

Extract from draft minutes of Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee – 1 December 2020

Parking Services Phase 1 Project Report – Review of report to Cabinet 8 December 2020

The Place and Resources Scrutiny Committee was invited to review the report 'Parking Services Phase 1 Project' which was to be considered by Cabinet on 8 December 2020. The comments of the committee would be provided to Cabinet for consideration.

The Chairman stated that comments to be made at the meeting should be related to the content of the report and not about the use of officer delegated powers or the communications which accompanied the notice.

The Executive Director of Place provided an overview of the report and noted that the phase 1 project and the recommendations to be considered by Cabinet were about ensuring consistency in charging arrangements for parking. A separate report for phase 2 of the project would be brought forward for consideration at the appropriate time.

The Portfolio Holder for Highways, Travel and Environment noted that the report covered two key areas – the harmonisation of parking charges and hours and the need to address a revenue shortfall in this area.

The Lead Member for Highways (supporting the Portfolio Holder in this area) noted that work had been undertaken with councillors on this issue. In addition, she noted that revenue from car parking was used for areas such as highways winter maintenance so it was important to secure revenue for areas such as this.

The Chairman invited any non-committee members to address the committee and points were raised as follows:

- It was felt that consultation comments received reflected a snapshot of comments made on this issue. It was understood that members of the Dorchester BID had submitted comments but these were not included in the appendix.
- There was recognition of the support that had been provided to local businesses by central and local government during the pandemic and also that there was a need for income from car parks but it was felt that this was not the right time to consult and make changes. Support should be provided to local businesses at this current time
- Comments were made with regard to the level of information provided in the report in order to support the reasons behind the recommendations proposed.

The Chairman opened up discussion to members of the committee and during discussion the following points were raised:

- There were representations about whether the parking scheme should be unified across the Dorset Council area as it was felt important to have the ability to support differing local needs. However, a counter point was noted that it may not be considered fair that some areas currently paid higher charges for car parking
- A concern was raised with regard to the potential impact on the night time economy and that the views of people relating to this had not been reflected in the comments received
- In response to a question on what proportion of the population would be representative in order to reflect the views of Dorset residents, the Executive Director of Place noted that a statistical method would consider 30 replies to constitute a representative sample. The council had sought to consult as widely as possible and this included through social media. The committee's views could also be taken on board as part of the report to Cabinet
- Councillors discussed the need for improvements to public transport infrastructure and the need to be able to offer viable public transport alternatives. In response, the Executive Director noted that transport policies were being reviewed and that the long term strategy was to investigate more sustainable options and investment in public transport. Links to the council's climate change work was highlighted
- The timing of the changes was raised as a concern and the potential impact on local businesses during the current pandemic. A view was expressed that this should be addressed once the pandemic had eased
- The shoppers permit would be considered as part of the phase 2 proposals
- The Portfolio Holder spoke of the budget issues and referred to the support provided by the council during the pandemic including the suspension of parking charges in car parks and pedestrian schemes in particular areas in order to support businesses. It was important to achieve revenue from car parking which would be used to maintain the road network and provide subsidy for public transport
- The Monitoring Officer confirmed that the council could not use car parking as a revenue raising mechanism but that income was ring fenced for the road network and public transport
- A point was noted that if charges were increased in this area, this could be used for highways improvements and that council tax funding could then be used in other areas
- In addition, a point was raised that it was felt that a small increase in charging would not have a negative impact on peoples' decision to travel to and use the council's car parks
- Reference was made to the strength of feeling amongst businesses for the proposed changes and an online poll which had been run

outside of the council's consultation. A point was made that businesses felt that this was not the right time to make changes and that any changes should be considered holistically including both on and off street parking. The impact on car boot sales and the support they provided to voluntary organisations was also highlighted. The suggestion was made that a review of all issues should be undertaken by the Place and Resources Overview Committee

- A view was expressed that trying to achieve a unified approach across the council area was ideological, did not recognise different requirements across the area and was not necessarily the best way to raise revenue
- A point was noted with regard to comparison data referred to in the report and whether this reflected accurate information in these council areas
- The Portfolio Holder emphasised that the work undertaken was to balance the revenue budget and was not about making money. He also noted that there were no changes proposed to car boot arrangements
- In response to concerns about the potential impact on local businesses, the Portfolio Holder asked councillors to keep the issues in focus, as the proposed changes reflected a small increase in charges when looked at in the context of peoples' wider expenditure and the support provided by the council during the pandemic.

The Chairman referred to the recommendations to be considered by Cabinet and noted a general acceptance of recommendations a, b and c. However, he expressed concern with regard to recommendation d with regard to extending evening charges and did not feel that he could support this. He noted a need to take circumstances in different areas into account and links to residents parking schemes when looking at this area. He also noted an acceptance that there was a need to provide a level of service in respect of highways, including winter maintenance.

The Executive Director thanked the committee for their comments and recommendations and noted that discussions would take place with the Portfolio Holder before the Cabinet meeting to pick up areas identified at this meeting.

The Portfolio Holder also thanked the committee for their input and noted that he had included the issue of car boot sales to discussions to be held.

The comments made at the meeting would be reported to Cabinet for their meeting on 8 December 2020.