

CABINET

6 NOVEMBER 2014

91 CAR PARKING SCRUTINY REVIEW

Councillor Stuart Whittingham introduced a report by the Chair of the Car Parking Scrutiny Panel that provided background information on the report of the Car Parking Scrutiny Review. The report had been approved by the Policy and Performance - Regeneration and Environment Committee and referred to the Cabinet for further consideration. Attached to the report was the Car Parking Scrutiny Review Final Report, dated September 2014.

The Cabinet noted that a Task and Finish Scrutiny Panel, consisting of seven Members, had been set up in November 2013. The membership of the Panel was Councillors Paul Doughty (Chair), Jim Crabtree, Anita Leech, Jerry Williams, Leah Fraser, Steve Williams and Alan Brighthouse.

Councillor Paul Doughty was in attendance at the meeting and guided the Cabinet through the Panel's Final Report setting out the key elements, answering Members' questions and informing that he considered that the Panel had provided broad recommendations that would, hopefully, help the Cabinet to agree a progressive and convenient Car Parking Strategy as the outcome of the review had been to inform a coherent; evidence based Car Parking Strategy that considered revenue, users' requirements and the local economy.

It was reported that the review had been conducted over a number of meetings with the assistance of appropriate Council officers between January and July 2014. Information had been provided as requested by the Review Panel to allow detailed question and answer sessions to be carried out. The Panel had also considered town centre economic viability and the effect that the harmonisation of charges had on usage and the policies of similar sized authorities with similar competition from larger commercial and retail offers.

The Final Report had been presented to the meeting of the Policy and Performance - Regeneration and Environment Committee held on 22 September 2014 and the Cabinet had regard to the outcome which was detailed in the report (Minute No. 13 refers) as follows:

'At the invitation of the Chair, Councillor Paul Doughty introduced the Car Parking Scrutiny Review Final Report, which had been undertaken by a Task and Finish Panel that he had chaired and which also comprised Councillors Alan Brighthouse, Jim Crabtree, Leah Fraser, Anita Leech, Jerry Williams and Steve Williams.

The detailed report set out the context for the Review and its scope and methodology. It recognised that the pressures on retail and commercial centres were many and varied and that a Car Parking Strategy should be supportive of the economic sustainability of each of the centres. Following research and discussion of the approach taken by other, similar local authorities, the Panel

had proposed a number of 'Objectives' and 'Principles' to provide a guiding framework for any future Strategy and considered that they were in full harmony with the Council's Corporate Plan. Councillor Paul Doughty highlighted the Panel's findings, which had resulted in a range of recommendations for consideration, related to pricing, technology and demand based decision making. It had not been the role of the Panel to formulate a Car Parking Strategy but it was hoped that its recommendations would provide a suitable framework. Councillor Doughty thanked the Members of the Panel and the support officers for the considerable work they had undertaken. He also drew the attention of the Committee to a minor error in Table 1.2 of the Review and circulated a correction.

A Member referred to considerable increased parking charges, particularly in Heswall and West Kirby and expressed a view that such increases were detrimental to the local economy. He also commented that it was not acceptable to charge Medical Centre patients for parking at West Kirby Concourse. As locations for increased parking charges were not specified in the Review, he could not support its recommendations.

The Chair indicated that the Review made no such recommendation and anticipated that the detail of any future Car Parking Strategy prepared by officers would be subject to consultation. He commented also that there had been cross party involvement in the Panel and he commended its recommendations.

Resolved (12:2) –

- (1) That the Scrutiny Review and its recommendations be endorsed.**
- (2) That the Review be referred to the Cabinet for approval.'**

Councillor Stuart Whittingham thanked the Car Parking Scrutiny Review Panel and everyone involved in the Review for the Final Report. He proposed that, because of the potential budget implications, that the Cabinet note the content of the Car Parking Scrutiny Review Final Report and it be considered in detail at the same time as the Cabinet considered the Council's budget options.

Councillor Phil Davies informed the Cabinet that he considered it refreshing to see the recommendations that the Scrutiny Review Panel had made and he welcomed the Panel's proposals around looking at demand and the viability of shopping centres.

Councillor Stuart Whittingham addressed the Cabinet about the present cost of living crisis because wages had not kept up with prices and that, coupled with the rise in zero hours contracts, meant that many people were not feeling the benefits of any recovery in the economy. It was noted that this cost of living crisis was also having an adverse effect on local businesses in Wirral's shopping areas.

As an authority the Council was committed to supporting local town centres in its administrative area and Members were very aware that Christmas was an important

time for both families and local businesses. With this in mind, Councillor Stuart Whittingham requested the Cabinet to support the following recommendations to the Council as they constituted a change to the Council's budgetary framework:

'That

- (1) from Tuesday, 9 December until the end of December 2014 the Council cuts the cost of parking in Council owned car parks by introducing free parking after 3pm;
- (2) on Boxing Day and New Year's Day the Council provides free all day parking in Council owned car parks; and
- (3) Officers be instructed to evaluate any change in usage in Council owned car parks compared to previous years.

Councillor Whittingham told the Cabinet that he believed that if these recommendations were agreed by the Council, they would go some way to easing the burden on families and help support local businesses at this important time of year. The financial impact could be met from existing approved budgets.

Councillor Phil Davies reported that if the Council was to agree these recommendations, residents and local businesses would welcome the announcement. The proposals provided a real lifeline to some businesses that were operating on the margin

RESOLVED: That

- (1) the Cabinet will give consideration to the recommendations set out in Car Parking Scrutiny Review Final Report at the same time as it gives consideration to the Council's budget options for 2014/15; and**
- (2) Council be RECOMMENDED to agree: That**
 - (a) from Tuesday, 9 December until the end of December 2014 the Council cuts the cost of parking in Council owned car parks by introducing free parking after 3pm;**
 - (b) on Boxing Day and New Year's Day the Council provide free all day parking in Council owned car parks; and**
 - (c) officers be instructed to evaluate any change in usage in Council owned car parks over the time periods set out in (a) and (b) above, compared to previous years.**