

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE** held in the King Edmund Chamber, Endeavour House, 8 Russell Road, Ipswich on Monday, 18 March 2024

PRESENT:

Councillor: Mary McLaren (Chair)
John Whyman (Vice-Chair)

Councillors: Kathryn Grandon Leigh Jamieson
Margaret Maybury BA (Hons) Ch Laura Smith
Th

In attendance:

Councillor(s): Elisabeth Malvisi
Alison Owen

Officers: Interim Monitoring Officer (JR)
Director – Operations and Climate Change (ME)
Parking Services Manager (MS)
Finance Business Partner (JB)
Sustainable Travel Officer (KD)
Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny (AN)

Apologies:

Councillor(s): Brian Riley

20 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

20.1 Councillor Maybury declared an Other Registrable Interest as the Chair of the Lavenham Traffic Working Party but confirmed that she had never voted on matters regarding the proposed car parking tariffs and had come to the meeting with an open mind. The Monitoring Officer advised that Councillor Maybury could partake in the meeting as a committee member.

21 TO RECEIVE NOTIFICATION OF PETITIONS IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE COUNCIL'S PETITION SCHEME

21.1 None received.

22 QUESTIONS BY THE PUBLIC

22.1 None received.

23 QUESTIONS BY COUNCILLORS

23.1 None received.

24 BOS/23/10 PROPOSED CAR PARKING CHARGES AND ROAD TRAFFIC ORDERS

24.1 The Chair invited the Interim Monitoring Officer to set out the governance arrangements for the committee meeting.

24.2 The Interim Monitoring Officer advised the Committee that the recommendations as set out in the report were for the Cabinet to vote on, that the Committee's role was to scrutinise the engagement process and the research that had led to those proposed recommendations, and reminded Members to approach the item objectively and with an open mind.

24.3 The Chair invited the Leader of the Council and the Officers to introduce the item to the Committee.

24.4 Councillor Dave Busby, Leader of the Council, introduced the item to the Committee outlining before Members: the £6.7million budget deficit, the current costs of subsidising car parking at £400,000 a year, the need for full cost recovery, alternative options concerning outsourcing of car park management to town councils or selling/leasing the car parks to a third party for operation, and the reasons why these alternatives were not considered further.

24.5 The Director for Operations and Climate Change presented the item to the Committee outlining before Members: the decision made by Cabinet to go out to public consultation on car parking tariffs, the public engagement process undertaken, the feedback report constructed by the Strategic Policy team, the current net cost of subsidising car park charges, the two different tariff options proposed to the Cabinet, proposed reductions to all-day parking tariffs, differences in short and long stay tariffs, the reasons for ruling out a free parking period, proposed changes to parking restrictions, the proposed hiring of a parking projects officer to assist with the implementation of charges if agreed, and invited the Committee to provide feedback on the report.

24.6 Councillor Maybury queried why all car parks within Sudbury and Lavenham were not listed in the table as set out in Point 6.22. The Director for Operations and Climate Change responded that this table detailed the car parks that would be charged for and clarified that this did not include all car parks in key towns across the District.

24.7 Councillor Whyman questioned whether the processes for determining parking tariffs had been shared with neighbouring councils. The Director for Operations and Climate Change responded that the Parking Services Manager frequently attended a regional parking forum and engaged with officers from neighbouring authorities concerning parking issues and tariffs.

- 24.8 Councillor Whyman requested that the absolute net cost be clarified due to differing figures within the budget. The Director for Operations and Climate Change responded that the figure for national non-domestic rates (NNDR) payable, as listed in Appendix B as £297,428, was accurate and had been reviewed and confirmed by the manager of the business rates service.
- 24.9 Councillor Grandon queried if the split between short stay and long stay spaces available in Hadleigh was an appropriate proposal. The Director for Operations and Climate Change responded that an increase in long stay provision would help address pre-existing confusion within car parks in Hadleigh and that residents would benefit overall from the cheaper tariffs set out in the long stay proposal in comparison to the short stay tariffs.
- 24.10 Councillor Grandon raised concerns regarding the lack of a subsidised “free” parking period and the impact this could cause on school pick-ups and drop-offs in particular. The Director for Operations and Climate Change responded that these pre-existing issues existed across the District but that the retention of a free parking period was ruled out due to the significant financial impact it would have on the Council’s ability to deliver on its parking strategy and sustainable travel plans.
- 24.11 Councillor Smith queried if there would be possibility in the future to increase these tariffs, if implemented, and asked why a free parking period had not been considered given the proposals did not already achieve full cost recovery. The Director for Operations and Climate Change responded that the decision to increase charges in the future would be the prerogative of the Cabinet and that further proposals could be modelled to incorporate a free parking period but it would culminate in a significant dent to efforts to improve the budget position.
- 24.12 Councillor Smith questioned why the merchant fees were different between option A and B. The Finance Business Partner responded that this related to the transactional fees when paying parking charges, which would be covered by the Council, and that the higher costs for option B were due to the higher tariffs proposed.
- 24.13 Councillor Maybury questioned if the possibility of implementing a rebate scheme for users of the doctors surgery and village hall in Lavenham was considered. The Director for Operations and Climate Change responded that this had not been explored but that rebates were being offered within Sudbury and Hadleigh and similar provisions could be made in Lavenham.
- 24.14 Councillor Maybury requested more details on what aspects of sustainable travel would be funded using the costs recovered from implementing parking tariffs. The Director for Operations and Climate Change responded that strategies had been approved but deliverables were yet to be prioritised, and advised that little progress had been made towards sustainable travel goals and targets due to an inadequate pool of funding.

- 24.15 Councillor McLaren queried the additional costs of contracting Ethos to carry out consultancy work. The Director for Operations and Climate Change responded that he did not have those figures to hand but clarified for Members that Ethos carried out two engagement processes that fed into the approved Parking Strategy (2022-42).
- 24.16 Councillor Whyman queried the different costs for a parking charge depending on which method was used to pay the tariff. The Finance Business Partner clarified that this related to transactional fees, which Babergh District Council covered, with mobile transactions costing 10p, contactless payments 9p, and cash payments roughly 10p per transaction.
- 24.17 Councillor Whyman queried if automatic number plate recognition (ANPR) software was used in Council owned car parks and, if not, if this would be rolled out as part of enforcement improvements. The Parking Services Manager responded that ANPR was not currently used and was an option to implement in the near future but clarified that this could not be used for enforcement.
- 24.18 Councillor Jamieson questioned what support services entailed and why these figures had not been reported in the budgets for car parking. The Director for Operations and Climate Change responded that these increased figures were as a result of doing a full cost recovery review of the parking service. The Finance Business Partner clarified that the costs of support services included the cost of work that teams and individual officers from other areas of the Council contribute to the management of parking across the District as well as other corporate overheads.
- 24.19 Councillor Smith asked for clarification on Point 4.7 and whether the introduction of resident parking zones was subject to available funding from Babergh District Council or Suffolk County Council. The Director for Operations and Climate Change responded that there would be an expectation for Babergh to provide that funding if the scheme went ahead.
- 24.20 Councillor Maybury questioned if officers had incorporated the rural setting of the District and accounts of rural poverty into the equality impact assessment (EIA) for the proposed charges. The Director for Operations and Climate Change responded that an equalities screening had taken place, which highlighted no equalities issues, and was approved by the Strategic Policy team which meant there was no requirement to do a more intensive review due to no problems being flagged. The Director further clarified that the rural setting and rural poverty was not captured in this screening.
- 24.21 Councillor Maybury further questioned what analysis had been made for potential reduction in use of car parking facilities due to implementing charges and the potential financial impact of this. The Director for Operations and Climate Change responded that the income modelling carried out was transaction-based, that rebates and refunds had been removed from this modelling, and that a 20% drop in short stay and a 10% drop in long stay parking had been modelled and planned for accordingly.

24.22 Councillor Jamieson questioned what mitigating factors were being put in place should a significant reduction in car park use happen as a result of implementing parking tariffs. The Director for Operations and Climate Change responded that a drop-off had already been modelled against but that there was no evidence to suggest a reduction significant enough to cause a detrimental financial impact would occur.

A short break was taken between 10:50am and 11:10am.

24.23 The Chair invited other Councillors in attendance to pose questions to the Officers.

24.24 Councillor Owen questioned if more extensive dialogue had taken place with the Ward Members for Sudbury, Hadleigh, and Lavenham to better ascertain the nature of concerns from residents. The Director for Operations and Climate Change responded that meetings had taken place with Ward Members and the Town Councils about the proposed parking tariffs.

24.25 Councillor Owen queried if the issues raised within Sudbury Town Council's letter to Babergh District Council could be addressed. The Director of Operations and Climate Change read out Sudbury Town Council's letter to the committee and provided answers for all points raised. This response included information about: the petition process followed by the Council on 20th February, the lack of evidence to support a reduction in visitors to the high streets, comparisons to charges in nearby towns, the engagement process undertaken, and a breakdown of proposed operating costs.

24.26 Councillor Malvisi queried why details of Mill Lane car park in Long Melford were not included in the analysis set out in the report. The Parking Services Manager responded that the Councils were in the process of implementing a resident permit scheme for this car park which would go live on April 15th.

24.27 The Chair invited Committee Members to continue with their questioning to Officers.

24.28 Councillor Grandon raised that most volunteers based their shifts around the current free parking period and questioned if a rebate scheme could be organised to allow volunteers to continue giving their time for free. The Director for Operations and Climate Change responded that this was not included in these proposals and that the tariffs proposed were reasonable enough to hopefully not impact volunteer numbers or availability.

24.29 Councillor Smith questioned if the feedback gathered from the engagement survey was incorporated into the report and the proposals. The Director for Operations and Climate Change responded that this feedback was tied into all aspects of the report.

24.30 Councillor Grandon questioned if the funds brought in from car parking tariffs would be ringfenced. The Director for Operations and Climate Change responded that this money would be kept within the parking service to assist with maintenance of car parks and that any profits would be put towards delivering aspects of the parking strategy and the council's sustainable travel goals.

24.31 Members debated the item on the following issues:

- The equality impact assessment;
- Whether due consideration had been given to the rural setting of the District and the reliance on cars to travel;
- Sustainable travel goals;
- Provisions of a free parking period;
- Potential pre-determination from members of the Cabinet;
- The process followed when undertaking the car parking petition at Full Council in February 2024;
- The current budget deficit;
- Efforts to achieve full cost recovery;
- Potential impact on local businesses and the high street;
- The overall reduction in proposed all-day tariffs;
- Recognising the public as community stakeholders;
- Babergh's Parking Strategy 2022-42;

A short break was taken between 12:18pm and 12:46pm.

24.32 The Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny put forward the following recommendations based on questions and debate from Members:

- That the Director for Operations and Climate Change takes on board the comments made by the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- That Officers provide more detailed clarification on the amendments made to the information and proposals set out in the Cabinet report as a result of the consultation process.
- That Officers be requested to set out in the report to Cabinet a proposed range of tariffs that include a free parking period of 1 hour and its associated costs.
- That Officers further explore with Suffolk County Council the possibility of introducing on-street resident parking permits across the District, that more information on this type of scheme be included in the report to Cabinet, and investigate implementing an appropriate policy.

- That Officers review whether a rebate system could be implemented in Hadleigh, Sudbury, and Lavenham in car parks serving doctors surgeries and medical centres.
- That the Director for Operations and Climate Change continues to consider and create shared value for residents by enhancing the councils offer for non-contact, long term parking permits using intelligent parking control processes such that residents are recognised as community stakeholders.
- That Officers include more information and context about the rural setting of the districts, the current reliance on car use to travel, and the accessible parking provisions needed to adequately meet this need.
- That the Monitoring Officer be asked to investigate allegations of pre-determination raised by the Overview and Scrutiny committee in regard to members of the Cabinet.
- That Officers give further consideration to the issues raised concerning school pick-ups and drop-off as well as carers and medical staff visiting patients.
- That Officers are encouraged to retain the cash and card system for paying parking permits to avoid moving to a cashless system.
- That Cabinet are made aware of the committee's concerns regarding the process followed during the handling of the parking petition considered by Full Council on 20th February.

24.33 Councillor Grandon proposed the recommendations as read out by the Lead Officer for Overview and Scrutiny.

24.34 Councillor Jamieson seconded the proposal.

By a unanimous vote

It was RESOLVED:

- 1.1. That the Director for Operations and Climate Change takes on board the comments made by the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee.**
- 1.2. That Officers provide more detailed clarification on the amendments made to the information and proposals set out in the Cabinet report as a result of the consultation process.**

- 1.3. That Officers be requested to set out in the report to Cabinet a proposed range of tariffs that include a free parking period of 1 hour and its associated costs.
- 1.4. That Officers further explore with Suffolk County Council the possibility of introducing on-street resident parking permits across the District, that more information on this type of scheme be included in the report to Cabinet, and investigate implementing an appropriate policy.
- 1.5. That Officers review whether a rebate system could be implemented in Hadleigh, Sudbury, and Lavenham in car parks serving doctors surgeries and medical centres.
- 1.6. That the Director for Operations and Climate Change continues to consider and create shared value for residents by enhancing the councils offer for non-contact, long term parking permits using intelligent parking control processes such that residents are recognised as community stakeholders.
- 1.7. That Officers include more information and context about the rural setting of the districts, the current reliance on car use to travel, and the accessible parking provisions needed to adequately meet this need.
- 1.8. That the Monitoring Officer be asked to investigate allegations of pre-determination raised by the Overview and Scrutiny committee in regard to members of the Cabinet.
- 1.9. That Officers give further consideration to the issues raised concerning school pick-ups and drop-off as well as carers and medical staff visiting patients.
- 1.10. That Officers are encouraged to retain the cash and card system for paying parking permits to avoid moving to a cashless system.
- 1.11. That Cabinet are made aware of the committee's concerns regarding the process followed during the handling of the parking petition considered by Full Council on 20th February.

The business of the meeting was concluded at 12:51pm.

.....
Chair