, residents were not getting what they were paying for. Councillor Feeney said that it was not clear what the

consultation will look at. The concern with the electronic system and visitor permits was aimed at residents who do not have access to the internet e.g. older people.

Councillor Jonathon Chilvers informed the committee that he advocated for a different pricing structure with a cheaper first permit and more expensive second one so on-street parking could be managed as this was a scarce resource. He agreed that there should be clarity on the cost of things in the scheme to provide clarity to members and the public.

The Chair noted that the working group asked for a breakdown of the figures which said that each permit was £63. The group agreed that the lower charge should be for the first permit and a higher charge for the second one. £50 annually equated to less than £1 a week.

In response to Councillor Sinclair, David Ayton-Hill stated that they were trying to make the spreadsheets from the consultant more presentable and understandable for members and the public to understand. This will be shared when done.

Councillor Chilvers said that the price per permit each came from: the appropriate part of NSL's costs plus Warwickshire County Council staff costs divided by the amount permits issued (roughly 13,000).

In response to Councillor Chilvers, Ian Marriott stated that any of the cost of enforcement could be considered that related to on-street parking under the resident parking scheme. Information regarding money going to NSL would need to be obtained for the scheme's accountant, but any costs expended by the council for the purpose of enforcement could be taken in when calculating the charges that can be recovered.

Following a supplementary from Councillor Chilvers, David Ayton-Hill That some assumptions with the amount of enforcement needed would need to be made because of the different sizes of permit areas. Work was being done to show how these assumptions were made.

In response to Councillor Roodhouse, Ian Marriott stated that there was no restriction in the legislation on what matters can be raised by consultees during that statutory consultation. Therefore, it could cover anything relevant to the proposals in the report and in the meeting, excluding the opt-out of the scheme which would need to be dealt with on a case-by-case basis as the relevant district/borough would need to remove the order on street. This will include the key worker/EV discounts, HMO parking, the removal of the third permit, the impact on town centres etc. Consultees could say that the evidence supporting the proposals needed to be improved/examined and all of this would have to be considered by Cabinet when they consider the consultations outcome.

Following a supplementary from Councillor Roodhouse, Ian Marriott stated that the council could voluntarily choose to widen the scope of the consultation so it could invite members of the public to request to opt-out option.

In response to Councillor Sinclair, Ian Marriott confirmed that the cost breakdown should only include what the council pays NSL.

The Chair noted that most resident parking schemes were brought in at the request of residents to manage parking on their street. Too many residents opting out could mean that more cars would be parking in street that they do not live in/near.

Councillor Feeney said that her residents only saw NSL on weekends and they only checked yellow lines and disabled parking spaces. She had been requesting the breakdown of figures in

the scheme since late February. Her residents said that just advertising the consultation the in the paper would not be enough. She reiterated her residents' frustrations with the scheme.

In response to the Chair, Jon Rollinson said that all statutory consultations get advertised in local papers, the local library, on the street itself and on the council website. Sometime there were letter drops but this was not compulsory.

In response to Councillor Feeney, Jon Rollinson confirmed that translations of these notices were available in other languages for non-English speakers.

Councillor Richard Baxter-Payne reiterated that there would be no increase in charges for 12 months and a consultation would be done so residents could opt out of the scheme if they wanted.

In response to Councillor Baxter-Payne, Ian Marriott stated that if a street opted out of the resident parking scheme, officers would investigate the request. If there was local support, then an individual revocation order would be made for that street which would then go through a statutory consultation process. At the end of this the Portfolio Holder or Cabinet would grant it or not. Anybody requesting an opt-out would only start a process of an investigation order. However, residents could request this at any time.

In response to the Chair, Councillor Redford informed the committee that over 1000 care workers receive free parking permits from Warwickshire County Council and expanding this to other additional other NHS key workers was a matter for discussion. Central government recently removed the entitlement to free parking for NHS workers in hospitals.

In response to Councillor Sinclair, the Chair said that recommendations or observations could go back to Cabinet or the committee could take no further action with or without the committee sharing the comments made in this meeting.

Councillor Sinclair stated that the committee looked at every aspect of the call-in and the delay on implementing these prices by 12 months had been welcomed by everyone. All the other recommendations made would be part of the public consultation.

Councillor Sinclair formally proposed that the Communities OSC:

1. Welcome the delay of resident permit prices increasing by 12 months
2. Welcome that the other points raised in the meeting would be addressed as part of the public consultation
3. Propose no further actions because of the reasons stated in the first and second recommendations

This was seconded by Councillor Jack Kennaugh.

The Chair proposed that the comments made in the meeting be passed onto Cabinet for their information and considerations.

Six members voted for this, two voted against and one abstained.

Resolved

That the Communities OSC:

1. Welcome the delay of resident permit prices increasing by 12 months

2. Welcome that the other points raised in the meeting would be addressed as part of the public consultation
3. Propose no further actions because of the reasons stated in the first and second recommendations
4. That the comments made in the meeting be passed onto Cabinet for their information and consideration

The Chair stated that they tried to represent all resident's needs

The meeting rose at 15:12

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Chair