



Report
Scrutiny Review of Car Parking Services
By Scrutiny (Audit and Value for Money Council Services) Committee

Background:

The committee wanted to consider the current services provided by ESBC car parks team to ensure users of the council car parks are receiving value for money and the best user experience.

At its meeting on the 23rd July 2019, the Scrutiny (Audit and Value for Money Council Services) Committee agreed to review the Council's Car Parking Services. The results of this process may support the review that has recently been undertaken by the Communities, Open Spaces & Facilities Manager

The following Members were assigned to the sub-committee:

- Councillor Sonia Andjelkovic
- Councillor Chris Sylvester
- Councillor Mike Metcalfe

The sub-committee met on three occasions between September and December 2019:

Date	Attendance (Cllrs)
Tues 17/09/2019	Andjelkovic / Sylvester / Metcalfe
Tues 15/10/2019	Andjelkovic / Sylvester / Metcalfe
Tues 12/11/2019	Andjelkovic / Sylvester / Metcalfe

Scrutiny approach

The sub-committee met on three occasions between September and December 2019.

Information was gleaned from the Car Park review report which was presented to Members in October 2019.

An interview was held with the Communities, Open Spaces and Facilities Manager and the sub-committee were able to discuss the current provision alongside the new proposals that are due to be implemented in April of 2020.

Specific data relating to tickets and tariffs was provided by the Civil and Community Enforcement team.

Opinion was provided by the shopping centre managers of Coopers Square and Burton Place.

Scrutiny Review Scope

The following questions were suggested and agreed by the sub-committee in order to provide a focus for this review.

- 1. Is “Free After 3” making any impact on the footfall into the Borough’s towns?**
- 2. Are we charging the right amount and do we charge at the correct times?**
- 3. Are we using the correct payment technology are there better alternatives available?**

Scrutiny Review Findings

- 1. Is “Free After 3” making any impact on the footfall into the Borough’s towns?**
 - 1.1. Evidence from the Managers of Cooper Square and Burton Place in Burton shows an increase in footfall since the ‘Free after 3’ scheme was introduced. No evidence from Uttoxeter is available. The sub-committee noted that people visit these centres in a number of other ways in addition to parking in ESBC car parks, including arriving in taxis, buses and walking and parking in other car parks.
 - 1.2. Personal evidence was provided by the members of the sub-committee that demonstrated a significant number of people use the ‘Free after 3’ scheme. The sub-committee members use it personally, both in Burton and Uttoxeter, because it is

available and may not have gone into town otherwise. In particular it is noted that parents use it after picking children up from school to shop, bank or have a coffee.

- 1.3. The sub-committee recommends it should continue. However, consideration needs to be given to the loss of revenue not being restricted to users parking after 3pm, but also to users parking earlier and paying for a shorter parking time.

2. Are we charging the right amount and do we charge at the correct times?

- 2.1. The proposed increase in tariffs is as follows:

Time frame	Change in costs	Increase %	Comments
1-2 hours	£1.00 to £1.40	40% increase	First increase for 6 years so 6.7% p.a.
Up to 3 hours	£2.00 to £2.40	20% increase	Tariff standardised at £2.00 in 2017.
Over 3 hours	£5.00	No change	Tariff standardised at £5.00 in 2017.

Presumably the £1 tariff was not changed for six years because no one wanted to move from such a round sum. Previous to standardisation in 2017 there was an “up to 4 hours” rate and an “over 4 hours” rate with different rates for these in different locations. See Appendix 1 for details of parking tariffs since 2007.

- 2.2. Overall there is an increase in Tariffs above the RPI, particularly on the 1-2 hour rate. However, the sub-committee felt that the new tariffs were reasonable when compared to those in other towns and would increase income to ESBC significantly, especially in the 1 to 2 hour rate, which is the most used.
- 2.3. There was a concern that tariffs had moved away from round pounds and that parking machines do not give change, therefore causing hassle and deterring people from using our carparks. However, over the Borough’s 8 carparks there are now 16 new machines taking card payments and 16 old cash machines. The new machines are all in the three main carparks, Coopers Square and Burton Place in Burton upon Trent and The Maltings in Uttoxeter. In addition, the introduction of a new smart phone parking app (on a trial period) to be used across all carparks has eased some of those concerns, as we move towards a cashless society. Currently card payments cover approximately 17% of parking receipts and it is estimated that the parking app will account for a further 20% initially. Lichfield District and Stafford Borough Councils already use a parking app and average 45% cashless transactions.

- 2.4. The sub-committee considered whether the Borough should offer totally free parking and if this would significantly increase footfall in the town centres and the benefits that brings. There is no information available to allow the sub-committee to properly consider this, however, it is worth mentioning that there are a number of free parking spaces in Burton and Uttoxeter, yet ESBC car parks are still heavily used. The sub-committee felt that only towns with very little to offer visitors provided free parking and that it would not significantly increase footfall in our towns. In addition, ESBC currently raises £1.3million from car parking.
- 2.5. The sub-committee considered whether ESBC should increase parking tariffs each year instead of a large increase every four years or so. However, this idea was rejected as it would involve parking tariff signs and parking meter software having to be updated every year at significant cost (estimated at £4.5k, excluding staff costs) and effort. However, it would increasingly improve revenue in each of the second, third and fourth years, approximately £32k (assuming 2.5% increase) in year 2, £65k in year 3 etc., so perhaps it could be reconsidered in the future.
- 2.6. After much discussion it was felt that that the parking time bands were reasonable and should not be changed.
- 2.7. For your information, Appendix 2 shows the breakdown of ticket sales by tariff by hour for each of the Borough's car parks.
- 2.8. One area further review is required is the refund given to the Leisure Centres users on their car parks which, in turn, is refunded by ESBC to Everyone Active. It is probably right that the users receive a refund, however, should that be refunded by ESBC? Is it part of our agreement with Everyone Active? ¹

3. Are we using the correct payment technology are there better alternatives available?

- 3.1. The sub-committee felt that it did not have the expertise or information to consider "Payment on Exit" Systems available, these are usually controlled by barriers or number plate recognition cameras.

The advantages of these are:

- For users you only pay for the time parked and there are no worries about returning late to a fine;
- ESBC would not need staff to monitor tickets in windscreens etc.

¹ This question was answered by the Leisure Services Contract Manager at the Scrutiny (Audit and Value for Money Council Services) Committee meeting held on Tuesday 17th December 2019.

However, many of the Borough's car parks are multiple entrances/exits and some are shared with other providers. Therefore, either of these systems would be impracticable and extremely expensive. The introduction of the parking app helps alleviate some of the user's problems as it will allow parking times to be extended on a smartphone and, if fully rolled out after the trial period, could result in some staff savings. The cost to the user would be 5-10p per transaction and to ESBC, assuming a 20% take up, is estimated to be £6,000 p.a. in transaction charges.

- 3.2. Pay by Phone claim to be the market leader in this field, and are already used by Lichfield, Stafford and Stoke, though ESBC will run a competitive procurement process to establish a provider.
- 3.3. Costs of a full roll-out of the app and replacement of all cash machines will be evaluated after the trial period and presumably will be subject to a further scrutiny review.

4. Summary

- 4.1. Generally the sub-committee agrees with the proposed scheme, but raise some questions in specific areas, as outlined in this report.

5. Recommendations

- 5.1. To invite the Communities, Open Spaces and Facilities Manager to an Audit and Value for Money Scrutiny Committee in March 2021 to consider the impact of the recommendations of the internal review as the recommendations of that report will not be implemented until April 2020. Specifically:

- 5.1.2 To consider the impact of the changes in parking fees.

- 5.1.3 To consider the success of the new parking app.