

## Pre-Scrutiny Questions and Answers- Cabinet Agenda 17 October 2024

**Report Title: Fees and Charges**

**Report Author(s): Tony Sidhu – Principal Accountant**

Questions	Response
<b>Councillor Syson</b>	
<p><b>Q1:</b> Will Councillors sometime get to see what Commercial Gov actually said?</p>	<p>This will be circulated to all members as a P&amp;C item ahead of the briefing.</p>
<p>We are told in this report that managers have taken note of Commercial Gov's report in proposing these new charges. We paid a lot for that report.</p> <p>Can you give any examples of where their guidance has been followed? It appears to me that there is a general 10% increase in most cases and certainly no change in policy in respect of car parking.</p>	<p>All managers were in receipt of the report from Commercial Gov and took this into consideration when finalising their proposals for 2025-26. Their rationale is explained in Appendix B.</p> <p>Throughout the Fees &amp; Charges proposals there are examples of where the Commercial Gov recommendations have been followed, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Markets for instance have added some new 'Road closure' fee lines that were suggested that didn't exist before.</li> <li>• A number of the planning fees have increased in excess of 10%, in line with recommendations.</li> <li>• The Lifeline Team have followed their recommendations.</li> <li>• Car Parking increasing by 10p per ticket and introducing 24 hour fees.</li> </ul>

	<p>An example where a recommendation has not been followed is in increasing green waste charging beyond the level recommended in the report, and accepting a slight reduction in demand for the service. Consultation between the service area and finance (with their respective PF holders) has seen an agreement reached at £47 p.a., with a view to look at how we promote and encourage increased take up to bring in fee income of similar levels to those proposed by CommercialGov.</p>
<p><b>Q2:</b> 4.4 In the table I think the Housing Fund final figure is a typo and 51 should be 15. Can you confirm this please?</p>	<p>Apologies yes this was a typo. An amended report with the corrected table %'s will follow.</p>
<p><b>Q3:</b> What is the current occupancy of our car parks? Where are the empty spaces and when? Does our pricing policy reflect this?</p>	<p>We have 25 locations spread across three towns with weekday and weekend figures for each location. This data capture will enable us to acquire a deeper insight into how each of our car parks are used and by which type of customer it is attracting. This way we can adjust to suit and promote accordingly. Some car parks often achieve very high occupancy as you have observed looking at some of your questions, as much as 100% or high 90%, some conversely are not doing so well and we endeavour to reflect our tariff decisions to suit.</p>
<p><b>Q4:</b> Why is the "cut off" 4 hours in most car parks, after that if you want 5 hours you pay the full rate. 9.00am – 1pm is 4 hours and a morning's work but you need some extra minutes for getting there and back, eg to the Justice Centre. Why not a 5 hour charge too?</p>	<p>Historically our car parks have been designated either short or long stay and reflect what may be a nationally recognised approach to car park type designation. 4 hours seems to have been the standard for all our short stays and the long stay locations added an additional all day tariff for £3 or £4 more. We are always reviewing what our neighbouring authorities are doing and will welcome the advice from our Parking Consultants once some have been appointed. The short stay of 4 hours is to stimulate turnaround of vehicles in popular shopping areas and not stagnate with what may attract staff or local workers that may block shoppers for the retail areas. 1 to 2 hours are the most popular tariffs by far.</p>

<p><b>Q5:</b> For Bedford Street, Chandos Street, and Covent Garden charges are £1.50 for 1 hour, £2.70 for 2 hours, £4.00 for 3 hours and £5.20 for 4 hours Why do we charge £1.50 for the first hour, £1.20 for the next hour, <b>£1.30</b> for the 3rd hour and £1.20 for the 4th hour? Why not either £1.20 for each subsequent hour or £1.30 for each subsequent hour?</p>	<p>Some hourly rate increases have slipped out of some sort of increasing regular rate owing to historical rounding up or down of 5p to make cash payments simpler in the past. This can be fixed now we are cashless and has been left on this occasion with standard 10p increases as recommended by Commercial Gov. Whilst we would like to make changes now, it was felt best to wait for the advice of Parking Consultants once onboard which will include a review of tiered tariff increments, with less amount to pay per hour the longer you stay.</p>
<p><b>Q6:</b> At St Peters the hourly charges are 1st hour £ 1.50, £1.20 for the next hour, £1.30 for the 3rd hour and £1.80 for the 4th hour. Why so much for the 4th hour?</p>	<p>This change for the 4<sup>th</sup> hour at St Peters reflects its popularity, particularly given that most of its parking provision is under cover. Parking charge guidelines advise tariffs should reflect how busy a car park is to manage demand.</p>
<p><b>Q7:</b> Bath Street; this car park is now absolutely full during the day, with a charge of £3 per day , a noticeable change over the past few months. The station charges £8.90 per day. I suspect, but don't know, that rail travellers have realised their bargain at Bath Street. I see you have introduced a new 11 hour charge but at only £3.30, the standard 10% increase.</p> <p>The same comments apply to Station Approach given its proximity to the station. Do you take into account the station charges when fixing ours?</p>	<p>The £1, £2, or £3 all day rates were brought in to restore parking again, particularly Old Town. This also helped to encourage a healthier lifestyle and encourage more out of town parking. It has received a huge revival over the last two years. January 2024 seemed too soon to adjust these so we felt that April next year would be a smarter choice.</p> <p>The Station Approach car park off De Normanville Avenue had to have its prices set at town centre rates for a period of 5 years whilst Chiltern introduced their new car park. This period expired in 2023 and our rates will no doubt attract many of their customers back to that area once again.</p>
<p><b>Q8:</b> Annual car park charges – these seem very low compared to the ordinary charges. I realise that they are subject to VAT, which is presumably in addition to</p>	<p>Season tickets can look expensive in comparison to other car parks that offer this, notably Sainsbury's in Kenilworth or the station in Kenilworth. They do offer a large discount, as much as 65%, but</p>

<p>the stated charge, but we as a Council don't benefit from that.</p>	<p>many commuter complaints say these are too expensive. St Peter's is more expensive as it's the most sort after location in town for season tickets.</p>
<p><b>Q9:</b> Which are the car parks referred to as "Long Stay ONLY (Excluding Pay on Foot Car Parks) "and why are the annual passes more expensive there?</p>	<p>These are for season tickets, we only provide these for long stay locations. A 4 hours limit is set in short stay locations so is not compatible with a season ticket process. It is to stimulate turnaround of vehicles in popular shopping areas and not stagnate with what may attract staff or local workers that may block shoppers for the retail areas</p>
<p><b>Q10:</b> Overnight parking permits (18.00 – 09.00) why are these only £64 per annum, and staying at that price?</p>	<p>These tariffs are to encourage residents or possibly late shift or evening workers to use, there is a low take up of them so far. We wish to encourage greater use of our car parks in the evenings and overnight. These have not been promoted clearly in previous years and we have been actively promoted them in all our car parks since January this year. Market stalls hosted by Parking in recent years had found that residents were not aware of them and have now been a useful alternative for residents since Covent Garden MSCP closed last year. These are available in all our car parks, including short stay and it is felt will help with less on-street parking space in some of our towns. Customers are advised that they are only valid between 6pm and 9am.</p>
<p><b>Q11:</b> What is the current occupancy of our car parks? Where are the empty spaces and when? Does our pricing policy reflect this?</p>	<p>Please see my answer to your question 3.</p>
<p><b>Q12:</b> Crematorium charges. I assume the shortfall is because we are not having as many cremations as anticipated. Do we know if Coventry and Rugby are also experiencing fewer</p>	<p>The Bereavement Services manager has confirmed the following.  No the death rate is down nationally, Coventry and Rugby are down too, anecdotal evidence from our FDs are reporting being</p>

<p>cremations or is it possible we are losing custom to them?</p>	<p>"quiet". We only have 2023 stats for other crematoria, only The Vale shows an increase (171 cremations) however both Worcester and Redditch are down by more than this, so some of the Vale's increase will have come from them and some will have come from us.</p> <p>There are a couple of anomalies across the region where some places have been impacted due to major works elsewhere, but 2023 stats for Warwickshire, Worcestershire and West Midlands are all showing far fewer cremations took place last year.</p>
<p><b>Councillor Dickson</b></p>	
<p><b>Q1:</b> Consistency with Corporate Strategy - it would be helpful to have more detail in Section 5 of the report to explain how the proposed fees and charges are consistent with the three strategic priorities of the Council. For example, can explanations please be provided as to how these fees and charges focus on working with businesses and encouraging everyone to have a more active lifestyle?</p>	<p>Further clarification to be provided.</p>
<p><b>Q2:</b> Equality Impact Assessment - whilst it's noted what is said in Section 7 of the report about Service Area Managers assessing the impact of the proposed charges, this appears to be informal and unstructured. If Councillors are to justify the planned changes to residents, doesn't good governance require a formal report to be written setting out the conclusions of the EIAs?</p>	<p>As part of an update to Employment Committee on the 17<sup>th</sup> September Recommendation (3) asked for 'endorsement of updated EQIA guidance, support and training'. I can assure you that the process for considering EIA for the various elements will be conducted as per our EIA process to consider any implications of which can be provided as a further update if required to Cabinet. There is a planned training programme and process being updated to all Senior Managers relating to EIA's and taking into account any areas identified within Cabinet papers.</p>
<p><b>Q3:</b> Stakeholder consultation - it's welcome that for some areas, e.g. markets (Section 7.3.2 of Appendix B),</p>	<p>For Car parking ... we are endeavouring to make further engagement through the Off-street Parking Order (OSPO) process in the coming</p>

WDC has consulted with external stakeholders. However, when the 2024/25 fees and charges were proposed, it was made clear in more than one Council meeting that, for carparking fees, closer liaison with the County Council would be welcome. It's noted in Section 6.2.9 of Appendix B that 'parking would like to develop a more joined-up strategy with their WCC counterparts to work together for future parking reviews' so has the closer liaison encouraged last year not occurred?

Also, aside from markets, it would be useful to know for the other principal fees and charges areas, e.g. carparking and events, what formal stakeholder and community consultation has taken place, e.g. with Town and Parish Councils, community groups, medical centres, faith bodies and businesses, and what did it conclude?

year. We have liaised with our WCC counterparts, particularly over the approach to the National Parking Platform app payment process for a joined up approach. Current on-street fees are matched with our off-street fees since their increase and tariff structure changes in March, after a 6 year freeze. We are planning to involve WCC with our Parking Strategy and once onboard, ask our Parking Consultants to include them. Fees and charges are endorsed for consultation with relevant stakeholders including Warwickshire County Council by Councillors. Once F&C are approved by Councillors and Cabinet we plan to seek consent from WCC to approve the new OSPO, their consent is required under section 39 of the Road Traffic Regulation Act 1984. They are our overriding Transport authority and it will be the responsibility of their Portfolio Holder for Transport and Environment to approve this. In recent years we have used a process via a Section 35C notice to inform our customers of tariff increases and this has not given WCC scope to comment. It should be noted that WCC therefore have the opportunity to object to some or all of the charges and Council need to be aware of this.

All service areas setting F&C have been contacted and awaiting response. We have the following ...

Car Parking - We invited the thoughts, observations and ideas from all town councils, Chambers of Trade, Bid and a number of stakeholders and asked for these to be returned by 30<sup>th</sup> September. We have been improving our communications and trying to learn from previous formalities. We have expanded on what we did last year and have learned of additional organisations that would like to take part. We have extended the opportunity for them to comment, it was envisaged that the Town Council members would have a good background and insight of the town's needs as a whole and limit the scope and breadth of the opportunity to manage with the resources we have in Parking. A broader market engagement

	<p>may be better placed with Parking Consultants once onboard and we aim to refine our future process once this has taken place.</p> <p>Bereavement Services - We don't consult but we do benchmark.</p>
<p>On a practical level,</p> <p>a) why is it still proposed that users of the EA facilities in Warwick have to pay to park their car whereas at Newbold Comyn and at Castle Farm they do not?</p> <p>b) what options exist for local Councils to increase the number of free parking days? Currently Kenilworth has two, why not four or even six?</p>	<p>Parking charges have long been in place at St Nicholas Park Car Park, it serves a number of different stakeholders for leisure, commuters and tourism. Castle Farm parking has been specifically for the leisure centre there and the Parking Service has not been asked to enforce until only recently. Newbold Comyn car parks similarly, have only invited the Parking Service, in recent years, to enforce there to ensure customers park within lined bays. <u>This is to help maintain optimal usage of the available space and minimise any inconsiderate parking.</u> We will review these locations for fees and charges, particularly the levels of use for a resource designed for the existing stakeholders.</p> <p>WDC off-street parking historically only offers 2 days a year, I am not certain why this level was set. I believe WCC do not offer free parking in the interests of managing traffic flows and easing congestion. It may be debated that offering free parking days does not encourage or support our climate emergency goals or sustainable transport options. Perhaps WDC should consider exploring other initiatives to support town councils with sustainable transport options.</p>
<p><b>Councillor Dominic Harrison</b></p>	
<p>Main Paper , 1.2.12 - it states the importance of maximising service demand to mitigate revenue shortfalls against budget in future years, which I would agree with , rather than relying on above-inflation increases in charges. However, are there any such</p>	<p>As part of the green waste charging fee proposed, a number of avenues for maximising service demand are being (or will be) explored as a way to offset the need for above-inflation rises. These have been agreed between the service area and finance in</p>

<p>initiatives being considered and formulated , or are they just being left with Heads of Service to develop their own?</p>	<p>conjunction with the relevant Portfolio Holders. These focus on marketing and introducing new payment options for customers.</p> <p>Other initiatives will be looked at going forward alongside the Change Programme, to which the F&amp;C process forms one strand.</p>
<p><b>Appendix A - Refuse Collection</b> - regarding the Standard Wheeled Bin charges , how are these collected? I am aware of the garden waste permit schemes and collection of additional waste items as one-off specific charges, but I have not seen the standard wheeled bin charges ? It may be my lack of understanding or are they just a bundled charge within council tax?</p>	<p>All waste containers need to be purchased - either via the Contact Centre (currently SDC but from 2025 this will be back in house at WDC) or our webforms (link below)</p> <p><a href="http://warwickdc.gov.uk">Order waste and recycling bins - Warwick District Council. (warwickdc.gov.uk)</a></p>



**Report Title: Minor Amendments to the Complaints Policy**

**Report Author(s): Graham Leach – Head of Governance and Monitoring Officer**

Councillor K Dickson:

I note from reviewing agenda item 5 from the Cabinet papers, that there is a recommendation that " Any compensation over £5,000 or above will be reported to O&S committee"

I suggest that Overview and Scrutiny is not the most suitable platform for this reporting, and that it should be reported to the Asset Compliance/ Housing committee. Where the compensation is not a housing issue, it should be reported to the Audit & Standards committee. Please will you consider this change?

Response: