

Minutes of a Meeting of the Performance and Finance Scrutiny Committee held at Council Chamber, Surrey Heath House, Knoll Road, Camberley, GU15 3HD on 17 February 2022

+ Cllr Sashi Mylvaganam (Chairman)
+ Cllr Valerie White (Vice Chairman)

- Cllr Graham Alleway	- Cllr Sharon Galliford
+ Cllr Peter Barnett	+ Cllr Edward Hawkins
+ Cllr Rodney Bates	+ Cllr David Lewis
+ Cllr Stuart Black	+ Cllr Darryl Ratiram
+ Cllr Vivienne Chapman	+ Cllr Morgan Rise
+ Cllr Sarah Jane Croke	- Cllr Graham Tapper
+ Cllr Tim FitzGerald	+ Cllr Victoria Wheeler

+ Present
- Apologies for absence presented

Substitutes: Cllr Rodney Bates for Cllr Graham Alleway
Cllr Tim Fitzgerald for Cllr Graham Tapper
Cllr David Lewis for Cllr Paul Deach

Members in Attendance: Cllrs Cliff Betton, Paul Deach, Colin Dougan, Sharon Galliford, Shaun Garrett, Rebecca Jennings-Evans, David Mansfield, Emma-Jane McGrath, Adrian Page and Pat Tedder

Officers Present: Julia Greenfield, Corporate Enforcement Manager
Eugene Leal, Parking Services Manager
Gavin Ramtohal, Head of Legal & Democratic Services
Damian Roberts, Chief Executive
Nick Steevens, Strategic Director: Environment & community
Bob Watson, Strategic Director: Finance & Customer Services
Stephen Wilkinson, Head of Investment & Development

41/PF Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

42/PF Overview and Scrutiny Committee Call In Meeting Procedure

The Committee noted the procedure that would be followed during the meeting.

43/PF Call In of Executive Decision: Review of Parking Fees and Charges

The Committee considered a report setting out a Member Call-in in respect of a decision taken by the Executive on 25th January 2022 to approve changes to the fees and charges imposed at the Borough Council's car parks.

The Executive's decision to approve changes to the fees charges at car parks owned by the Borough Council had been called in by Councillors Betton, Rise, Tapper, Tedder and Wheeler, who expressed a number of concerns about the proposed changes including that:

- There had been a lack of consultation with ward councillors, local residents and businesses about the changes.
- There had been a lack of information about where the additional monies raised from the changes would be spent.
- The changes would negatively impact on local businesses in Frimley Green and Chobham
- The changes would increase the levels of on street parking in residential areas.
- The changes to charges in Chobham car parks would deter people from using the Chobham Water Meadow Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) which would in turn place additional pressure on the nearby Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) at Chobham Common.
- Parking in Chobham was limited and the car park was heavily used by parents of children attending the nearby school.

Those members who had requested the Call-in indicated that they were in agreement with the Executive's decision to raise the fees charged in Camberley Town Centre Car parks and that their main concerns were focused on the impacts that changes to the parking charges at Chobham Car Park and Wharf Road Car Park in Frimley Green would have on local residents and businesses. It was agreed that the charges at Chobham and Wharf Road car parks would be the focus of the debate.

Officers clarified that any monies received from the car parks contributed to the Council's overall budget. It was noted that car parking changes for out of town car parks had last been increased in 2009 and that under the current charging regime the monies collected were insufficient to cover the costs of the current service provision. It was stressed that even if the projected increase in income was achieved it would still not be enough to cover the costs of providing car parks in the rural areas of the Borough.

The Committee noted that the greatest expenditure being incurred was the Non-Domestic Rates imposed by the Government, something that the Council had no control over, other areas of expenditure included maintenance of car park surfaces and lighting and maintenance of the lifts in the multi-storey car parks.

It was clarified that the figures for the projected split between 1 hour tickets and 2 hour tickets had been reached followed an assessment made by an experienced parking team.

The Committee acknowledged that the projected gap in the Council's finances had to be covered and that services wherever possible should be covering their costs. Members recognised that parking fees should have been reviewed in an annual basis to ensure that they kept pace with inflation.

It was acknowledged that the introduction of charges in the out of town and rural car parks could deter some people from using them. However, experience with the town centre car parks had shown that even with the two hour free parking period currently available at Knoll Road the car park was rarely full with visitors preferring to pay to park somewhere with direct access to shops and services. Given the nature of the shops and services in Chobham and Frimley Green it was considered that a period of one hours free parking would be sufficient to cover the majority of people's needs when visiting the areas in question.

It was recognised that introducing charges at Wharf Road would in all probability result in a rise in on street parking by those people working in local businesses which didn't have their own staff parking. However, the car park had not functioned well as a car park for customers of the local businesses for many years and the introduction of charges would encourage greater churn in the number of visitors using the car park and free up spaces during the day.

Whilst the use of Chobham car park by parents collecting and dropping off children from the local primary school was noted it was stressed that residents would still be able to park for free for an hour, a time limit that was considered sufficient for this activity. Where longer parking periods were required, for example volunteers helping at the school, the possibility of working with the school to establish a parking pass scheme could be explored.

The lack of consultation with ward members was acknowledged and it was indicated that in future greater consideration would be given to broadening the scope of those who were consulted before non-routine decisions were made.

It was clarified that all of the Borough council's car parks were visited by Enforcement Officers on a daily basis and the majority of those using the car parks did adhere to the rules. The Committee stressed that Enforcement Officers should be visiting car parks randomly.

It was noted that following comments made at the Executive meeting, on 25th January 2022, officers had initiated discussions with Natural England over the potential impacts that changing the charging regime might have on the SSSI and SANG and Natural England had verbally indicated that they would support the retention of one hour's free parking in the Chobham car park; although written confirmation of this had been requested.

It was reported that the original business case for Chobham Water Meadows SANG referenced there being an assessed need for car parking at the site and that the status quo at the time the SANG was developed would be maintained. It was also noted that whilst the circular walk in Chobham Water Meadows measured approximately 2½km it did link to footpaths in the wider area and this should be taken into account when assessing how long visitors spent in the car park. It was agreed that these matters would be followed up outside the meeting.

It was questioned whether it would be possible to use SANG contributions from developers to offset the cost of parking in the rural areas.

RESOLVED that the matter be referred back to the Executive for reconsideration and the following points to be made:

- i. Changes to the fee structures at the Borough Council owned car parks should go ahead, as set out in the Executive report, with the exception of those proposed for Wharf Road car park and Chobham car park.
- ii. A decision on changing the fee structure at Wharf Road to be delayed to enable officers to:
 - a. consult with ward councillors, local businesses and residents in the immediate vicinity of the car park.
 - b. Monitor the capacity and usage of car park.
- iii. A decision on changing the fee structure at Chobham car park to be delayed to enable officers to:
 - a. Consult with Natural England, and other organisations as appropriate, on the impacts that the changes might have on the SSSI.
 - b. Explore the possible use of SANG contributions to offset the costs of running the Chobham car park.

CHAIRMAN