

## **Agenda Item No:**

Title:	Car Parking Charges Review
Portfolio Holder:	Rosemary Brown, Environmental Services
Reporting Officer:	Ian Gallin, Corporate Director
Key Decision:	Yes

---

### **Purpose of report**

The purpose of this report is to present Cabinet with the conclusions of the Car Parking Review and to make recommendations on the way forward in relation to car parking charges and a future strategy for such charges within West Wiltshire.

### **Background**

In undertaking this review, Cabinet has been clear that the intention is for any conclusions to be evidence based.

In collecting evidence to inform the review, officers have:

- issued press statements requesting that evidence of the impact be sent in
- written to the Wessex Association of Chambers of Commerce and the Federation of Small Businesses to request evidence of the impact
- written to all Town Councils requesting their views and any evidence
- asked for evidence to be submitted during all discussions with business, traders, individuals and their representative groups
- attended a meeting of the car park charges working group and the subsequent public meeting in Warminster
- met with councillors from Westbury Town Council
- reviewed all available occupancy and income data for the car parks

### **Main findings**

The Council has received numerous letters and responses in respect of car parking charges. This includes a report from Warminster Town Council collating a range of views from the town.

The main issues arising from the review are as follows:

- Concern about lack of adequate shoppers' car parking to support the vibrancy of town centres (two hours' free car parking)
- The level of long stay charges, including the impact on part-time workers
- The impact on local business (particularly retailers)

- An increase in, and lack of enforcement of, on-street car parking

## **Occupancy**

While the new car parking machines allow the Council to more accurately collate information regarding car park occupancy, this system is still bedding in. There have been a number of initial issues in relation to the software, but these have now been resolved.

However, this means that there are significant issues with the reliability of occupancy figures. Work will be undertaken so that the Council can use this information to ensure a solid base of data in setting and reviewing the impact of car park charges in the future.

## **Income figures**

Overall income from car park charges is holding up in line with the predicted budget, although the position is finely balanced. This is mainly due to significantly more excess charge income being received by the Council.

The latest monitoring information produced in August indicates a projected shortfall in car park income of £81,735 in the southern area and £7,680 in the northern area. Currently the central area is projected to achieve £13,328 more than predicted.

At this stage these are budget projections and need to be treated as such. They do, however, present a fairly clear overall picture at this stage.

## **Conclusions**

There are clearly a number of issues with regard to the impact of the revised level of car parking charges. These appear to be different in each of the five towns with some clear issues being identified in the southern part of the district.

This is indicated by the Council's own income data and is well supported by the range of views and evidence we have had expressed and provided to us. This has particularly been the case from Warminster, which has provided a great deal of considered information.

## **Suggested way forward**

It would be difficult to recommend any significant changes in car parking charges at this point in the financial year.

Reasons for this include:

- The budget has been set and it is very difficult to review at this point in the year. Budgets have been set in relation to income and expenditure so any

impact on income would have a resultant impact on the Council's delivery of other services.

- Cabinet's commissioning of this review has highlighted a need to establish a more rigorous bases for car park charges and a greater understanding of the needs of our market towns. To make any changes now without a wider discussion would lead to the risk of further additional changes at a later date and further confusion.
- The occupancy data still contains a number of inaccuracies and consequently is difficult to rely upon. Officers would have little confidence in advising on the financial implications of any changes to the level of charging based on this data at this time.

However, it is recommended that Cabinet considers some short-term measures in the current financial year to address the issues highlighted in this review, where practical, and commits to addressing the issues on a more permanent basis as part of the 2006/07 Service and Resource Planning process.

Suggested short-term measures include:

#### **Current financial year (2005/06)**

- Explore with Town Councils the introduction of free two hour car parking, prioritising the needs of towns in the south of the district. Town Councils would need to be able to make a contribution in order to achieve this outcome. Negotiations would be needed to confirm the detail.
- Work in partnership with the police to improve on-street parking enforcement.
- Work in partnership with the County Council, as Highways Authority, to seek the introduction of "yellow lining" in specific hot spots.

#### **Next financial year (2006/07)**

- Establish a Car Parking Forum for the district to act as a consultative body on car parking. This could be chaired by the West Wiltshire Economic Partnership (WWEP) to ensure an independent view and maintain effective links with the business community. Membership of the Forum would need to be more formally resolved, as would the role of WWEP.
- Explore the options presented by 'differential' charging in the towns. This allows much greater flexibility and an ability to respond to the needs of each town.
- Improve the model we use for structuring car parking income by utilising the occupancy data.
- In relation to the level of long stay charges, do not adjust the level, but review our ability to offer greater concessionary discounts, including discounted weekly or monthly ticketing from the machines. Also, in addition to long stay

charges, review the point at which these are effective in the charging scheme so as to avoid, as far as possible, the impact on part-time workers.

- Investigate the option of moving to a pay on foot system in selective town centre car parks. The advantage with this is the improved link between usage and the charge. This would require additional capital investment and would not be suitable for all sites; however, this approach would result in the need for less enforcement activity.
- Increase the provision of two hour free car parking in partnership with Town Councils.
- Develop a greater understanding in the District (through publicity) about where car parking charges go and how money is recycled into the towns through initiatives such as 5Ti.
- Improve signage within car parks advising of charges and signage directing to car parks on the highway.
- Give serious consideration to planning for the introduction of decriminalisation as part of the 2006/07 Service and Resource Planning process.

### **Financial implications**

At this stage, it is not possible to highlight the financial implications for 2006/07 but this will be addressed as part of the service and resource planning process.

In relation to this year (2005/06), officers believe that any costs to the Council can be met from existing budgets to support the short-term measures. This is of course dependent on the ability of the Town Councils to make a contribution.

### **Recommendation:**

- Cabinet adopt the measures as suggested for the current financial year and the actions suggested for the 2006/07 financial year
- Cabinet make any amendments or additions to the action plan

## Background Papers

File "Car parking charges review" Room F23

<b>Statement of reason for key decision</b>	The level of car parking charges has a significant impact on the viability of the market towns and has an impact on local communities and the Councils revenue budget
Options considered and rejected	A range of options were consider in the preparation of this report. The contents of this report are based on the evidence and the consultation carried out.
Date of implementation	The dates for implementation are highlighted in the report. It is anticipated that changes to this years charging will be negotiated immediately with changes to next years being part of the 2006/07 Service and Resource Planning Process, other initiatives such as the establishment of the Forum it is anticipated will be implemented by the end of the calendar year.