

DECISION REVIEW COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 10 August 2021

Present:

Councillor	P Hayes (Chair)	
Councillors	KJ Williams	P Cleary
	K Cannon	S Frost (In place of S Jones)
	T Anderson	K Greaney (In place of Joe Walsh)
	A Gardner	J Robinson (In place of I Williams)
	C Carubia	L Rennie (In place of T Cox)

4 MEMBERS' CODE OF CONDUCT - DECLARATIONS OF INTERESTS

Members were asked to consider whether they had any disclosable pecuniary interests and/or any other relevant interest in connection with any item(s) on this agenda and, if so, to declare them and state what they were.

No declarations were made.

5 DECISION REVIEW PROCEDURE

The Chair outlined the Decision Review Procedure to the Committee. The Committee was reminded of the process that had taken place at its previous meeting on 29 July 2021, where it had heard from the two lead signatories who had submitted notices of referral for review, the decision makers and a number of other witnesses. The previous meeting ended at the point where the Committee had started to hear from officers, and the Chair therefore outlined that the Committee would continue from this point in the review process.

6 DECISION REVIEWED ITEM - CAR PARKING CHARGING OPTIONS

Following on from the previous meeting, members were invited to ask questions of the officers involved. The Director of Resources was asked to introduce the financial statement again, where it was outlined that the Council needed to ensure it could set a balanced budget without calling upon the capitalisation directive whilst also demonstrating its long-term sustainability. It was also reported that the budget proposals were agreed unanimously at Council on 1 March 2021, and that in the event car parking charges were not implemented at all in the current financial year, the Policy and Resources

Committee would need to recommend what other areas of the Council could achieve the £1m target. The Director of Resources was therefore of the view that the decision should be implemented as agreed.

A number of questions were raised by members of the Committee. It was queried whether the Council was running a deficit on car parking charges, where it was confirmed that the cost of delivering car parking including enforcement and other associated costs was approximately £2.8m, with the income generated in 2019 being £1.8m, with the shortfall having been subsidised from other budgets to date therefore the proposal was to standardise parking charges intended to generate an additional £1m to make up the shortfall.

A further concern was raised in relation to the displacement of vehicles and the potential impact on residential areas close to shops. Officers reported that there was a Traffic Regulation Order process with statutory consultation to be undertaken, and work would be completed to determine the appropriate mitigations to deal with displacement. Members sought further information on what the mitigation may be and were informed it would depend on the exact location but could include residents parking schemes. Further clarity was also sought on the consultation process, where the Director of Law and Governance informed the Committee that the standardisation of existing charges required no formal consultation, but the introduction of new measures would be subject to a Traffic Regulation Order and a mandatory consultation process with the responses to be reported back to the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee before implementation.

The Committee discussed the timescales associated with Traffic Regulation Order consultation, where officers confirmed that without objections it would take 3-6 months, with objections adding a further 3 months onto the process. Members therefore queried whether the original timescale would have allowed the £1m to be generated in the 2021-22 financial year in any case. In response, the Director of Resources informed members that it was acknowledged that there would be a delay as part of the Traffic Regulation Order process, but that there were temporary mitigations in the 2021-22 budget through vacancies to mitigate that initial delay, however any further delay would result in the need for further savings proposals to be considered by the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee.

Lead Signatory Summary – Councillor Simon Mountney

Councillor Simon Mountney summed up his contribution. He raised concerns with the comments from Councillor Chris Cooke at the previous meeting relating to displacement of parking and the impact of businesses and argued that the decision to increase car parking charges would result in businesses closing and people losing employment which would impact the Council's revenue. He made the case that people should be able to park relatively close

to their home and that the decision would result in that being taken away from them. It was noted that the discussion was largely based around cost and that the value to residents and businesses should have been considered more widely. He argued that the decision would not generate the revenue required and that if the Council was currently operating car parking services at a loss, an increase to the number of fee-paying parking would result in extra losses, and therefore suggested the decision should be referred back for further consideration.

Lead Signatory Summary – Councillor Phil Gilchrist

In the absence of Councillor Phil Gilchrist, a statement was read out on his behalf. The statement outlined the potential impact car parking charges would have on Bromborough village with the ease of access to the nearby retail park for those taking the journey by car. The statement also summarised the accounts of the witnesses from the earlier meeting, detailing accounts of a reduction in the number of people using the local car park in Bromborough and the consequential displacement of parking. The statement referred to the study detailed within the report 'Assessing the Impact of Car Parking Charges on Town Centre Footfall', which encouraged Local Authorities to engage with key stakeholders involved in the local economy when changing their car parking charges including business owners, shoppers and Council Members. The study focused on five towns in Wales and Councillor Gilchrist brought attention to the varied car parking charges in Ruthin, one of the towns from the study. Further attention was brought to Cheshire West and Chester's parking strategy, where charges in nearby Ellesmere Port are in place in the town centre but not in Neston, Little Sutton or Great Sutton. The statement urged the Committee to not only consider what is practicable and achievable, but also take full account of the unintended consequence of the decision to increase car parking charges.

Decision Maker Summary – Councillor Chris Cooke

Councillor Chris Cooke then provided his summary. He outlined that the Council was facing a budgetary crisis and detailed the financial support agreed by Central Government based on the condition that the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government was satisfied that the Council was effectively led and financially responsible. He outlined that the report produced by Council Officers provided all of the justification needed for the decision to increase and extend car parking charges. Councillor Cooke outlined that alternative ways of raising the £1m were explored and that none had then or since been found. It was reported that failure to extend and increased car parking charges would result in the Council having to continue to subsidise the cost from other budgets. He argued that the consequence of this was less well off tax payers and those without cars effectively paying for services they don't use, and that introducing charges across the borough would address the imbalance. It was further outlined that Councillor Cooke

was of the view that the majority of car owners accepted the reasons for the increased charges, and that the increase in charges would have the potential to improve air quality, road safety and encourage people to exercise more.

Decision Maker Summary – Councillor Liz Grey

Councillor Liz Grey then provided her summary. She also outlined the financial situation the Council was in and made the case that the Council could not set parking charges to raise revenue for other services but could stop subsidising free parking and protect other services. It was outlined that there was no genuine data that parking charges have an adverse impact on local businesses, but that residents' concerns were appreciated and assurances were given that these concerns would be listened to and acted upon. Councillor Grey outlined that evidence suggested parking charges could manage the number of people travelling by car and could encourage active travel which would have a benefit of businesses and would assist to tackle the Environment and Climate Emergency and health crisis caused by lack of activity. It was reported that the budget alternatives to increased car parking charges were unwelcomed by members, and that the call-in had added financial pressure on Council services through loss of income. Councillor Grey further argued that the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government would take a dim view on lending the Council money if it refused to raise revenue through legitimate means.

Committee Discussion

Following the summing up of the lead signatories and decision makers, the Chair invited the Committee to consider and discuss the decision. Concerns were raised relating to the preparedness for additional costs for the enforcement of additional car parking charges and the financial impact of the potential extended timescale for the new charges to come into force due to the Traffic Regulation Order process. It was raised by another member that the Council was required to set a balanced budget and that objections to the principle of raising £1m in car parking charges should have been raised during the budget setting process.

Further discussions took place in relation to the reference to Cheshire West and Chester Council as raised by Cllr Phil Gilchrist as the lead signatory, where it was suggested that their analysis showed that parking charges and footfall were weakly related. In response, it was highlighted that increased car parking charges in Wirral would impact village centres as opposed to towns and cities as within Cheshire West and Chester. It was argued that the increased car parking charges would encourage people to walk or use public transport, thus addressing issues relating to inactivity and carbon emissions. In response it was queried how the Council could raise money from the proposal if it led to less parking. The impact on businesses was raised and evidence from an Environmental Economist as reported at the previous

meeting was relayed, where it was reported that evidence suggests car parking charges creates a better turnover of spaces as well as that those walking were likely to spend more.

Committee Decision

The Chair brought the discussion to a close and invited the Committee to move a proposal.

It was moved by Councillor Tom Anderson, seconded by Councillor Lesley Rennie, that –

‘After hearing the significant and detrimental impact the introduction of new car parking charges will have on local residents and business, and the distinct lack of preparation and consultation, committee resolves to defer all options back to Council, for the introduction of charges at 22 locations across the borough and 5 separate coastal areas and the standardisation of charges.’

The motion was put and lost (5:6).

It was moved by Councillor Kate, seconded by Councillor Samantha Frost, that –

‘The Decision Review Committee recognises that the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee was making the decision as a result of an instruction from within the Council’s budget. This was agreed unanimously by all members and sought to find a means to reduce the subsidy to car parking accounts to provide the £1m to this year and following years finances. This Committee has not heard any viable alternative during the process as to how that money could be found in any other way, other than implementing the original decision. This Committee feels that all other options it has explored would result in doing greater and long term financial harm to the Council and its communities. This Committee has also heard the fears and support of members of the public, businesses and voluntary groups regarding how they feel the decision will negatively impact them, and we hope that some of those initial fears have been alleviated by our officers and within the debate of this review committee. We also seek to assure residents that the consultation will be an essential part of establishing new car parking orders before final decisions are made. This Committee therefore resolves that the decision of the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee on car parking charges is implemented, but with the following recommendations:

- That all consultation on making new Traffic Regulation Orders for introducing car parking charges is reported back to the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee before being implemented; and

- That the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee takes into consideration all of the comments and emails we have received to this Committee as part of the consultation response.'

The meeting was adjourned at 7.58pm.

The meeting resumed at 8.08pm.

The motion was then put and carried (7:4).

A further motion was moved by Councillor Tom Anderson, seconded by Councillor Lesley Rennie, that –

'In light of the decision, this committee recommends that Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee considers implementing the first twenty minutes free in all of our high street car parks, and consider implementing a free pass for volunteers.'

The meeting was adjourned at 8.20pm.

The meeting resumed at 8.25pm.

The Committee discussed the motion and sought the views of officers on the feasibility of the proposal, where it was reported that a period of free parking would be difficult to enforce but that the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee could still consider it.

The motion was put and lost (5:6).