

**Confirmed**



Minutes of an Extraordinary Meeting of the **Scrutiny Committee** held via Zoom on **Monday 16 November 2020 at 6:30pm**

**Members of the Committee present:**

Councillor Edward Back, Councillor David Beavan, Councillor Stuart Bird, Councillor Judy Cloke, Councillor Linda Coulam, Councillor Mike Deacon, Councillor Louise Gooch, Councillor Tracey Green, Councillor Mark Newton, Councillor Keith Robinson, Councillor Caroline Topping

**Other Members present:**

Councillor Norman Brooks, Councillor Peter Byatt, Councillor Tony Cooper, Councillor Janet Craig, Councillor Steve Gallant, Councillor Tony Goldson, Councillor James Mallinder, Councillor Keith Patience, Councillor David Ritchie, Councillor Craig Rivett, Councillor Ed Thompson, Councillor Steve Wiles, Councillor Kay Yule

**Officers present:**

Katherine Abbott (Democratic Services Officer), Lewis Boudville (Transport, Infrastructure & Parking Services Manager), Andrew Jarvis (Strategic Director), Matt Makin (Democratic Services Officer), Sue Meeken (Political Group Support Officer (Labour))

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**1 Apologies for Absence and Substitutions**

Apologies for Absence were received from Councillor Gee and Councillor Lynch. Councillor Cooper acted as Substitute for Councillor Lynch.

**2 Declarations of Interest**

There were no Declarations of Interest.

**3 Review of Parking Management and Civil Parking Enforcement**

The Scrutiny Committee received report **ES/0566** by the Cabinet Member with responsibility for Transport. The Cabinet Member gave a brief introduction to the report and referred to the introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement and an on/off road parking management system earlier in the year. He wished to record his personal thanks to the Officers of the Council for their work which, he said, had achieved a phenomenal amount in a short period of time.

At the invitation of the Chairman, the Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager gave a brief presentation which outlined the problems which had been identified as needing to be resolved and the four objectives identified to achieve this - Standardise pricing and signage; increase the digital offer; introduce civil parking

enforcement; and, implement digital enforcement system. In addition, the Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager gave a brief demonstration of the digital permit system via the online portal.

The Chairman invited questions

Councillor Deacon, with reference to paragraph 2.1(iv) of the report, asked about the process that had been applied in the selection of the Taranto platform for the Penalty Charge Notice processing system. He asked why this platform had been considered superior to others on the market. In addition, and with regard to the demonstration of the digital permit application system, Councillor Deacon said it was important to remember that not all applicants were sufficiently IT literate to be able to use the system with ease. The Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager said that an Eastern Shires Purchasing Organisation (ESPO) framework had been utilised (*Clerk's note: ESPO is a public sector owned professional buying organisation, specialising in providing a wide range of goods and services to the public sector. It offers over 27,000 catalogue products, 120 frameworks and bespoke procurement services, all with free support and advice available*) and an open-invitation issued to all appropriate providers in the market to demonstrate their product. The demonstrations had been graded and scored and a decision taken based on key factors such as best technical solution, user-friendliness, operation and support facilities and overall integrity of the system. He stressed that the ease of use of the system by those with less IT knowledge had been considered in the process, but the system selected was typical of those in use for parking management. The Scrutiny Committee was informed that those who had no IT access or experienced difficulty accessing the system were able to telephone and seek assistance with their application.

Councillor Deacon referred to the significant increase in season ticket prices and asked how many formal complaints had been received as a result of that increase. Councillor Deacon also raised a query about a change to weekend parking at Oulton Broad which, he had been told, necessitated the purchase of an annual ticket to be able to park for whole weekends. The Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager replied that there had been very few formal complaints received. With reference to parking at Oulton Broad, he stated that weekend parking did not require the purchase of an annual ticket as a day ticket would suffice. However, if the user wished to park regularly at the site it might be that an annual ticket would offer a saving overall. Councillor Deacon said he was surprised few formal complaints had been received as he had received several from residents.

The Chairman asked how the standardisation in pricing had been arrived at. The Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager referred to the report which, he said, described how the pricing values had been arrived at and the reasons why this was felt to be necessary. He added that the prior ticket options had varied immensely with significant differences in pricing across the district; there had, he said, also been special arrangements at some locations and, therefore, rationalisation of the pricing structure had been sought to provide standardisation of charges across the district.

Councillor Gooch said she had tried to follow the process which had been demonstrated to the Committee, however, she had found it required registration, a password and email verification and queried if this was the case. The Transport,

Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager said that it was possible to apply as a guest on the portal.

Councillor Topping asked why an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) had not been completed. She added that she had been informed one was not required. Councillor Topping questioned why, as part of an EIA, permit holders had not been asked for their comments on the proposed scheme. Councillor Topping provided examples of the impact which residents in her ward had experienced with the changes to residents' permits. The Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager referred to the EIA which had been completed and referenced at paragraph 8.4 of the report. The Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager said that the previous paper-based system of residents' permits had, at times, be subject to anecdotal evidence of misuse. The new system was more flexible as temporary permits were issued as required. He noted comments about limited residents parking in one location in Beccles and said that supply and demand would be reviewed. Councillor Topping also gave the example of an elderly resident who was unable to go online to book a permit and so had been advised to do so by telephone. The telephone service operated within the Council's opening hours, but calls to the permit scheme could be made between 8am and 8pm weekdays and so weekend visitors were unable to book a permit on the day. Councillor Topping also referred to carer's permits which could be used 20 days out of 30 and queried the effectiveness of this approach.

*The Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager experienced technical issues. The meeting adjourned between 7.15pm and 7.18pm to enable him to re-join the meeting by telephone. The meeting reconvened at 7.18pm.*

The Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager responded that visitors planning to visit at weekends meant residents could apply for a permit online or by telephone in advance. Similarly, at weekends, a resident who was unable to use the online portal could call the telephone line and leave a voicemail with all the relevant details; a permit could then be issued retrospectively. If a Penalty Charge Notice was issued but the request had been registered in a telephone message, the Notice would be cancelled and no fine would be payable.

Councillor Cloke referred to the increase in parking charges at the car park at Sizewell beach and suggested that this had been excessive. Councillor Cloke said that she understood the merit of a standardised approach but questioned why this had not been approached in a phased way rather than one large increase. The Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager replied that the Sizewell Beach annual ticket had been £25 and so any increase might perhaps be seen as unreasonable. He added that parking sessions for more than an hour were £1.20, therefore, drivers to date had paid the equivalent of twenty-one days and received the equivalent of free parking for the rest of the year. Sizewell Beach was not a location where all day parking was in high demand and a two-hour visit was more likely – therefore, the new £1 ticket would, he said, provide best value for parking sessions of this length. It would be cheaper than the £1.20 ticket a two-hour session had previously cost. The demand for annual tickets at Sizewell Beach was not significant, he said, when considered against the three million parking sessions typically seen each year. He added that drivers had the option to pay monthly for their parking sessions should they not wish to commit to the annual ticket fee in one transaction.

Councillor Beavan asked about residents' parking and if exemptions were limited to certain areas. The Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager said that exemptions were considered on a street-by-street basis but that these had been implemented where residents' needs had not been fully considered previously. Councillor Beavan asked if the Council was able to assist carers who were not paid for the time they were parked and as the national pass for time limited parking bays during the pandemic was gradually phased out. The Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager said that possible schemes to manage parking would be considered in Framlingham, Lowestoft and Southwold first. Councillor Beavan urged every effort be made to avoid a gap between the end of one scheme and the start of a new one.

Councillor Coulam said that, previously, disabled users of car parks had been allowed a concession whereby two hours parking had been permitted for a one hour ticket. She explained that this had been to allow additional time in exiting vehicles, getting aids out, obtaining a ticket etc. Councillor Coulam said that the new charges did not allow and questioned if this might be discriminatory. The Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager replied that the blue badge scheme allowed a driver to park in more places and for more time than other drivers. This was because the scheme was there to help people who either had trouble getting about or had medical conditions that made having a car nearby vital. The exemptions provided by the blue badge were for on-street parking regulations. The criteria for exemptions, concessions and alternative methods had been applied in accordance with the Disabled Parking Accreditation (an initiative provided by Disability Motoring UK and managed by the British Parking Association) which was primarily aimed at improving parking for disabled people and reducing abuse of disabled spaces. He added that the Council would look at the possibility of discretionary disabled parking exemptions across its car parks. It was noted that the RingGo app would aid disabled drivers as it was possible to pay for parking from the car.

Councillor Topping referred to past delays in the implementation of the Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) and Off-Street Parking Places Order; these set out the provision for on-street parking restrictions, including residents' parking zones and permit schemes as well as stipulating the rules for permit holder schemes. The Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager said the Council was now administering permits in accordance with the provisions of the County Council's TRO; he stressed that the TRO had not been amended and that the change experienced by some was in the administration processes linked to the new permit management system. The delays in implementation of the new scheme had been the result of a delay in obtaining the statutory instrument and the initial transition period, moving forward, further delays were not anticipated.

The Chairman asked if there were sufficient staffing resources to undertake the administration of all the various aspects of parking management. The Cabinet Member with responsibility for Transport said the implementation of the new processes had been both technically demanding and labour intensive; unavoidable delays had been experienced with the obtaining of the statutory instrument and the impact of the pandemic. There had been initial teething issues during the transition but Officers had worked hard to resolve these. The Cabinet Member said that although there was a

phenomenal amount of work to be undertaken he had been advised that staffing levels were adequate. These remained under constant review and if more resource was considered necessary a case would be made to increase establishment. In response to a question from Councillor Topping, the Cabinet Member confirmed that no further delays were anticipated and responses required by SCC would be provided on time.

Councillor Topping referred to the four car parks in Halesworth and advised that residents had informed her they had been told they could only use one car park in any one day and could not return to any of the four car parks in the same day; she asked if that was accurate. The Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager said that people could return to the same or another car park in the same day as many times as they wished. However, the 30 minutes of free parking was a concession that was only available once a day.

Councillor Gooch said she had tried to load the RingGo app but it had failed to install and that this was possibly because it utilised significant storage space on a mobile telephone. Councillor Gooch said that if digital solutions were to be introduced they must be simple and easy to use. She added that the signage in car parks was not easy to read because of the size of the text, there was no indication on signs of the storage capacity of the app, there was no instruction to say that users could use coinage if they preferred and that, generally, the signage was more of a barrier to use than designed to make matters easier. Councillor Gooch asked that the signage be reviewed and improved and added that she was surprised there had not been complaints based on the digital infrastructure.

The Cabinet Member for Transport referred to the handling of coins as being expensive and having an impact on the environment and that, therefore, digital alternatives offered benefits. He confirmed that coins could still be used at the machines and that perhaps this could be made clearer.

Councillor Deacon asked if the pay machines were at a height which was accessible to someone in a wheelchair and also suggested that the signs were sited too high to be easily read if so seated. The Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager said that the main signage in car parks was being addressed but had not been set at a different height to the previous signs. He said that all the signs in the car parks had been replaced, but some of the information boards which utilised smaller text had been installed too high. All were being checked and lowered where necessary. He added that the manufacturer of the pay machines met disabled user requirements and some had included access ramps to the machine.

Councillor Beavan referred to the Council's online survey of parking schemes and asked if there was sufficient Officer resource to review the results, prioritise and facilitate said schemes. The Cabinet Member for Transport repeated that he had discussed staffing levels with senior Officers and added that back-office functions were being rationalised to create some additional capacity. Councillor Beavan asked when the schemes identified via the survey would be reviewed and prioritised. The Cabinet Member for Transport said no date for this had yet been set.

Councillor Cloke said she had tried to apply for a TRO on the website for a particular street within her ward on behalf of residents. This had proven to be problematic as it

required the entry of multiple addresses and, as she was not a resident in the street concerned, the system had not allowed the application. It was agreed that the Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager would contact Councillor Cloke, outside of the meeting, to resolve this problem.

The Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager, with reference to the earlier discussion of the Blue Badge Scheme, said that the Scheme already allowed parking on the street all day. The Scheme was not, however, an off-street or car park scheme.

Councillor Green said that overall parking in Felixstowe had been improved by the introduction of civil parking enforcement. She also said that she regularly used the RingGo app which she found to be very useful. Councillor Green said that she had previously sought a glossary of terms on this complex subject which she said would be helpful to Councillors and residents alike. The Cabinet Member for Transport welcomed Councillor Green's positive remarks on improved parking as a result of the introduction of CPE. With regard to a glossary of terms, he said he was working with Officers to produce this together with simple guides; he anticipated these being available shortly. The Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager added that infographics would also be available in the next few weeks and that the current information on the website, together with the requested glossary, would be revisited. He said that he was keen to ensure that information available elsewhere was not duplicated to avoid confusion but agreed to a review.

Councillor Patience asked how many pay machines were typically within a car park and if this varied significantly. The Chairman asked about the reliability rate of the pay machines, the average repair times when a machine would be out of order, etc. The Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager replied that the number of machines might be dependent on the geometry of the car park, the number of parking spaces, but generally there were one or two machines in a car park with the exception of Southwold which had seven. He added that in order to reduce the number of cash collections necessary, 96 of the pay machines had been upgraded - those which had not been upgraded were on the whole used less often. The upgraded machines would be monitored and the remaining machines brought up to the same standard in time, if required. He added that, at the moment, pay machines could accommodate cash payments particularly as the revised tariffs made this much simpler when using coins. The Committee was informed that the machines were deep cleaned and checked once per week; in addition, each time a Civil Parking Enforcement Officer patrolled s/he would check the machine too. If a machine was found to be faulty, no penalty fines would be served.

Councillor Yule said the introduction of Civil Parking Enforcement in Woodbridge had, generally, been well received and she congratulated the Council in that regard. However, she also had concerns about any impact on disabled users. Councillor Yule referred to one machine in Woodbridge which had been assumed to be out of order because the information on it had not been easy to understand, that disabled users had then tried to find an alternative machine to take coins and suggested this could have been more accessible with clearer signage and the aim to make car parks more accessible to disabled people. The Leader of the Council suggested that the earlier discussion of the Blue Badge Scheme had raised some issues and he wished to highlight

that disabled users were, perhaps, not the only group of people who might wish to have additional time - for example mothers with young children in push-chairs. Those who held Blue Badges could utilise the on-street parking concession which, he said, was not necessarily an option to other users such as the mother with children and pushchairs. He suggested that the issues needed to be kept in perspective. The Leader of the Council also said that it was right to encourage people to use the RingGo app for the environmental benefits it offered; there would always be some reluctance to any change but it was important to be clear the Council had no ulterior motive beyond trying to reduce carbon emissions. In conclusion, the Leader of the Council said that some 80% of the population owned and used a smart phone and so the use of an app should not be an issue. He also referred to the digital systems in place at the Dartford Crossing.

In response to a query, the Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager confirmed that four new electric vehicles were in use by Enforcement Officers.

In response to a further comment about the clarity of the messaging on the current signage, the Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager said the information board contained the legal wording associated with contravention laws. He added that the clear and important message was sited at the very top of the sign. In the event that a user's mobile telephone had no signal to enable use of the app, then coins could be used to purchase a ticket. He added that if there was no signal generally, the pay machines may not work either and so no fines would be served.

Councillor Wiles welcomed the proposed extension of additional car parking as supportive to the local economy and its recovery; he asked if there was a target date for this to happen. The Transport, Infrastructure and Parking Services Manager said it was hoped to do this in early December to allow for the 21 day notice period.

Councillor Deacon said that although issues had been highlighted during the discussion he was sure that these were resolvable.

There being no further questions or matters raised for debate, it was proposed by Councillor Bird and seconded by Councillor Deacon and by unanimous vote

## **RESOLVED**

1. That the draft recommendations arising from the contents of the report and the questions raised in relation to it at the meeting be considered and agreed at the next Scrutiny Committee meeting on 26 November 2020

## **4 Scrutiny Committee's Forward Work Programme**

The Scrutiny Committee received a draft remit for the establishment of a proposed Task and Finish Group on aspects of Integrated Care. In considering this draft remit, the Scrutiny Committee was referred to the protocol for Task and Finish Groups. At the request of the Chairman, the Clerk précised the protocol which had also been provided to the Committee in advance of the meeting.

The proposed remit was agreed and a Task and Finish Group established.

Councillor Deacon nominated Councillor Beavan to chair the Task and Finish Group; this was seconded by Councillor Topping. Councillor Robinson nominated Councillor Back to chair the Task and Finish Group; Councillor Back withdrew from the nomination.

It having been proposed and seconded, it was agreed by majority vote

**RESOLVED:**

1. That Councillor Beavan be chair of the Task and Finish Group which would also comprise Councillor Back, Councillor Green and Councillor Robinson.
  
- 2 In accordance with the protocol, written update reports from the Task and Finish Group would be received at the scheduled meetings of the Scrutiny Committee in December 2020 and January 2021. The final report, with draft recommendations, would be received at an Extraordinary meeting of the Scrutiny Committee to be arranged in February 2021.

The Meeting concluded at 9:45pm

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Chairman