



## ENVIRONMENT, CLIMATE EMERGENCY AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

Thursday, 3 December 2020

<b>REPORT TITLE:</b>	<b>CAR PARKING CHARGES - MEMBERS WORKING GROUP</b>
<b>REPORT OF:</b>	<b>DIRECTOR OF NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES</b>

### REPORT SUMMARY

A report was brought to the Policy and Resources Committee on the 7<sup>th</sup> October 2020 by the Director of Neighbourhood Services. This report 'car parking charges options' informed Members of considerations for the reintroduction of the current car parking charges in Wirral in 2020/21 and alternative options for parking charges in 2021/22 and beyond.

Several Members of the Policy and Resources Committee expressed concern at the prospect of re-introducing charges at a time when Covid cases were once again on the rise and many local businesses were struggling.

On a motion carried by the Policy & Resources Committee, it was resolved (16:1) that:

*(1) this Policy and Resources Committee agrees not to re-introduce car parking charges at this time; and*

*(2) authorisation is given to the Director of Neighbourhoods to consult on the implications of the medium to long term options detailed in Appendix 1 of the report and a further report is brought to the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee, as a matter of urgency, in the new year, with a particular emphasis on social inequalities and that in the meantime officers seek to find compensatory savings and that business traders are also consulted.*

As a result of this the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee appointed a working group to consider these options and inform the report.

### RECOMMENDATION/S

The Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee is asked to;

1. Note the findings of the Working Group attached as appendix 1 of this report and agree to the recommendations:

## Recommendations:

- Members support the upcoming transport strategy and recommend that any future transport strategy consults with Members, businesses, communities to ensure that it is environmentally, economically, and socially sustainable.
- The panel also recommends that a comprehensive review and survey is undertaken in Wirral as to the local impact of car parking charges on footfall and spend in retail areas and the high street.
- Members considered the request made by the Policy and Resource committee to consider the options attached in appendix 1 of this report. After much debate, Members considered the following options were acceptable and wish to submit them to the Policy and Resource Committee for consideration.

### **Option 4 (re-introduce parking charges immediately at all locations)**

Members understood that there would be no reintroduction of car parking charges until early 2021. They acknowledge the need to support local retailers during the second lockdown and in the run up to Christmas. Five of the six working group Members wished to put forward Option 4 to be considered alongside any subsequent reviews or studies.

Two of the five Members requested an additional caveat that Country Parks remain free until after lockdown due to the perceived health and wellbeing implications. Concerns were raised that introducing car parking charges in Country Parks would limit their accessibility to low-income car owners, especially during COVID-19 when more people are facing financial pressures. One Member also raised the point that charging for parking in country parks did not reduce visitor number and that the income generated would help with repairs and maintenance of the parks.

### **Option 6 (re-introduce charges at long-stay and on-street and County parks but not 'shoppers' car parks)**

One Member of the working group also wished to put forward option 6 for consideration. This Member was satisfied with this option in its entirety, however other working group members again raised concerns about re-introduction of car parking charges in Country Parks, for the reasons stated above and because of the environmental impact.

2. Refer this report to the Policy and Resources Committee for their consideration.

## **SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **1.0 REASON/S FOR RECOMMENDATION/S**

- 1.1 In April 2020 the decision was made to suspend all the Council's parking charges, at on street and off-street plus country parks locations. In October 2020, the Policy and Resources Committee voted to extend this suspension until early 2021 and requested the Director for Neighbourhood Services to bring a further report to the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee. The Director for Neighbourhood Services agreed to consult on the options through a cross-party working group formed by the Environment, Climate Emergency and Transport Committee.
- 1.2 The working group met on two occasions in November 2020 and agreed the recommendations detailed in Appendix 1 of this report with support from officers and external stakeholders. All options were considered by the working group and Members agreed to forward two for further consideration.

### **2.0 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 2.1 Members of the panel considered all the options presented in appendix 2. Whilst individual members had different opinions and preferences, the options and recommendations agreed in appendix 1 were agreed as a panel to be the most acceptable.

### **3.0 BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 3.1 A decision was made by chief officers through the Covid-19 emergency governance structure in April 2020 to suspend all the council's parking charges, at on-street and off-street plus country parks locations. The decision was proposed to be kept under review. This decision was taken to assist residents and key workers in parking for free when accessing shops for food and essentials, to help those businesses that were able to remain open, and to encourage the public to use parks and open spaces, in line with government guidance at the time. It also reduced the infection risks of people handling coins and pressing buttons on parking machines at a time of rapidly rising infection levels and travel being limited to essential journeys only.
- 3.2 Lockdown restrictions were relaxed and over the summer of 2020 there were large gatherings of people at Wirral's parks and open spaces and coastal locations, including overnight stopping, particularly during periods of good weather. However, in the autumn of 2020 a further spike of infections led to a Tier 3 lockdown in the Liverpool City Region, followed by further national lockdown. As such, this review and recommendations have been made with consideration to the rapidly changing COVID-19 situation and additional pressures placed on the Council and Local Businesses.

## **4.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 The suspension of car parking charges (and parking enforcement) across the whole of the borough has resulted in a loss of income of approximately £47,500 per week / £200,000 per month on average based on pre COVID existing use, (£24,500 from car parks, £7,500 from on-street and £3,500 from country parks and £12,000 from loss Penalty Charge Notice revenue per week).
- 4.2 The operational running costs for maintaining car parking facilities including rates, maintenance, servicing, and enforcement is approximately £800,000 per annum.
- 4.3 The COVID19 restrictions/guidance from Government from March 2020 led to a drop in travel and, by extension, parking requirements, therefore the loss of income directly relating to the suspension of parking charges is limited.
- 4.4 However, as the COVID19 restrictions are relaxed car park usage is increasing, particularly at the country parks, as residents make the most of being able to undertake non-essential journeys.
- 4.5 Suspending car parking charges for the whole of this 2020/2021 financial year would result in budget pressure of £1.9 million deficit. Parking enforcement resumed in full on street from June and is expected to bring in £300 - 350k of Penalty Charge Notice income for 2020/2021.
- 4.6 The budget to account for any loss of income, which cannot be covered by the COVID19 Emergency fund received from Government, will be agreed by relevant Committee and the Policy and Resources Committee in conjunction with the Director of Neighbourhood Services as part of the budget setting process.
- 4.7 Several of the car parking charges options as tabulated in Appendix 2 could minimise the loss of income or possibly increase income in future years.

## **5.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 The Council have powers under sections 32 and 35 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act (RTRA), 1984 to charge parking fees. Section 122 imposes a general duty on local authorities exercising functions under the RTRA 1984 to "secure the expeditious, convenient and safe movement of vehicular and other traffic (including pedestrians) and the provision of suitable and adequate parking on and off the highway...".

Charges should be fixed to cover the cost of maintaining the facilities and repaying any debt incurred for their construction, whilst budgeting for a modest surplus to allow for unforeseen expenses does not render the scheme unlawful, charges cannot be fixed for the purpose of raising money for non-car parking related purposes. Parking enforcement has been scaled back to meet the reduced demands. When parking charges are reintroduced, then parking enforcement will be stepped up.

## **6.0 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS: STAFFING, ICT AND ASSETS**

6.1 This report is for information only and does not contain any direct resource implications.

## **7.0 RELEVANT RISKS**

- 7.1 The relevant risks documented below and, in the report, 'car parking charges options' were considered by members of the panel, with particular emphasis on the risks faced by local businesses, equality implications and environment and climate emergency.
- 7.2 By continuing to offer free parking in all areas this may encourage large groups of people to travel and gather at Wirral's public parks & open spaces and shops which may lead to an increased risk of the spread of the virus.
- 7.3 Not continuing to offer free parking for the foreseeable future may have a negative impact on some local businesses in their recovery after lockdown and on those local people making use of Wirral's open spaces.
- 7.4 Effective management of car parking spaces through the use of charges can ensure a turn-over of parking and manage the supply of parking spaces.
- 7.5 Prioritising car drivers by providing free car parking raises equality issues – the council does not provide free travel by bus and in some cases does not provide cycle parking. There are a considerable number of Wirral residents without access to a car; this may be through choice but, assuming car owners may generally have higher incomes, free parking may be seen as subsidising those who are already better off and unfairly penalising more vulnerable residents and communities.
- 7.6 The Wirral Strategic Regeneration Framework sets out the priorities and challenges for economic growth in the borough, to help guide and proactively drive investment and activity across Wirral to deliver the Council's ambitions for the local economy. It has a strong focus on sustainability; continued free parking could have a negative impact on health and climate change issues by encouraging car use instead of active travel. Increasing parking tariffs in future could encourage active travel or sustainable transport modes.

## **8.0 ENGAGEMENT/CONSULTATION**

- 8.1 Wirral Chamber of Commerce were invited to represent Wirral Businesses as part of this review. Members of the panel also requested a representative from Wirral Environment Network to attend to give their perspective. It should also be noted that further investigation of options selected for a longer-term car parking strategy will include public consultation. The guiding principles for a fair consultation can be summarised as follows.
- It should be at a time when proposals are at a formative stage.
  - Must include sufficient reasons for particular proposals to allow those consulted to give intelligent consideration and an intelligent response.

- Those consulted should be made aware of the factors that are of decisive relevance to the decision.
- Adequate time should be given for consideration and response.

The product of the consultation should be conscientiously taken into account by the decision makers in finalising their statutory proposals/ when the ultimate decision is taken.

## 9.0 EQUALITY IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Wirral Council has a legal requirement to make sure its policies, and the way it carries out its work, do not discriminate against anyone. An Equality Impact Assessment is a tool to help council services identify steps they can take to ensure equality for anyone who might be affected by a particular policy, decision or activity.
- 9.2 The reintroduction of car parking charges has been subject to an equality impact assessment. As indicated in Appendix 2 a full EIA will be required for each of the options once agreed.

## 10.0 ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The link between poor air quality, the climate emergency and emissions from vehicles is widely accepted (add more here). An effective car parking charging regime encouraging modal shift away from the private motor car towards cleaner, more sustainable modes of transport will have a positive environmental and climate change impact. Any car parking and transport strategy needs to link to the council's Climate Emergency Declaration and Active Travel agendas.

If parking charges are reintroduced or increased in future as per several of the options contained within this report, this may reduce emissions of green-house gases.

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## APPENDICES

Appendix 1 - Working Group Report  
 Appendix 2 - Car Parking Options

## BACKGROUND PAPERS

Policy and Resources Committee, 'car parking charges options – 7<sup>th</sup> October 2020

## SUBJECT HISTORY (last 3 years)

Council Meeting	Date
Policy and Resources Committee	7 <sup>th</sup> October 2020

**Environment, Climate Emergency and Committee**

**22<sup>nd</sup> October 2020**