



EAST STAFFORDSHIRE BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT COVER SHEET

Title of Report:	Scrutiny Review of Car Park Charges 2023	To be marked with an 'X' by Democratic Services after report has been presented
Meeting of:	Scrutiny (Value for Money Council) Committee	
	Corporate Management Team	
	Leader and Deputy Leaders	
	Cabinet	

Scrutiny Committee Review Final Report

Title: Scrutiny Review of Car Park Charges 2023

Scrutiny Committee: Scrutiny (Value for Money Council) Committee

Committee Chair: Cllr Z Krupski

Sub-group Members Leading Review:

- Cllr P Krupski
- Cllr S Sankey
- Cllr S Gaskin
- Cllr M Shrive

Is the Report Confidential? No

If so, please state relevant paragraph from Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1972: [insert]

SECTION 1: COMMITTEE'S REPORT

1. Background

- 1.1. 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, while also remaining financially viable for ESBC.
- 1.2. At its meeting on the 13th July 2023, the Scrutiny (Value for Money Council) Committee agreed to review the Council's Car Parking Services. The results of this process may support the review that is currently being undertaken by the Community and Civil Enforcement Team.
- 1.3. The following Members were assigned to the sub group:

Councillor Z Krupski
Councillor P Krupski
Councillor S Sankey
Councillor S Gaskin
Councillor M Shrive

- 1.4. The sub group met on three occasions between July 2023 and February 2024:

Date	Attendance (Cllrs)
Tue 15/08/2023	Z Krupski / P Krupski / S Sankey / S Gaskin / M Shrive
Weds 08/11/2023	Z Krupski / P Krupski / S Sankey
Fri 08/12/2023	Z Krupski / P Krupski
Fri 02/02/2024	Z Krupski / P Krupski
Thu 22/02/2024	Z Krupski / P Krupski / S Sankey / M Shrive

2. Scrutiny Approach

- 2.1. The Communities, Open Spaces and Facilities Manager was invited to the November sub group meeting to give a presentation on car parking services across the borough. The sub-committee were able to discuss the current provision and gain an understanding of infrastructure in place. This meeting also provided the sub-committee the opportunity to ask questions from the relevant team about topics including staffing and PCN's.
- 2.2. Specific data, relating to ticket and app sales, was provided by the Civil and Community Enforcement team early on in the process, to support members in their review. There were some omissions in this data and subsequently FMU provided updated information which superseded the original.
- 2.3. The sub-committee also gathered data relating to car parking charges in similar authorities (identified through CIPFA / Nearest Neighbours), benchmarking this against current ESBC charges.

2.4. Data was also provided to the sub-committee by HR regarding the approximate costings of a FTE Civil & Community Enforcement Officer, including job advertising, recruitment/selection, training, on boarding and salary costs.

3. Scrutiny Review Scope

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

1. Car Parking Service and Infrastructure

- a. What car parks does the Council manage?
 - i. What condition are the car parks and associated equipment in?
 - ii. What are the parking volumes in each car park?
 - iii. What are the parking volumes broken down by day and time?
- b. What are the available payment methods (e.g. machines, telephone, online etc.)?
 - i. What is the usage of the various payment methods?
 - ii. What is the cost per transaction per method, or any other associated costs?
 - iii. Is ANPR a viable option?
- c. Is car parking enforcement adequately resourced?
 - i. How many FTEs did the Council have 19/20; 20/21; 21/22 and currently?
 - ii. How are these deployed / scheduled?
- d. What other competing car parks operate in our towns?
 - i. What are their charging structures?
 - ii. Have these had any impact on the Council's car parks?
- e. How do other similar Councils operate their car parks?

2. Financial Considerations

- a. What is the financial position of the Council's car parking service?
 - i. What is the income and breakdown of expenditure?
 - ii. Does the service generate a profit, break even or make a loss?
- b. Does the Council use external contractors in any aspect of the operation of its car parking and associated service?
 - i. Do these have an impact on the value for money of the service?

3. Charging Policy / Strategy

- a. What is the Council's charging policy / strategy?
- b. What are the positive and / or negative impacts from the Council's approach to car park delivery, including the "Free after 3" approach, including in relation to our High Streets, citizens and local businesses?
 - i. Could subsidised parking be delivered differently to achieve positive impacts?
- c. What impact does the Charging Policy / Strategy have on carbon footprints, environmental impacts or highway infrastructure?

4. Scrutiny Review Findings

4.1. **What car parks does the Council manage?**

4.2. ESBC manage fourteen (14) car parks across the Borough. Eleven (11) of these car parks are situated in Burton, while three (3) are situated in Uttoxeter.

4.3. Appendix 1 contains a list of these car parks with additional detail on some bespoke and universal tariffs associated with them.

4.4. **What are the available payment methods (e.g. machines, telephone, online etc.)?**

4.5. Users of the Councils car parks have a range of payment methods to choose from including cash, card, telephone and cashless (Pay by Phone/App) options.

4.6. Currently the Council have thirty one (31) parking machines across the estate. Sixteen (16) machines accept cash and card, whilst the remaining fifteen (15) machines run on an older system and will only accept cash.

4.7. App payments were introduced in 2020 and are currently under contract with Pay by Phone (PBP). All parking machines have bespoke PBP decals attached, informing customers of the location and how to use the app based service.

4.8. **Is car parking enforcement adequately resourced?**

4.9. Currently the Council employ 6.0 FTE's as Community Civil Enforcement Officers on a range of duties. A breakdown of these can be found in Appendix 2.

4.10. Figure 1 below details how a Community Civil Enforcement Officers workload is typically broken down:

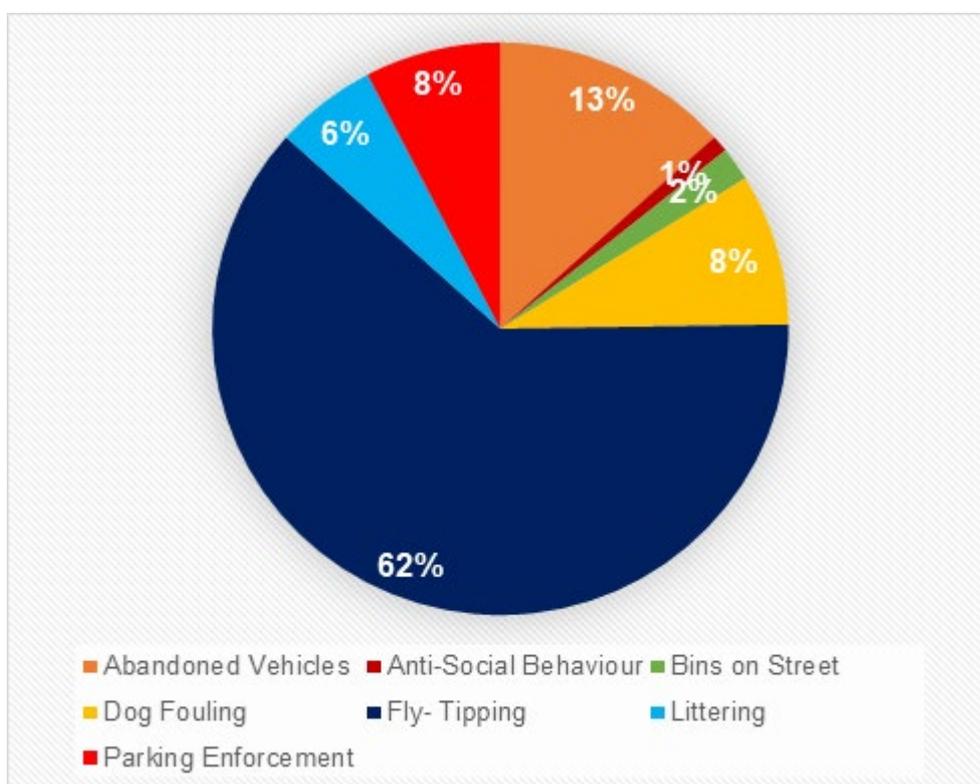


Figure 1

- 4.11. In 2012 the Council employed 12.0 FTE's to undertake the same number of duties. However the workload has increased significantly over the demands in 2012 especially in the amount of fly tipping currently being reported.
- 4.12. This would suggest that car parking enforcement is not adequately resourced across the borough and is further supported by an analysis of the number of fines which have been issued. Further information on this can be found in Appendix 3.
- 4.13. **What other competing car parks operate in our towns?**
- 4.14. Currently there are thirteen (13) competitor car parks operating in Burton and Uttoxeter, providing some 3,084 spaces in Burton and 1,202 spaces in Uttoxeter.
- 4.15. Since this audit a further 100 spaces have been added at Aldi, Uttoxeter. A full list of competitor car parks and their capacities can be found in Appendix 4.
- 4.16. A comparison of competitor car parks versus ESBC tariffs can also be found within Appendix 4.
- 4.17. **How do other similar Councils operate their car parks?**
- 4.18. Many similar councils now operate a multi payment offer, cash, card, app, phone payment or ANPR. However the parking model at other Councils remains very similar to ESBC's.
- 4.19. Following confirmation from Officers, it has been noted that Lichfield, Stafford & Stoke have introduced ANPR with varying degrees of success.
- 4.20. **What is the financial position of the Council's car parking service?**
- 4.21. Currently, with the free after three provision, best estimates suggest that in 2023/24 the Council estimated income reduction will be £83.500, which is a reduction on the 2017 figure of -£167K.
- 4.22. The Councils car parking budget is currently on a loss making trajectory for 2023/24.
- 4.23. **Does the Council use external contractors in any aspect of the operation of its car parking and associated service?**
- 4.24. External contractors are used for cash collection from the car parks - this is a 2 year contract effective until June 2025. Car park machine maintenance, which is a 2year contract until April 2025, is also contracted at a cost of £550 per machine pa.
- 4.25. Contractors are also responsible for replacement of car park tickets on an annual rolling contract, at a cost of £4.8K over 5 years. Administrating paying by phone is currently costing £6.5K over a five year period and is currently being re-contracted.
- 4.26. It's worth noting that Stoke on Trent Council administer parking fines on behalf of ESBC and other Staffordshire councils.
- 4.27. **What is the Council's charging policy / strategy?**

- 4.28. The Council's strategy is to manage its car parks to break even. Any surplus gained from this annually, should be ring-fenced and used to improve the infrastructure moving forward.
- 4.29. The policy and practice has been to benchmark itself against councils within Staffordshire, geographical & CIPFA most similar authorities, whilst taking into account their fees and charging policy.
- 4.30. In terms of context, lower tariffs often equate to a weaker town centre offer. The quality of the town centre makes parking charges incidental. No evidence to suggest that lower tariffs or free parking is better for businesses, although many strong voices advocate this. It should also be noted that operating overheads still exist no matter what the charge.
- 4.31. **What are the positive and / or negative impacts from the Council's approach to car park delivery, including the "Free after 3" (FA3) approach, including in relation to our High Streets, citizens and local businesses?**
- 4.32. It's fair to say that nobody wishes to see increases in tariffs, especially in a cost of living crises. However not covering our current overheads means that other vital services are adversely impacted or cut.
- 4.33. In 2017 the then administration produced a review report of the FA3 scheme which highlighted that the Council was incurring an annual loss of £167K to run the scheme. The report also highlighted that the FA3 had not increased traffic/footfall into the town centre, rather it had shifted parking space take up to later in the day.
- 4.34. **What impact does the Charging Policy / Strategy have on carbon footprints, environmental impacts or highway infrastructure?**
- 4.35. It will be difficult to quantify the carbon dioxide emissions, air quality and congestion benefits of the mileage reduction associated with increasing parking charges without knowing current and predicted future car park usage figures. With a small decrease in the amount of traffic the impact will be insignificant.

5. Summary

- 5.1. ESBC car parks are in competition with the large carparks provided by retailers in both Burton and Uttoxeter. Some of the independent car parks are free whilst others are competitively priced. ESBC car parking machines are aging and many are cannibalised for spare parts to keep the remaining units operational.
- 5.2. Moving to an APP base may be more financially viable dependent upon the providers charges (currently at the Uttoxeter Leisure Centre the end user has to pay an additional 10p to use this form of payment). Currently ESBC with the limited number of Civil Enforcement Officers are spending very limited time monitoring the number of cars purchasing car park tickets for their stay.
- 5.3. It should be noted that reducing the Carbon footprint will be challenging due to many of the outlying rural villages use cars to access the towns as public transport is sketchy and often unreliable. Additionally many of the roads in both Burton and Uttoxeter are not wide enough to install safe cycle paths.

- 5.4. Following the 2017 administration review of FA3 where it was noted that FA3 had little to no impact on the footfall into the town centre, rather it had shifted parking space take up to later in the day.

6. Recommendation(s) of the Committee

- 6.1. The recommendations of this report are:
- 6.2. Review headcount and resource within the CCE team to ensure this is reflective of the current workload, in light of the number of tickets being issued and the 8% time being spent on this by Officers.
- 6.3. ESBC to conduct a full options appraisal on the viability and cost of ANPR being introduced to certain car parks across the borough.
- 6.4. Conduct a 12 month review of financial results as a consequence of the new car park pricing policy brought into effect in 2024.
- 6.5. Review the possibility of introducing a variable car parking pricing strategy across the borough, dependant on location (town centre v outlying areas) with Officers to assess viability and consider any environmental impacts.
- 6.6. Introduce a short stay (1 hour) fee for £1 to assist users who may only require a short time using the car park.
- 6.7. The Committee felt that when either a new car park were to be built or a current car park refurbished, the Council should consider using semi permeable surfaces as opposed to tarmac or concrete.
- 6.8. ESBC to conduct a review with the service provider into security of the online payment solution and adoption of a backup policy in case of IT failure.
- 6.9. Obtain the results for Trinity Rd & Coopers Square EV charge point trials, sharing with relevant parties, supporting further roll outs to assist with the Councils climate strategy.

7. Appendices

- 7.1. Appendix 1: ESBC Car Parks
- 7.2. Appendix 2: Community Civil Enforcement Officer Duties
- 7.3. Appendix 3: ESBC Car Parking Fines Issued
- 7.4. Appendix 4: Competitor Car Parks & Capacities with Tariff Comparison

SECTION 2: OFFICER CONSIDERATIONS

8. Financial Considerations

*This section has been approved by the following member of the Financial Management Unit:
James Hopwood*

- 8.1. The main financial issues arising from this Report are as follows:
- 8.2. If recommendation 6.6 is implemented - introduce a short stay (1 hour) fee for £1 to assist users who may only require a short time using the car park – this would have a financial impact on the Medium Term Financial Strategy.
- 8.3. Full Cost on the context of car park expenditure could include some accounting adjustments such as revaluation changes (assessed by an external valuer) do not have a real cash impact are potentially volatile across years. The next update for the financial position for car parking – informing future trajectory after the 2023-24 financial year – will come out of the work to produce the Council's statement of accounts. However, this work is not yet complete.

9. Legal Considerations

*This section has been approved by the following member of the Legal Team:
Glen McCusker – Locum Solicitor and Deputy Monitoring Officer*

- 9.1. There are no significant legal issues arising from this Report at this stage.

10. Risk Assessment and Management

- 10.1. The main risks arising from this Report and the Council achieving its objectives are as follows:

10.2. Positive (Opportunities/Benefits):

- 10.2.1. Car park users and local residents would have an improved experience of utilising the service if the short term (1 hour) payment was introduced.
- 10.2.2. Council would understand the impact of the updated charging policy better if a 12 month review was implemented.

10.3. Negative (Threats):

- 10.3.1. Council could see a reduction in car park usage if users/residents remain unhappy with charging policies and strategies.

- 10.4. The risks do not need to be entered in the Risk Register.

10.5. Any financial implications to mitigate against these risks are considered above.

11. Equalities and Health

11.1. **Equality Impacts:** The subject of this Report is not a policy, strategy, function or service that is new or being revised. An equality and health impact assessment is not required.

11.2. **Health Impacts:** The outcome of the health screening question does not require a full Health Impact Assessment to be completed. An equality and health impact assessment is not required.

12. Human Rights

12.1. There are no Human Rights issues arising from this Report.

13. Sustainability (including climate change and change adaptation measures)

13.1. Does the proposal result in an overall positive effect in terms of sustainability (including climate change and change adaptation measures) Yes

13.2. Please detail any positive/negative aspects:

13.2.1. The recommendations may support less traffic entering the main towns and therefore reducing pollution.