



Scrutiny Committee
Tuesday 9 September 2014

**Report from the Operational Director,
Environment and Protection**

Wards Affected: ALL

Parking Services update

1.0 Summary

1.1 Further to a request from Members of the Scrutiny Committee, this report provides commentary on some of the services provided by the Council's Parking and Lighting Service, specifically in respect of the following services:

- The provision of resident and visitor parking
- Controlled Parking Zones
- Customer Contact;
- The impact of the provision of services on high street business, and;
- Arrangements for Religious Festivals and places of Worship

2.0 Recommendations

2.1 That Members note the updates provided within this report.

3.0 Detail

3.1. The methods by which the Council provide parking services have dramatically changed over the last two years.

Parking Permits

3.2. In September 2012, the Council's Executive agreed to make a range of changes aimed at modernising the service, reducing service expenditure, and providing a platform for future efficiencies.

- 3.3. This commitment was the catalyst for developing a new online parking permit database designed to facilitate access to our services through the Council's website, over the telephone, and through mobile telephone services; whilst removing counter services.
- 3.4. In early 2013, the Council finally closed its parking shops, and transferred customer contact to the website and a new call centre.
- 3.5. Subsequently, the Council re-let the main parking contract, awarding the Contract to Serco to generate savings of up to £850k per annum. These savings have been a direct result of the introduction of the parking permit database and the virtual visitor permits. The fact that the contractor can use Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) systems on CCTV cars and Hand Held Computers (HHC) to look up vehicles on the databases to see whether they are entitled to be parked at that location has allowed better intelligence gathering, more efficient and intelligent deployment patterns, improvements in productivity and a significant reduction in the numbers of Civil Enforcement Officers employed in comparison to the previous contract, which has generated the savings.

Issues

- 3.6. The introduction of changes generated a large amount of positive and negative customer feedback driven by the volume of service users; the service uses the new permit database to sell 17 different products, fielding 35,000 transactions per month (October '13 – March '14). Principal issues included:
- 3.7. **General snagging issues:** The permit system was brand new, and created according to the bespoke permit business rules used by the London Borough of Brent. Whilst the system was heavily tested before its launch, minor issues were later identified through customer use. These were managed in liaison with the Contractor and its IT developers; minor changes and updates have been regularly made since the launch of the database, and there is on-going dialogue between officers and contractors.
- 3.8. **Scratch Cards:** Whilst few people regret not having to queue at the former Parking Shops to buy them, scratch cards for visitor parking had the merit of simplicity at the point of use. Customers have needed time to adjust to the new products and particularly the virtual visitor parking.
- 3.9. **Access Issues:** Problems were also highlighted by groups and individuals who found the new channels (online, telephone, SMS) difficult to use; as the new system has bedded-in and customers have become accustomed to the new system, these complaints have generally fallen.
- 3.10. **Capacity Issues:** The new parking system required customers to open an account before they could use the services provided. Accounts may be

opened either online, or customers may set-up accounts over the telephone. As customers struggled to use initial online service, the call centre experienced a high level of customer demand. The demand for telephone services outstripped the capacity of the call centre, meaning that many customers abandoned calls or experienced lengthy waiting times.

3.11 **Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ) anomalies:** Throughout the term of the last parking contract, officers working within the Parking Service incorrectly allowed some customers a degree of choice over which CPZ they are eligible to park within. Unfortunately, residential addresses are specific to certain CPZs, and as such, when the new permit system was launched, it did not recognise such decisions made in the past. This meant that a small proportion of our residents have been informed that they do not have a choice of CPZ. The types of complaints experienced are:

- Issuing property holders with a permit in the incorrect zone at the request of the resident or business
- Issue of permits in more than one zone to business and resident permits to businesses
- Residential and business properties which had been excluded from any CPZ but no available parking bays within the vicinity of their property during restricted hours
- Failure to apply planning restrictions on car free developments and issue of permits to property holders therein these developments
- Supplying permits to individuals who do not reside in the borough of Brent
- Provision of permits to properties that did not have planning consent
- Individuals who did not know the correct details of their property and therefore not able to obtain products from the online system

4.0 **Visitor Parking**

4.1. The usage of the online service has grown such that there are now over 30,000 bookings per month made either online or booked by a phone based operative.

4.2 Some individuals have voiced concern that ease of use and access is problematic for those that do not have computer access either due to affordability or aptitude; however, a phone based service is available and members of the public are able to book visitor parking over the telephone or via SMS.

4.3 There are several benefits / advantages to the new visitor permit system, which the Scratch Card system did not provide.

- The service is available online 24 hours a day, and seven days a week; officers have made substantial progress towards introducing a 24 hour telephone service to complement this.
- Customers may book visitor parking in advance of guests arriving; removing the need for customers to rush when guests arrive.
- The need for customers to continually present documents in order to prove their eligibility for permits has been removed.
- The service has facilitated smarter methods of regulation; this in turn has made a substantial contribution to the reduced cost to the service (realised through the re-letting of the parking contract)
- The visitor parking service represents extraordinary value for money for our residents; by removing counter services we have been able to keep the cost of visitor parking well below the equivalent products sold by neighbouring authorities.

5.0 Call Centre Performance

5.1 As expressed (item 3.10), the initial demand for telephone services following the launch of the new permit system was higher than anticipated. In order to meet this unanticipated demand, officers worked with Serco in order to make extensive operational changes to service delivery.

5.2 Call centre performance is measured against a variety of indicators including: call waiting (the time that a caller has to wait before speaking to an operative); call duration (the length of the phone conversation); and abandonment (the proportion of calls 'dropped').

5.3 The improvement in performance, since initial problems occurred in July 2014 is visible in the below table:

	July- Sept	Oct-Dec	Jan-Mar	Apr-Jun
Abandonment Rate (%)	26.3	8.0	2.6	1.7
Average Call Wait (m:ss)	04:27	02:03	00:46	00:39
Average Call Duration (m:ss)	05:04	04:40	04:21	04:08

5.4 Continuous improvements in performance are being developed between officers and Serco, principally concentrating on making online services more accessible, and reducing the volume of calls handled.

6.0 Impact on Business

- 6.1. The relationship between parking and high street vitality has been frequently reported in the last year, principally concentrating on enforcement activities, parking provision, and tariffs.
- 6.2. The Council provide a wealth of facilities in order to support the high streets of Brent. These facilities extend to (but are not limited to):
- Loading Bays
 - Disabled Bays
 - Pay and Display Bays
 - Car Parks
 - Business Permits
- 6.3. Some commentators, including Mary Portas' reporting on town centres have argued that cheap or free parking is critical to the success of retail centres. Research by the British Retail Consortium argues that businesses overestimate the proportion of trade that is influenced by parking availability and underestimate the proportion of custom that comes from people who access their services on foot.
- 6.4. In a study commissioned they found that traders over estimated the proportionate value to their business from parking by around 40% whereas the actual proportion of business from individuals accessing their services on foot is 80%
- 6.5 The Council has tried to balance the needs of businesses against the other competing objectives of parking policy, including parking demand from residents, voluntary and public organisations, members of the public including shoppers and visitors, visitors to residents in the borough, tourism, loading and unloading, as well as statutory obligations which enable the Council to meet its Network Management Duty.
- 6.6 In October 2013 the Executive introduced a substantial reduction in on-street parking tariffs to a rate of £2.00 per hour with a very low cost option of a 15 minute stay for 20p. These reductions were intended to support local traders and to help residents by making town centre parking more affordable.

7.0 Religious Festivals and places of Worship

- 7.1. The Council does not make any special arrangements for religious festivals or places of Worship.
- 7.2. Faith organisations for major events at their own cost, may request a Temporary Traffic Order to suspend parking and vehicle use on a section of the public highway but this is subject to a transport assessment and statutory public consultation.

- 7.3 There is a diverse set of practices across most local authorities but as a matter of course in most council's in London, faith organisations are asked to make special requests to suspend parking enforcement. Whilst with funerals the majority of organisers will accede to requirements, faith organisations appear not to adhere to making special arrangements or making such requests.
- 7.4 A recent benchmark with Birmingham, Hackney, Hounslow, Luton, Oxford, Reading, and Richmond is summarised below. In summary it appears the majority of authorities' state that no relaxation of enforcement takes place and in some circumstances additional enforcement is required. The Council's policy on parking as part of the LIP states that religious "organisers to maximise the use of sustainable transport by people attending events and worship, for example through the development of faith travel plans"

Council	Policy	Options for organisations/public	Notes
Oxford Council/ Oxfordshire County Council	No special arrangements may apply for TRO for large events. Suspensions allowed for up to 1 hour for funerals only	Apply for TRO, use pay and display, ask for non-enforcement for a maximum of 1 hr where no P&D exists	No TROs issued for religious events in general and no special arrangements except funerals
Reading/West Berkshire County Council	No special arrangements, may apply for TRO for large events	No dispensations, can apply for visitors vouchers	No informal agreements for non-enforcement made
Hounslow	Special arrangements are available on request and be assessed on merit	Organisations may apply for a variation in enforcement regulation which will be assessed on a case by case basis.	The PEP does offer the right to special arrangements but is sufficiently vague to afford the council the discretion to review on unspecified criteria
Hackney	Parking may be suspended on request but for major events only and not for regular and minor activity such as weekly worship	Apply for bay suspensions. For regular activity use pay and display parking	The council retains the right to assess each application on a case-by-case basis and decline the request for bay suspension
Richmond	Free residents permits given to the religious workers to allow them to undertake community work		

Council	Policy	Options for organisations/public	Notes
Birmingham	seek dialogue and discussions with the various groups	As appropriate, TRO exemptions made for other specific events which take place	non-committal
Luton			makes no reference to exemptions

9.0 Financial Implications

9.1 None specific to this report

10.0 Legal Implications

10.1 None specific to this report

11.0 Diversity Implications

11.1 The findings of the Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) were reported to Executive as part of the Parking service simplification and pricing report by the Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services on the 19th September 2012.

11.2 Whilst the 2012 EIA assessment identified that there was likely to be a differential impact on the grounds of race, disability and age. The mitigation measures described as part of the assessment found that the remaining impact to be negligible. This was supported by the increasing difficulty in legally buying a car, obtaining insurance, obtaining a driving licence, obtaining road tax, without a bank account or an electronic means of payment.

11.3 The 2012 EIA assessment is currently being reviewed and the conclusions will be reported back to Cabinet at a future meeting

12.0 Staffing/Accommodation Implications (if appropriate)

12.1 None specific to this report

Background Papers

Executive 19 September 2012 - Parking service simplification and pricing – Appendix A – Equalities Impact Assessment
<http://democracy.brent.gov.uk/documents/s9446/ens-parking-permits.pdf>

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