



MINUTES OF THE CALL IN OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE Thursday 1 August 2013 at 7.00 pm

PRESENT: Councillors Jones, Kabir, Lorber, HB Patel, RS Patel and Krupa Sheth

Also present: Councillors Butt (Leader/ Lead Member for Corporate Strategy and Policy Co-ordination), Councillor Cheese, and Councillor Cummins

Apologies for absence were received from: Councillors Ashraf and Daly

1. Declarations of personal and prejudicial interests

None declared.

2. Deputations

None.

3. Minutes of the last meeting held on 27 February 2013

RESOLVED:

That the minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2013 be approved as a correct record.

4. Matters arising

Call in of Barham Park Trust Committee decisions from the meeting of the Barham Park Trust Committee held on 27 February 2013

Councillor H B Patel requested an update from the officers on the decision called in on 27 February. Officers stated that there were not able to answer as this committee was not the right forum to discuss these matters. They stated that Councillor H B Patel should raise this question at the next Barham Park Trust Committee.

5. Call-in of Executive decisions from the meeting of the Executive held on 15 July 2013

Decisions made by the Executive on 15 July 2013 in respect of the following report were called-in for consideration by the Call In Overview and Scrutiny Committee in accordance with Standing Order 20.

Outcomes from consultation for parking charge changes and permit changes

The decisions made by the Executive held on 15 July 2013 were:-

RESOLVED:-

- (i) that the petition and representations received in relation to the notices of proposals dated 9 May 2013 and summarised in section 4 and Appendix A of the report from the Strategic Director of Environment and Neighbourhood be noted;
- (ii) that approval be given to the retention of longstanding day-long visitor parking duration, from the four hours agreed by the Executive on 12 September 2012, as described in paragraph 4.3 of the report;
- (iii) that approval be given a new visitor parking price tariff as described in paragraph 4.3.5 of the Directors;
- (iv) that approval be given to the extension of the validity of a Wembley Stadium Protective Parking Scheme residents' permit and Brentfield Road zone T from the two years agreed by the Executive on 12 September 2012 to three years, as described in section 4.4 and 4.7.2 of the report;
- (v) that approval be given to the extension of the maximum duration of virtual visitor passes in the Wembley Stadium Protective Parking Scheme from the four hours agreed by the Executive on 12 September 2012 to one calendar day, as described in section 4.5 of this report;
- (vi) that approval be given to the extension of the maximum duration of virtual visitor passes in the Brentfield Road zone T from the four hours agreed by the Executive on 12 September 2012 to 24 hours, as described in section 4.7.2 of the report;
- (vii) that approval be given to the tariff for virtual visitor passes in the Wembley Stadium Protective Parking Scheme and Brentfield Road zone T from the £1 agreed by the Executive on 12 September 2012 to 50p and to continue the longstanding limit of two visitor simultaneous parking passes per household, as described in section 4.5 and 4.7 of the report;
- (viii) that approval be given to the arrangements for exchanging unused scratch-cards and for easing enforcement in the period immediately after 31 October 2013, when they will become invalid as set out in section 5 of this report, including granting delegated authority to the Strategic Director of Environment and Neighbourhoods as regards the detailed arrangements for timing and implementation;
- (ix) that authority be delegated to the Strategic Director of Environment and Neighbourhood Services to establish and implement temporary mitigation measures for carers of people that would be eligible for the new cared-for persons' permit, until such time as that permit is formally launched as set out in paragraph 5.13 of the report;

- (x) that the remaining parking tariffs and pricing and product changes agreed by the Executive on 19 September 2012 be implemented where they are unaffected by the representations made and considered within the report.

The reasons for the call in are:-

This call-in relates to recommendations 2.1.3 (decision [iii] - new visitor parking price tariff) and 2.1.9 (decision [x] - implementation of remaining parking tariffs and prices and product changes) only.

The 50 per cent increase in the cost of the visitor parking permit is unreasonable. Given that the financial implications section of the report says the impact of the CPZ visitor parking changes is financially neutral the increased charge appears to penalise residents without bringing any benefit to the council.

There has been no proper consultation exercise on the visitor parking permit charge increase.

Members have not received proper assurances that the operation of the telephone system will improve, and in any case the promise of future improvements does nothing to assist residents who are finding it difficult to contact the council about their parking permits now. This is particularly true of older and more vulnerable residents who do not have the opportunity to use alternative channels.

An outline of the suggested alternative course of action for the Call In Overview and Scrutiny Committee to take is :

1. Continuation of the scratchcard scheme for those who cannot use online contact.
2. Retaining the cost of a residents' visitor parking session at £1.

The Chair then invited Councillor Lorber, one of the councillors who had called in this item, to outline the reasons for call in. Councillor Lorber explained that he had called this decision in because the Executive had not consulted on increasing the cost of parking permits by 50%. He added that David Thrle had advised members that charges would not change as result of the new parking contract and yet the Executive had now increased the charge. Councillor Lorber stated that the Executive had not provided information in regards to profits or costs to the Council and they had not explained why they had increased the charge from £1.00 to £1.50. Therefore Councillor Lorber felt that the Executive was wrong for increasing the price and that they should reconsider their decision.

Councillor Butt stated that the Executive had agreed to increase the price by 50p at the December meeting and the decision was for parking permits to be four hours and cost £.150. However after consultation with residents, they had listened to what residents wanted and agreed to have permits that covered the whole day and cost £1.50. He argued that this would actually save residents money as under the previous recommendation residents would potentially pay up to £9 to park all day if they had to extend it six times to cover 24 hours. He also added that when the Liberal Democrats and Conservatives had been in control of the Council they

increased visitor parking from £5 to £10, so this increase was not as dramatic as that had been.

David Thrale (Head of Safer Streets) also replied to Councillor Lorber stating that Councillor Lorber had quoted him correctly however he had been referring to the cost the council would incur for parking services, which would not increase. The decision about the price of parking was a matter for the Council and did not concern the parking contractors.

Members were then invited to discuss the call in. It was stated that it was not fair for the Executive to compare their increase in charges to the potential of what the cost could have been, as this had never been reality. It was also noted that in some areas of the borough it was preferable to have four hour permits and therefore the comparison did not apply. It was explained that this increase was likely to impact disproportionately on those who had carers and friends and families who visited to offer care. Clarification was sought about the number of scratch cards that had been sold in the last year and therefore how many people this increase was likely to affect. It was also questioned why the Executive had made the decision to increase the cost when it stated in the report that the cost of the scheme was financially neutral for the council. Also members wanted to know if it was financially neutral then what would the Executive be doing with the extra revenue from increasing the cost and why had they had decided to increase it.

Questions were also asked about why Brent was compared to other London Borough in particular ones that were very different to Brent. Also it was queried why scratch cards could not be maintained for the elderly and those not used to or able to operate technology.

In response to the questions raised Councillor Butt stated that professional Carers would not have to pay for parking. It was explained that the report did not state that the scheme would be cost neutral but that officers could not determine whether it would have a profit or a deficit for the Council as there were too many unknown figures. For example 700,000 scratch cards had been sold in the previous year yet it was unknown how many of these remained unused and whether people had been bulk buying. It was explained that due to inflation the rise from £1 to £1.50 was actually only an increase of 3% a year since 2007 and therefore the council would not be making money out of residents. David Thrale explained to members that the revenue the council collected from parking was roughly £16 million. It cost £8 million to maintain parking services in the borough and therefore the CPZ roughly paid for themselves which was deemed to be good practice.

In response to the other questions raised Councillor Butt explained that the report compared Brent to other boroughs as that was how any organisation knew they were doing well or had to improve; when they benchmarked themselves against other relevant companies. It was stated that it would not be cost efficient to allow some scratch cards to remain in operation as the Council would not be able to save money by operating a dual system of enforcement. Councillor Butt reiterated that they had amended the scheme but in a positive manner to address the concerns that residents had raised.

Councillor Lorber explained that the next reason he had called in this decision was due to the Executives lack of consultation on the decision to increase the charge for

visitor parking permits. Other members questioned the Executives method of consulting stating that it did not take note of residents' views. It was questioned whether the Executive had consulted directly with the vulnerable groups likely to be affected by the removal of scratch cards, including the elderly and disabled. Clarification was also sought as to when the specification for tender was concluded and whether this was prior to or after the executive had made their decision to get rid of scratch cards.

In response to this Councillor Butt explained that the Executive had consulted on the change to the visitor parking permits. They had consulted a number of area forums and consultative forums as well as addressing petitioners at the last Executive. Councillor Butt agreed that the consultation method that had been introduced by a previous Conservative administration did need reviewing and therefore they were in the process of beginning this review. He added that the fact that they had changed the permit to allow people to park for the whole day instead of just four hours demonstrated that they had listened to residents views and had amended the scheme accordingly.

Councillor Al Ebadi explained to members that the Council had to make significant savings at the moment due to the cuts imposed from Central Government. Therefore some people were likely to be affected by these cuts and it was not possible to follow every suggestion or request from residents due to budget constraints. Councillor Butt added that prior to setting his budget for the year he had held two budget open days for residents so that residents could air their concerns. It had been clear from these days that parking was very important to residents of Brent and that was why they had decided to reduce parking charges from the scheme initially suggested.

David Thrale clarified that the invitation to tender had included the report on parking that had been submitted to the Executive in September 2012. He stated that whilst inviting tenders for Brent, they had also been running a concurrent tender for a shared service. The Brent only contract had not been pursued and the final specification for the joint service had been written after the Executive meeting in September 2012.

Councillor Lorber then informed the Committee of the last reason that he had called this decision in was to receive assurance that the operation of the telephone system for paying parking permits would improve dramatically. It was acknowledged that the current service was not at an acceptable level and members questioned the amount of testing that had been done to ensure it was fit for purpose. They also wanted to know if the contractors would face any penalties for their lack of performance so far. Councillor Lorber wanted to know what measures were going to be introduced to help those unable to use the internet. Members also questioned why the Council were reimbursing residents for unused scratch cards instead of allowing people to use up the scratch cards they had.

David Thrale informed the Committee that it was possible to pay for parking via a landline telephone and therefore those residents not able to use the internet were still able to pay for parking. He stated that residents were also able to pay by cash at a pay point, which would also help local retailers. He admitted that there had been some glitches at the beginning of the new scheme. However they had now employed double the number of original employees to help people set up their

accounts on the phone. David Thrale assured members that thorough testing had been of the telephone system and that the issues had arisen due to there being some confusion regarding the number of staff moving across to the new contractors. He stated that after the contractors had been in operation for at least a month then there would be a review meeting and Brent may look to impose sanctions on them due to the problems experienced at the beginning of the contract.

It was explained that for those people who had carers, it was acknowledged that there could be up to 5 different carers in a day. Therefore residents who had carers were given one permit that would cover each carer. It was added that people who were eligible for this did not have to apply as the Council had picked them automatically. Also residents who weren't automatically eligible could apply and the council would consider their circumstances. He stated that they were not allowing scratch cards to continue to be used as this would delay the savings the council needed to make as they would have to operate a dual system of enforcement.

Councillor Butt concluded by explaining that due to the budgets constraints that the Council now faced the Executive had to make the necessary savings. They believed that reviewing parking in the borough was an appropriate way to make some of those savings. He added that we were moving in to a digital age, where more and more was being done online or via the telephone.

The committee then decided against Councillor Lorber's suggestion the continued use of scratch cards and retaining the cost of residents' visitor parking session at £1.

At the Chair's request David Thrale agreed to produce a simple information sheet to clearly explain both the visitor permit cash option and carer permit for members and residents who remain concerned about the new system.

RESOLVED:

That the decisions made by the Executive be noted.

6. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the next meeting of the Call in Overview and Scrutiny Committee was scheduled for Thursday 5 September at 7.00 pm and would take place in the event of there being any call ins of decisions made by the Executive on 19 August 2013.

7. Any other urgent business

None.

The meeting closed at 8.35 pm

L Jones
Chair