

Chichester District Council

OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

24 JANUARY 2017

Call-In of the Cabinet decision relating to evening charges in New Park Road and Northgate Car Parks

Contacts:

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Recommendation:

That Overview & Scrutiny consider the Call-In and either:

- (a) refer it back to the decision maker for re-consideration, setting out in writing the nature of the committee's concerns
- (b) refer the matter to Council setting out in writing the nature of the committee's concerns
- (c) decide that neither (a) or (b) above applies in which case the decision will be effective immediately thereafter.

Background

Parking Charges are reviewed annually and are subject to consideration in line with other neighbouring authorities, capacity issues and associated running costs. Car park users expect charges to be reasonable and proportionate. The Council needs to generate enough income from car parking to cover its costs and to allow for future investment. Car parks occupy valuable sites and charges need to reflect this aspect. If they are not serving their purpose effectively, or their usage could be consolidated, there may be another economically beneficial use to which a site could be put.

Chichester District Council's Car Park Strategy 2010-20 reflects the need to maximise the capacity of the existing stock. One method of doing so is to ensure that charges are set at a level which encourages turnover of use in higher demand areas.

Details of Call-In

A Call-In has been received relating to the decision made by Cabinet on 10 January 2017 relating to Off-Street Parking Charges. The call in only relates to paragraph 5.1 (a) – 'To

extend the hours of charging in New Park Road and Northgate Car Parks from 6.00pm Monday to Saturday to 8.00pm Monday to Saturday’.

The Call-In has been properly made in accordance with the Constitution and as a result has been referred to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration.

The Call-In request states the reasons for Call-In as follows:

1. Inadequate consultation process and flawed interpretation of responses
2. Inequality of charges on New Park due to different car parking hourly rates
3. Effect on CFT, New Park activities and night-time economy

This paper addresses each of those specific points in order to assist the Committee with their consideration.

Details of Consultation Process Undertaken

The proposal to implement the extension of charging hours has been considered and consulted on through the processes as detailed below:

1. Chichester District Parking Forum, at its meeting on 6 September 2016, considered and discussed a number of options relating to Parking Charges for implementation from 1 April 2017 and agreed that these should be considered by Cabinet for implementation. One of these options was to extend the period of charging within Northgate and New Park Road car parks within Chichester city from the existing 8.00am – 6.00pm Monday to Saturday to 8.00am – 8.00pm Monday to Saturday. Chichester District Parking Forum is a group of internal and external stakeholders who consider the parking and charging strategy for district car parks prior to these options being considered by Cabinet. A Parking Forum is not a statutory requirement for local authorities and Chichester District Council is, indeed, quite unique in having such comprehensive consultative group in place. The very existence of the Parking Forum and the process of consideration of parking charges by this Forum is therefore evidence of the authority undertaking additional consultation on parking charges prior to implementation.

The Terms of Reference and Membership of the Chichester District Parking Forum is attached at Appendix 1.

2. Contact was made with both the New Park Centre and Chichester Festival Theatre prior to Cabinet on 1 November, to enable both organisations to provide details of their considerations of the potential proposals at an early stage. This is another example of the authority having provided an additional opportunity for consultation to the process which was not required under the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 when setting parking charges. Details of the feedback received from both the New Park Centre and Chichester Festival Theatre were included as an oral update to Cabinet on 1 November to assist with consideration of the proposals for consultation. Details of the discussion and feedback from the two organisations are included within Minute 281 of Cabinet Meeting of 1 November 2016.

3. Following agreement by Cabinet that the proposals discussed should be consulted on, the statutory process, meeting the requirements of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 was followed and a notice was placed in local newspapers (Observer Series), on 17 November 2016, advertising the proposed charges and providing details of the method for consultation responses to be received. In addition to this, and as stated within the advert, the draft Parking Order detailing the proposed charges was available for inspection at East Pallant House and the Council's Area Offices. Several Notices were also placed in both car parks on 17 November detailing the proposed charges and the method of providing any consultation responses. This process meets with the requirement of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984 for the communication and amendment of parking charges.
4. Statutory consultees were also contacted with details of the proposed charges and invited to provide feedback on the proposals. A list of statutory consultees is included at Appendix 2.
5. Significant media interest in the proposals resulted in an increased awareness of the proposals under consideration. This was seen through extensive press and social media coverage.
6. The statutory timescale for advertisement of proposed charges is 21 days within the affected car parks. The timescale was extended in this case, with 26 days allowed (to incorporate the final weekend), for responses - an enhancement to the required process. In addition to this, Chichester City Council communicated during the consultation process that they wished to have an extension of time as they wanted the opportunity to consider at both the Finance Committee and their Full Council meeting prior to submitting their response. This was also agreed. Three additional responses to the consultation were received after the close of the consultation period and were included as a verbal update to Cabinet. Again, this is evidence of enhancement of the required consultation process having been in place.
7. A decision was taken at Cabinet on 6 December that the responses to consultation would be considered by Cabinet in January prior to being implemented. (This amended the recommendation which had been agreed at Cabinet on 1 November which permitted delegated authority to the Head of Commercial Services, which is the standard process). This therefore provided an additional opportunity for consideration of the proposals.
8. The advertised deadline for consultation responses was 12 December 2016. Prior to the consultation deadline an email was sent to both Chichester Festival Theatre and New Park Community Centre, as they had not yet responded in the consultation period, to remind them of the consultation process and to request any additional information they wished to provide. Both organisations responded and their comments were considered and were taken into consideration when finalising the

Cabinet Report. A total of 21 responses were received, with 4 of these being in support of the proposals. These responses were summarised and included within the report to Cabinet relating to On-Street Parking Charges on 10 January 2017. Cabinet debate determined that the proposals for evening charges would be introduced with effect from 1 April 2017 as a trial period.

Impact of Charges on New Park due to different hourly rates

Tariffs within car parks are set to reflect the local circumstances, capacity and demand, in order to performance manage the usage of the car parks. New Park Road, being a short stay car park in the city centre does therefore attract a higher tariff. Customers using the car park during the day, including those using the New Park Centre, are currently subject to the same hourly tariff which is proposed for the extended hours.

There are a number of other parking options in close proximity to the New Park Road Car Park – with the Cattle Market car park providing over 800 spaces which will remain free during the trial period proposed.

Customers of New Park Community Centre are one group of the many users of the car park (there are many restaurants, pubs and retail outlets close by), with the New Park Community Centre having an added advantage of its own car park with a number of spaces which can be provided to customers. In addition to this the proposal incorporates some drop off / pick up parking bays for a maximum of 20 minutes to assist with customers using local facilities.

Effect on Chichester Festival Theatre, New Park Activities and Night-time Economy

Feedback on the proposals was received by both Chichester Festival Theatre and the New Park Centre, referencing their concerns relating to the impact on their users. This feedback was included as part of the papers for Cabinet, where it was determined that the trial of evening charges would be closely monitored for any resultant impact on local organisations such as the New Park Centre and Chichester Festival Theatre.

Evening charges exist in many cities across the country and the existence of these meet with the policy of users paying for the service for which they receive and attempting to make the charges for daytime and evening users equitable. Examples of this were provided within the Cabinet Report.

Similar concerns were raised when the Council proposed to introduce charges for the first time in its car parks, when these were extended to rural car parks and on Sundays. Despite these concerns the Council has always been very careful to ensure that any changes are proportionate and will not have the negative impacts at first envisaged in some quarters. This has been the experience on each occasion.

Chichester Festival Theatre in the past has supported the introduction of evening charges, albeit with the income being credited to the Theatre, as evidenced by their letter dated 23 August 2011 (attached as Appendix 3).

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Terms of reference and membership of Chichester District Parking Forum

Appendix 2 – Statutory consultees

Appendix 3 – Letter from Chichester Festival Theatre dated 23 August 2011