

Report to: Communities Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting: 25th November 2013

Lead Members: Lead Member for Public Realm and Council Leader

Report Authors: Head of Highways and Environmental Services &
Head of Housing and Community Development

Title: Parking Enforcement Strategy and its impact on Economic Development

1. What is the report about?

To examine the Council's Parking Enforcement Strategy and its impact upon the local economy.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

Communities Scrutiny Committee has requested a paper to examine how parking enforcement strategy affects the local economy and to identify any shortcomings in the strategy which may reduce the Council's effectiveness in delivering its corporate priority to develop the local economy.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That the Committee:

- 3.1. Provides observations and supports the development of a new parking policy jointly between Highways and Economic & Business Development; and
- 3.2. endorses the proposal to carry out a scoping exercise to fully evaluate the detailed requirements for parking and traffic reviews in all towns. This will enable reasonably accurate cost estimates to be produced which would then be reported back to Scrutiny before proceeding with the reviews.

4. Report details

4.1. Introduction

The first step when considering parking provision is to consider parking policy. The parking policy needs to reflect what is trying to be achieved within the bigger picture of transport, land use and economic development policies. For example, in larger cities the aim might be to reduce the amount of traffic entering the city centre.

Within smaller towns and rural areas, such as Denbighshire, parking policies are usually aimed at maximising the use of available parking spaces to benefit residents and the local economy. This aim, however, still has to be balanced against the need to keep traffic flowing and to not compromise road safety.

Once a parking policy is decided it will be necessary to develop a plan to achieve the policy aims which will consider factors such as the availability and pricing of off-street car parking spaces; policy for on-street parking restrictions and enforcement strategy.

4.2 Background

The Council's Parking Policy was written in 1996; a copy is provided in Appendix 1.

Parking enforcement was decriminalised in Denbighshire in 2004. Prior to this, enforcement was carried out by the Police. In practice, the Police enforcement was carried out by one part-time traffic warden who served the whole County. This traffic warden retired in 2001 and wasn't replaced. The reality of the pre-2004 situation was that on-street parking restrictions were largely ignored because of the lack of enforcement. This caused issues for road safety and reduced parking for shoppers as short stay parking bays were often occupied by the same vehicle all day. This situation didn't apply in off-street car parks which were enforced by council-employed Parking Attendants.

It was because of these issues that the Council took the decision to decriminalise parking enforcement, becoming the first in Wales to do so. Since then, the majority of Welsh unitary authorities have also chosen to Decriminalise Parking Enforcement.

4.3 Enforcement

The Council employs 7 full-time Civil Enforcement Officers and 2 relief staff. A total of 8,894 Penalty Charge Notices were issued in 2012. This number has decreased steadily since 2006. This decrease can be explained by improved compliance amongst drivers. More detail on enforcement activities can be found in Appendix 2.

4.4 Impact of parking policy and strategies on the local economy

Unlike other local authorities, Denbighshire Parking Policy has not aimed to limit parking spaces or set high tariffs specifically to discourage car usage and the policy of restricting town centre on street parking to short-stay combined with effective enforcement allows more productive use to be made of the spaces.

The variables that influence the success of a town centre are many and trying to find a conclusive link between car parking and town centre prosperity is extremely difficult; the broader retail, commercial, leisure and/or tourism offer have the greatest impact on a towns competitiveness. However, all other things being equal, parking will clearly have an effect and where the economy is weak parking should support the strategy for the town centre and be economically priced.

Recent reviews on how to revitalise high streets nationally have made recommendations about parking. The Portas Report (2011) included a key recommendation for local authorities to provide free controlled parking schemes and Bill Grimsey's review of the future of the high street (2013) argued that councils need to provide free high street parking (for two hours) and freeze car park charges for at least a year. See Appendix 3 for a pricing scheme introduced by Altrincham in Trafford.

Where both the Grimsey and Portas reports are clear is that a more coordinated approach is needed. There is some anecdotal evidence that changes to on street parking have affected retail trade but there is a lack of robust evidence to support this and the view that pricing policy is having a damaging impact on the local economy.

That said, carrying out a Denbighshire wide traffic management and parking review will provide an opportunity to assess where current highways arrangements and parking may be impacting on town centres and provide the Authority with robust evidence to inform decision making. Please see Appendix 4 for further details about these proposed reviews.

The review of the Council's parking policy to determine the priority for on street parking as opposed to utilising existing car parking provision can be taken forward quite quickly by officers and should take roughly 3 months to complete. This is work that can, therefore, be undertaken within existing budgets.

With the exception of the pricing review, the other reviews outlined above could potentially be quite significant pieces of work in terms of cost and the length of time taken to complete them. It is suggested that before a decision is made to proceed with these reviews, some further work is undertaken to fully scope what is required from the reviews and to gain a fairly accurate estimate of the likely costs. It is suggested that a further report is taken to Scrutiny once these cost estimates are available before a decision is taken to go ahead with the reviews.

It is worth noting that a review of parking capacity is due to start shortly in Llangollen. This review will be predominantly looking at parking supply, rather than any highway network issues. This review will also help to inform the cost estimates for the County wide work. The Llangollen parking review is being funded from the traffic element of the Highways block capital budget however there will be insufficient budget to undertake a similar exercise for all Towns therefore other funding sources will need to be identified to take this work forward once the costs are known.

In addition to the data collected by Highways, agreeing mechanisms for measuring the economic impact of any initiatives on the Town Centre will be fundamental to any changes in the parking policy / regime. Suggested indicators include:

- Footfall – this will require investment in footfall cameras.
- Credit card spend data – this can be bought in.
- Retail vacancy rates.

Further work in relation to the costs and strategy for measuring the economic impact of such initiatives shall be encapsulated in a report to Scrutiny Committee.

The emerging Area Plans shall also provide important feedback on the priorities of members relating to car parking particularly in relation to Town Centres.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

Addressing Local Transport Infrastructure and barriers to growth is a key priority within the Economic and Community Ambition Delivery Plan and Developing the Local Economy is a corporate priority. Parking policy has the potential to affect the

viability of the local economy and it is therefore important that the new policy is drafted jointly by Economic & Business Development and the Highways and Environmental teams to develop a joined up and integrated approach to service development which reflects the strategic priorities of both service areas.

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

The review of the existing parking policy and drafting of a new policy will be carried out by existing staff within Highways and Economic Development. It will, therefore, be undertaken within existing budgets.

The likely cost of reviewing parking capacity, on street restrictions and network performance in all towns will vary significantly depending upon the extent of the reviews undertaken. It is, therefore, proposed to first undertake a scoping exercise to determine what is required and to gain an accurate idea of costs. These costs would then be reported back to Scrutiny before any commitment was made to proceed.

The recommendations of the reviews may have implications for the Planning Department and, therefore, Planning colleagues will be consulted with.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.

An Equality Impact Assessment will be carried out for the new parking policy.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

A previous briefing note was sent to the Scrutiny Committee Chairs.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

The costs of the initial work should be contained within existing budgets. Any further work needs to be costed and a budget identified before any decisions can be taken.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

There is a risk that should the recommended reviews and development of a new parking policy fail to take place then existing arrangements shall become increasingly unfit for purpose and have a damaging impact upon the local economy.

11. Power to make the Decision

Article 6.3.3 of the Council's Constitution sets out Scrutiny's powers with respect to policy development and review

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