



**To/
Councillor Mark Thomas
Cabinet Member for Environment
Enhancement & Infrastructure
Management
BY EMAIL**

cc: Cabinet Members

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SPC/2021-22/10

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Summary: This is a letter from the Scrutiny Programme Committee to the Cabinet Member following the meeting of the Committee on 14 December 2021. It is about Parking Policy, Control & Enforcement. A response is required by 26 January.

Dear Councillor Thomas,

Scrutiny Programme Committee – 14 December

We are writing to you following our Scrutiny session, which focussed on a specific aspect of your wide-ranging cabinet portfolio, namely Parking Policy, Control & Enforcement.

We wanted to gain a greater understanding of these specific responsibilities, your priorities, resources, performance measures, key headlines / achievements against objectives, and overall assessment (including how we compare with others, challenges / risks) and impact / difference made.

We thank you and officers for attending the meeting and providing a written report on these responsibilities and the Council's work. The Committee asked questions to explore this work and provide challenge on actions and performance, as well as future thinking.

This letter reflects on what we learnt from the information presented, questions, and discussion. It shares the views of the Committee and highlights any outstanding issues / actions for your response - main issues summarised below.

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Parking Policy, Control & Enforcement

Your report on Parking Services covered work in relation to Off Street Car Parks, Civil Parking Enforcement (on street parking restrictions), Park and Ride Sites, and the Abandoned Vehicle Service. This included the operation of 48 public use car parks throughout the City & County area.

Specific aspects to our discussion noted below.

Finance

You provided details of the Parking Services Operational Budgets (cost of running the service), Income Targets and Actual Income for Civic Parking Enforcement, Car Parks, and Park & Ride, and explained their inter-relationship.

It was clarified that there is no specific income target for Civil Parking Enforcement, but the operation is required by legislation to be self-financing, not at cost to the Council itself. Any revenue from Parking Charge Notices (PCNs), over and above operating costs, are required to be ring-fenced to support Environmental and Transportation service areas. Figures provided for 2020/21 showed a surplus of just over £300k, against an operational budget of £1.389m. We were told that this surplus was not used exclusively within Parking Services, such as for the maintenance of road markings for parking bays, nor set aside for specific improvement work, but would supplement the overall Highways & Transportation budget and delivery of services within that. As an example, we asked whether the surplus could in the future be used to reduce the charges for Park & Ride, and you confirmed that this would be a legitimate use. Monies, however, could not be used for other Council services. On the question of re-painting road markings, you stated that this would be addressed on an as-and-when required basis not a rolling programme.

Residents Parking

We discussed potential difficulties with the enforcement of residents parking bays given that there are now paperless permits. This means that it is impossible for residents to check that vehicles in the bay are legitimately parked. However, given that certain information is already available to the public on-line, such as typing in a vehicle registration number to check whether a vehicle is taxed or has a MOT, we suggested it would help if information on whether a vehicle had a residents parking permit was also accessible, so that people can then call for enforcement if necessary. We were told that officers would investigate this but suspected issues around privacy / data protection. We would be grateful for a response on whether this would be feasible. Nevertheless, you stated that members of the public can contact the Council about any residents parking issue and whilst they would not be told whether a vehicle was permitted or not the Enforcement Team would action as appropriate. You stressed that you would not want members

of the public challenging individuals themselves but leave enforcement to the Council. You highlighted the benefits of paperless permits, not least in keeping the scheme free for residents.

Safety

Your report stated that one of the key reasons for on street enforcement is safety, to discourage vehicles from stopping and parking in areas which could compromise the safety of pedestrians, cyclists, and motorists. We asked about the action taken by the Council with motorists who have blatantly parked their vehicles on pavements, including the new pavements in the City Centre, which is a problem for pedestrians and the disabled as well as causing damage. You stated that where vehicles are found to be contravening traffic orders action would be taken (e.g., PCNs) however highlighted that there are limited powers of enforcement on unrestricted roads. In such cases, obstruction / pavement parking would be a matter for the Police, not the Council.

Given the desire to have an attractive City Centre, we noted that actions like the placement of street furniture can be taken to improve the aesthetics whilst also discouraging parking on pavements.

Changing Travel Choices

In view of the climate emergency and need to reduce carbon emissions we welcomed proposals to invest in the provision of secure cycle parking. We were happy that consideration is being given to customers at Park & Ride sites being able to park their vehicles at the sites and complete their journey by bicycle, with the obvious benefits to health, wellbeing, and the environment. You informed the Committee that two secure cycle parking areas were being developed and almost complete at Fabian Way and the Quadrant Car Park. There would also be secure cycle parking in the new Arena car parks. As well as that, you were looking at the expansion of cycle hubs / bike hire in the City Centre, such as by the McDonalds at Castle Square. The pandemic has slowed progress, but you told us that you were very much behind encouraging cycling.

Staffing

There is a staffing complement of 52 officers in Parking Services, of which 37 carry out Civil Parking Enforcement, with others involved in attending / patrolling car parks. You clarified that 24 officers are involved in the actual issuing of PCNs. Although noting that Civil Parking Enforcement is self-financing and officer numbers reflect the 'demand', a remark was made within the Committee around relative priorities and shortage of enforcement within the Council in other important areas such as the protection of nature. Whilst understanding the concern, you remarked that comparisons were not applicable and that some people feel we do not have enough Civil Parking

Enforcement officers as it is, e.g., enforcement around schools and suburban areas and being responsive to issues. The service was aware of hot spots which would see greater patrols, and inevitably included areas within the City Centre. You stated that unfortunately officers could not be everywhere at the same time, and the Camera Enforcement Van is limited to specific offences but would be happy to hear from councillors and consider their requests if they felt certain areas needed attention.

We also asked about the prevalence of abuse, threats, and hostility towards Civil Enforcement officers. Although officers are provided with bodycams, we noted that due to such risks and safety of officers being paramount, officers patrolled in pairs though may split off for short periods within a small, designated area for efficiency.

Cleanliness

We sought clarity around responsibility for the cleanliness of Car Parks, something which Councillors receive complaints about. We heard that officers within Parking Services would be involved in the general cleaning / maintenance of car parks, attending to the basics to ensure car parks were tidy, however major cleaning was the responsibility of the Council's Parks & Street Cleansing Team. Issues would be referred to that Team if they otherwise cannot be dealt with by Parking Services. We felt the issues around litter were perhaps more of a problem in the summer months and hoped that patrols and cleaning regimes were more frequent during that period.

Investment

We discussed how technology can be utilised to improve parking operations and make car parking smarter, and to what extent this Council was adopting this, not just for the benefit of the Council but user. For example, with camera technology drivers only paying for actual use rather than by the hour or having to pre-pay for a specific time, etc. Whilst entirely possible you questioned the appetite for moving away from hourly charging, e.g., per 20 or 30 minutes, in car parks. This method of charging was already used exclusively in areas of very short term on-street parking. Nevertheless, you assured the Committee that as members of the British Parking Association and having close contact with other Councils and operators, public and private, our services matched current practice in this sector but would be improved further as technology evolves.

We noted that two new multi-storey car parks would be available next year, within the Copr Bay / Arena Development, Copr Bae North and South. The North Car Park will have 630 spaces and the South 355. However, this development has resulted in the loss of two surface car parks (St Mary's and Oystermouth Road car parks) plus St David's will soon be lost to make way for future development as part of the City Centre Regeneration Strategy. We noted that overall, the net impact on available car parking spaces is a

reduction of 15 spaces. We were told that the new car parks would utilise ANPR technology on entry with payment on return to the vehicle with hourly charges applicable, offering several methods of payment (cash, card, contactless and phone/app, etc.) providing flexibility and choice to users.

You reported that the Park & Ride operation has been hard hit during the pandemic, with concern amongst customers over the risks of sharing a bus with strangers and infection. You stated that the current location of the Landore Park & Ride site is under review given that new developments such as the SkyLine and other commercial, retail and leisure developments are being considered in the area. A commission was underway to consider any alternative locations for a Park & Ride site to serve the lower Swansea Valley. We know that the Council has been considering additional Park & Ride sites, particularly to serve the west of Swansea, for many years and noted that further work will be necessary to determine the feasibility of potential park and ride sites to the northwest and west of the city and assess suitable locations.

Your Response

We hope that you find the contents of this letter useful and would welcome comments on any of the issues raised within. We would be grateful, however, if you could specifically consider our views on residents parking and provide response on the feasibility of information about residents parking permits being made public.

Please provide your response to this and any other comments about our letter by 26 January. We will then publish both letters in the agenda of the next available Committee meeting.

Yours sincerely,



COUNCILLOR PETER BLACK

Chair, Scrutiny Programme Committee

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