

SCRUTINY BOARD (ENVIRONMENT, HOUSING AND COMMUNITIES)

THURSDAY, 21ST NOVEMBER, 2024

PRESENT: Councillor S Golton in the Chair

Councillors A Maloney, S Ali,
L Cunningham, L Farley, K Haigh,
E Bromley, B Flynn, J Garvani, R Jones,
N Manaka and R Stephenson

55 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against refusal of inspection of documents.

56 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There was no exempt information.

57 Late Items

There were no late items.

58 Declaration of Interests

There were no declarations of interests.

59 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies were received from the following members of the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities):

- Cllr N Harrington (Cllr B Flynn attended as a substitute)
- Cllr B Anderson (Cllr R Stephenson attended as a substitute)
- Cllr A Hannan (Cllr E Bromley attended as a substitute)
- Cllr Z Hussain (Cllr J Garvani attended as a substitute)
- Cllr M Iqbal (Cllr R Jones attended as a substitute)
- Cllr A McCluskey (Cllr N Manaka attended as a substitute)

Cllr M Dobson also asked that his apologies be noted in his capacity as a signatory to the first call-in request.

60 Call-In Briefing Paper

The Principal Scrutiny Advisor highlighted the key elements of the call-in process as set out in the appended report.

The Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities) members were advised that they were being asked to consider two call-in requests, which had been received in line with the Executive and Decision-Making Procedure Rules.

Those call-in requests related to a key decision regarding Parking Charges on District Centres. Further detail surrounding the decision was provided elsewhere in the agenda pack, along with copies of the call-in request forms.

The Scrutiny Board was advised that the meeting was specific to the key decision that has been called in. Issues outside of this decision, including other related decisions, could not be considered as part of the Scrutiny Board's determination of the outcome of the Call In.

Members were reminded that having reviewed the decision, the Scrutiny Board could pursue one of two courses of action:

Option 1 – Release the decision for implementation. In this case, the decision would be immediately released for implementation and the decision could not be Called In again.

Option 2 – Recommend to the decision maker that the decision be reconsidered. If the Scrutiny Board chose to make this recommendation, a report of the Scrutiny Board would be produced and referred to the Director of Communities, Housing and Environment for consideration.

Members were advised that if the Scrutiny Board did not agree one of the above actions, then Option 1 would be adopted by default - the decision would be released for implementation and could not be Called-In again.

RESOLVED: The Scrutiny Board noted the content of the report and agreed to adopt the procedure as detailed within it.

61 Parking Charges on District Centres (D57783)

Those individuals in attendance were:

Cllr N Harrington	Lead signatory to call in 1 (Conservative Group representative)
Cllr C Hart-Brooke	Signatory to call in 1 (Liberal Democrat Group representative)
Cllr P Stables	Lead signatory to call in 2 (Green Group)
Cllr M Rafique	Executive Member for Climate, Energy, Environment & Green Space
James Rogers	Director, Communities, Housing & Environment
Gary Bartlett	Chief Officer Highways and Transportation
John Mulcahy	Chief Officer Elections and Regulatory
Jason Singh	Head of Regulatory and City Centre Services
Mark Jefford	Senior Manager, Environmental Services
Nikki Deol	Head of Service, Legal Services

The officers supporting the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities) for this meeting were:

Draft minutes to be approved at the meeting
to be held on Thursday 23 January 2025

Rebecca Roberts	Section Head, Legal Services
Rebecca Atherton	Principal Scrutiny Advisor

The Chair introduced the item by setting out the structure for the meeting.

He noted that he had agreed in advance to a request for a nominated representative from each political group represented on the first call-in request to speak at the meeting. However, Cllr Dobson was subsequently unable to attend the meeting. The Scrutiny Board therefore agreed Cllr Harrington could read a brief statement on his behalf.

Speakers were reminded that they should focus on the grounds for the call-in and that introductory comments would be time limited.

In making her introductory comments, Cllr Harrington highlighted concerns including:

- Levels of local opposition in Wetherby reflected in consultation exercises, public meetings and a petition.
- Potential displacement of parking to surrounding areas.
- The impact on young and vulnerable people.
- Limited alternative methods of public transport.
- Economic impact of reduced footfall on local businesses and charities.
- The outcome of a pilot programme of enhanced enforcement.

Cllr Hart-Brooke provided further comment noting the following issues:

- Impact on local businesses, particularly near Marsh Street car park.
- Disadvantage for local businesses in comparison to out of town retail sites, which will continue to offer free parking.
- Impact on low-income households and workers.
- The geography of outer areas resulting in a higher reliance on car ownership for some people.
- A lack of reliable public transport alternatives.
- Level of opposition reflected in consultation responses.
- Predicted levels of revenue and costs associated with the project.

With the agreement of the Scrutiny Board, Cllr Harrington read a statement on behalf of Cllr Dobson. He highlighted concerns including:

- Potential to exacerbate existing challenges regarding parking and driver behaviours around Barleyhill Road.
- Risks to public safety of increased congestion and poor driver behaviour.
- Potential displacement of parking to surrounding areas.
- The impact of new charges on local businesses.
- Predicted costs of potential increases in enforcement activity.

Cllr Stables was invited to make introductory comments. She began by noting she did not object in principle to car parking charges as a potential tool to discourage car use and raise revenue. However, in this instance she is

concerned that Wetherby has no railway and a lack of reliable, regular bus services.

She agreed with many of the comments relating to Wetherby that had already been made and raised the following matters:

- Impact on workers travelling to Wetherby from villages in North Yorkshire, where there are no alternative public transport links.
- Impact for employees on low-incomes and the potential impact on local businesses if those employees seek alternative work.
- Impact on charity shops, which are reliant upon volunteers.
- Impact of displacement parking into surrounding areas.
- Potential impact on the cultural life of Wetherby, including a series of summer performances by silver bands.

A concern was raised about the breadth of payment options available to car park users, especially for those people who do not use bank cards or apps. Members queried whether there could be an option for people to pay for parking in advance using other facilities.

Further information was sought about the public meetings, drop-in sessions and petition organised in Wetherby.

Additional information was requested in relation to a pilot of enhanced enforcement activity in Wetherby and the number of tickets that need to be issued each day to meet the requirements of the budget.

Signatories confirmed they had all engaged with West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) and bus providers about scope to enhance future bus service provision in the localities in question.

In responding to the concerns raised, Cllr Rafique highlighted the unprecedented budget challenge facing the Council, the need to take difficult decisions and the way in which the proposals have been amended following initial public engagement.

John Mulcahy set out the key parameters of the proposals, highlighting that the maximum daily charge would be £3.65. In response to feedback from the initial consultation the proposals had been amended to offer an hour of free parking at all sites.

There would be no charge before 8am or after 6pm and blue badge holders would continue to access free parking.

Officers confirmed options for season tickets are being explored and some revenue will be used to deliver improvements to the sites. Members were also informed that advice about the proposals had been sought from colleagues in legal and financial services, and the equalities team

Cash payment will not be permitted under current proposals due to the risk of theft and vandalism. Instead, payment will be available via credit or debit card,

or mobile phone. Officers highlighted that the consultation demonstrates that most people would choose to make card or app payments. Members queried whether an evaluation could be undertaken to provide reassurance about the number of people who may be adversely affected by cashless payments.

Taking into account costs, including borrowing costs, annual revenue for this year had been anticipated to be £335k. It is anticipated to be £414k in the following year.

Members sought clarity about alternative revenue-raising proposals that had been considered. Officers confirmed that alternative proposals were considered but none were deemed viable in terms of income generation in the required timeframe.

It was noted that alternative methods of transport had been identified in all areas affected.

It was confirmed that the highways service would monitor the impact of new charges so that any measures required to respond to displacement parking can be implemented.

Members sought further information about the typical timeframes for the introduction of Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs). Members discussed with officers whether an introduction of TROs ahead of the implementation of a charging schedule would be beneficial for residents.

In response the Chief Officer (Highways and Transportation) advised that this can result in a reduction of available parking for local people. As such usual practice is to assess the impact of any local changes and to then respond in the most appropriate manner. He confirmed that the service would review statutory consultation responses to identify specific concerns.

The Scrutiny Board was advised that an assessment of sites had been carried out which captured the number of cars and the length of stay. Members queried whether any further assessments had been carried out to capture information about car park users such as age, purpose of visit and distance travelled.

Concern was raised about the impact on local businesses if charges lead to reduced footfall. Further information was sought about the potential impact on the average length of stay in car parks and the effect that may have on local economy.

Jason Singh updated members on what has been learnt from the implementation of parking charges in Otley. He highlighted the importance of a collaborative approach in the district and flexibility around issues such as permits and season tickets. He noted a record of flexibility in Otley with charging schemes reflecting changing behaviours/needs.

Members sought clarification about whether any evaluation had taken place of the experience of districts outside of Leeds where charges have been introduced. Officers confirmed that they have identified areas where charging has been introduced but a formal evaluation had not been undertaken as to the experience of those districts.

The Scrutiny Board was advised that there is limited data available that provides evidence of the long-term economic impact of introducing car parking charges – including the impact on low-income households, workers and businesses.

Reflecting on the challenge of the budget, members were reassured that charging was regarded as proportionate and that subsequent statutory consultation would seek to consider any specific matters linked to each locality.

James Rogers highlighted that all charging policies are monitored and will be amended as required to respond to changing circumstances.

He also highlighted the challenge of managing cost pressures this year due to delays in implementation of the proposed charging policy, and the additional cost pressure that would be created in subsequent years if the decision were not implemented.

Mark Jefford outlined the way in which enforcement activity would be managed in district centres following the introduction of charges and the costs associated with that work. He provided reassurance around staff retention and recruitment.

It was noted that those affected by the charges would already be paying to run a car. Members were asked to consider the increased reliance on car ownership in outer areas as a result of the local geography and lack of good public transport links.

Members sought and received advice about whether there would be circumstances in which the local authority might take action that is not in accordance with national statutory guidance.

11.30 Cllr Cunningham left the meeting

John Mulcahy confirmed that officers will look at all payment options.

Lead signatories and the Director were invited to make closing remarks before members determined the outcome of the call-in.

The Director reflected on the proportionality of the proposed charges in the context of the budget challenge and reminded members that the proposals already reflect amendments in light of public feedback. He set out the next steps should the decision be released and assured members all parking policies would remain under review.

Cllrs Harrington, Hart-Brooke and Stables summarised their outstanding concerns including a lack of alternative public transport, displacement parking, payment methods, the impact on local economies and the potential financial impact on staff, volunteers and visitors.

RESOLVED: Members of the Scrutiny Board reviewed the decision and moved to determine the outcome of the call-in.

62 Outcome of the Call In

The Chair invited each member of the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing & Communities) to vote for one of two available options:

- Option 1: release the decision for implementation.
- Option 2: recommend to the decision maker that the decision be reconsidered.

The Principal Scrutiny Advisor confirmed that the majority of Scrutiny Board members voted for option 2 and the outcome was therefore to recommend to the decision maker that the decision be reconsidered.

She further advised the Scrutiny Board that where a decision is referred back for reconsideration, the Scrutiny Officer is required to prepare a report within three working days of the meeting for the relevant Director.

As a result, there was a brief adjournment of the meeting to allow the Chair, Principal Scrutiny Officer and the Legal Officer supporting the Scrutiny Board to summarise the principles which would form the basis of that report to the Director.

Upon returning to public session, members agreed the following principles should form the basis of the Scrutiny Officer's report to the Director:

- **Displacement Parking:** concern was expressed that the introduction of parking charges would lead to displacement parking on roads in surrounding areas. Clarity and reassurance was requested regarding the pace at which additional Traffic Regulation Orders (TROs) could be introduced.
- **Impact on the economies of district centres:** It was acknowledged that district centres are by their nature highly localised. However, common concerns were raised about all district centres including ways in which a robust assessment could be made about the influence of new parking charges on footfall, length of parking stay and how much money may then be spent in the local economy. The Scrutiny Board suggested that comparative data from other district centres outside of Leeds, where charges have already been introduced, may provide valuable evidence.

- **Proportionality:** the Scrutiny Board sought additional data to provide assurance about the proportional impact of the introduction of charges on different stakeholder groups – for example, workers, shoppers and visitors. Members highlighted challenges regarding the accessibility of district centres for some people living in the outer areas of the city with limited options for alternative methods of travel.
- **Consultation:** Members expressed concern about the level of opposition to the proposed charges (reflected in the survey responses appended to the report to the decision maker).
- **Equality of access:** The Director was asked to further consider the breadth of payment methods, particularly addressing those citizens without access to a bank card or parking app.

RESOLVED:

The Scrutiny Board agreed to recommend to the decision maker that the decision be reconsidered. The Scrutiny Officer was therefore required to prepare a report within three working days of the meeting for the relevant Director.

In line with the Council's [Executive and Decision Making Procedure Rules](#) the Scrutiny Board further agreed the principles which should form the basis of the Scrutiny Officer's subsequent report to the Director. The details of the agreed principles are as set out in the minute above.

63 Date and Time of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Scrutiny Board (Environment, Housing and Communities) will take place on **Friday 6 December at 10.00am**. There will be a pre-meeting for all Scrutiny Board members at **9.30am**.