Cheltenham Borough Council

Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee

15 September 2003

Report of the Parking Solutions Working Group

1. Summary and recommendation

1.1 In June 2002 the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to set up a working group to investigate the provision of more effective parking enforcement in Cheltenham. Following an initial report in September 2002 a comprehensive review of parking has been carried out and specific recommendations made.

1.2 This report highlights the main reasons for the review and its key findings.

1.3 I therefore recommend that:

1.3.1 Members note the recommendations set out in the report of the Parking Solutions Working Group:

- to request the county council to prepare a joint brief with the Cheltenham Borough Council to further investigate the decriminalisation of parking enforcement (DPE) in Cheltenham in 2004/05; a partnership with Gloucester City Council should be explored as part of this process.
- to instruct officers to prepare an SLA for traffic wardens by April 2004
- to instruct officers to review residents parking policies and practices in 2004.
- to instruct officers to develop a strategy for managing the quantity and pricing of on street parking in the town centre during 2004.
- to defer the designation of new residents parking schemes other than those already committed until after this review.
- to instruct officers to review issue of parking permits issued to organisations in the town centre in 2004.
- to instruct officers to produce an asset management strategy for the council’s car parks by April 2004, drawing on current risk management work and reinvesting a proportion of income into ongoing maintenance and renewal in order to enhance the safety and quality of the car parks.
- to instruct officers to work with Gloucestershire Constabulary (Traffic Warden section) to identify ways of improving the effectiveness of available enforcement resources.

1.3.2 Members agree that the report should be forwarded to Cabinet for it to consider the findings and recommendations.

2. Background

2.1 Parking plays a key role in the local economy, the quality of life of residents and the financial position of the council. Well-managed parking policies and effective enforcement are therefore in the interests of businesses, residents, visitors and the council.
2.2 The council is involved in local parking policy and management in several ways:

- as local planning authority – controlling parking at new development;
- as highways agent to Gloucestershire County Council – responsible for traffic management, implementing integrated transport schemes and administering on-street residents parking and pay and display; and
- as owner and operator of most of the town centre’s off-street public car parking.

2.3 Given this broad agenda parking issues are often on the agenda for officers and Members of the council.

2.4 The Parking Solutions Working Group was set up following the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting in July 2002. Its main objective has been to consider the provision of more effective parking enforcement in Cheltenham by investigating the decriminalisation of parking enforcement (DPE). This involves the transfer of parking enforcement duties from the police to the highway authority, which is able to improve enforcement by being allowed to retain the income.

2.5 Update reports were taken to Committee in September and December 2002 setting out progress and identifying the key issues involved in DPE. A decision was taken to make the review more holistic and to invite representatives from the police and county council to share their views.

2.6 The working group has since met with officers from the police, county council and Gloucester City Council to establish a local and regional perspective on parking enforcement. Study visits have also been made to Oxford and Worcester to learn from their experiences of DPE. In drawing together the report the police and traffic wardens have been consulted and their comments included.

3.0 Key findings

2.7 3.1 Cheltenham’s traffic wardens are increasingly stretched to enforce the growing number of residents parking and waiting restrictions introduced by the council since mid 1990s. Despite significant financial support from the council parking enforcement is not a police priority and traffic warden numbers have declined in recent years. If demand for new residents parking schemes and waiting restrictions is to be met then it will be at the expense of existing enforcement obligations.

2.8 3.2 This scenario is reflected nationally with some seventy local authorities outside London having decriminalised parking enforcement since legislation was introduced in 1991. Twenty others are in the process of doing so. Whilst some local authorities have done this to provide more effective management of traffic and parking enforcement others have been forced as police authorities unilaterally withdraw from providing this service. The Department for Transport has stated that ‘it is in the interests of authorities who have not already done so to seriously consider taking DPE powers and that is the message DfT would wish to put across.’ This process could be expected to take 18 to 24 months.

2.9 3.3 Gloucestershire County Council does not consider DPE to be a priority however with Gloucester and Cheltenham studying this it is willing to work together to consider DPE for the urban areas with police enforcement elsewhere, as in Worcestershire. The support of the county council would be necessary as it is the highway authority. Hence the report recommends that the county council is formally requested to investigate this further with the council.
2.10 3.4 Other key on-street parking issues forthcoming from the report, within the council’s responsibility and achievable in the short term include:

- formalisation of existing funding of traffic wardens through a new service level agreement; a review of residents parking policies;
- deferring the introduction of new schemes until after this; and
- a review of town centre and edge of centre on-street parking.

2.11 3.5 Given the importance of the council’s off-street public car parks both to the local economy and as an income stream for the council it is also recommended that a more proactive maintenance and investment regime be undertaken. This will draw on work underway on risk management in the car parks service. The shape of town centre parking is likely to change as part of Civic Pride proposals to improve the public realm and as additional park and ride sites come into operation. Investing in high quality, secure and accessible car parks will benefit the local economy and mitigate any risks to the council’s finances.

4.0 Implications

4.1 Financial  None as a direct result of this report.

4.2 Legal  None as a result of this report.

4.3 Personnel  None as a result of this report.

4.4 Equal opportunities, social justice and anti-poverty  None as a result of this report.

4.5 Environmental  None as a direct result of this report.

Background papers

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Accountability  David Fidgeon, Cabinet Deputy Built Environment & Democracy

Scrutiny Function  Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee