

The Highland Council

Minutes of Special Meeting of the **Environment, Development and Infrastructure Committee** held in the Council Chamber, Council Headquarters, Glenurquhart Road, Inverness on Thursday, 24 October 2019 at 10.30 am.

Present:

Mr R Balfour	Mr A Jarvie (substitute)
Mr A Baxter (substitute)	Mrs L MacDonald
Mr B Boyd	Mr W MacKay (by video conference)
Miss J Campbell	Ms A MacLean
Mrs H Carmichael	Mr D MacLeod
Dr I Cockburn	Mr D Macpherson
Mr D Louden	Mr A Rhind
Mr M Finlayson	Mr D Rixson
Mr C Fraser	Mrs T Robertson
Mr J Gordon	Mr K Rosie (by video conference)
Mr J Gray	Mr P Sagers (substitute)
Mr A Henderson	Mr A Sinclair

Non-Members also present:

Mr G Adam	Mrs D Mackay
Mr R Bremner (by video conference)	Mr A MacInnes
Mrs C Caddick	Mr G MacKenzie
Mr A Christie	Mr J McGillivray (by video conference)
Mrs M Davidson	Mrs P Munro
Mr J Finlayson	Mrs F Robertson
Mr L Fraser	Mr G Ross
Mr A Graham	Ms N Sinclair (by video conference)
Mr T Heggie	Ms M Smith
Mr B Lobban	Mr B Thompson (by video conference)
Mr D Mackay	

In attendance:

Ms L Denovan, Executive Chief Officer Resources & Finance
Mr M MacLeod, Executive Chief Officer Infrastructure and Environment
Ms C McDiarmid, Executive Chief Officer Customer and Communities
Ms A Clark, Acting Head of Policy, Chief Executive's Service
Ms T Urry, Head of Roads and Transport, Community Services
Mr M Mitchell, Finance Manager (Community Services/Development and Infrastructure), Corporate Resources
Mr S Manning, Principal Traffic Officer, Community Services
Finance Manager
Mr S Fraser, Head of Corporate Governance Chief Executive's Service
Miss J MacLennan, Democratic Services Manager, Chief Executive's Service
Miss J MacLennan, Principal Administrator, Chief Executive's Office

An asterisk in the margin denotes a recommendation to the Council. All decisions with no marking in the margin are delegated to Committee.

Mr A Henderson in the Chair

Business

1. Apologies for Absence Leisgeulan

Apologies for absence were intimated on behalf of Mr H Morrison, Mr I Ramon and Mr C Smith.

2. Declarations of Interest Foillseachaidhean Com-pàirt

There were no declarations of interest.

3. Off-Street Car Parking Policy Review Ath-sgrùdadh Poileasaidh Parcadh Chàraichean Sràide

There had been circulated Report No EDI/66/19 dated 21 October 2019 by the Chief Executive.

Introducing the report, the Chairman referred to previous attempts to develop an effective parking policy. There was a cost in maintaining council car parks but the policy now before Members enabled income to be raised and used locally, addressing the localism agenda supported by the Council, whilst also allowing the Council to invest in its roads infrastructure. Confirming that the policy included Legacy car parks (car parks which were already charging), he advised the Committee it was his intention to support the new policy for off-street car parking, that, taking into account limited resources, it be a two-phase roll-out (option 2) and, at this stage, Option B be adopted (60%/40% service/local share of surplus income).

Following on, the Depute Leader presented PowerPoint slides supporting the recommendations. He emphasised the need for a holistic approach and for the Council to engage with businesses and communities. The proposed policy was equitable, fair and easily understood unlike previous policies. Whilst there was no doubt the policy would need to be refined, it had been drawn up in response to comments from the public that they would support the Council raising income if it protected jobs and services. Highland had welcomed the increase in visitor numbers but this had brought severe traffic management issues at certain locations and, by investing in local infrastructure and services, this too could be addressed. Whilst it was suggested in the report an Area's surplus could be spent on roads this was not compulsory and it was for Area Committees to determine taking on board local concerns and circumstances. It was acknowledged that there were some areas where businesses were on a fragile footing but he suggested this policy gave Members flexibility to benefit an area.

Car parks were a revenue burden to the Council in terms of maintenance etc. At present, only 20 of the 230 off street Council car parks charged but the new policy would be to consider the possibility of charging in all car parks. There would be an option to opt out but the decision would be for Area Committees to determine. Where charging was to be introduced this would be done in partnership with the local community. It was important to outline the benefits of

the new approach and the potential income which would be raised, resulting in local income going towards local investment. In detailing the potential surpluses which could be raised, he commended the proposals to Members, highlighting the opportunity to introduce true localism.

During discussion, the following main points were raised by Members:-

- clarification was sought, and provided, in relation to the surplus made in 2018/19 and to the potential surplus which appeared to be about £200,000 less with £2.242m incurred as overheads. It was explained that these overheads would reduce in future years as the policy moved forward and economies of scale came into play but an element of approximately £1.5m would remain to enable continued support of existing service budgets;
- confirmation was sought, and provided, as to when the baseline figures had been set as it was important to ensure that, where Areas had recently introduced new car parking charges, these were not included in the Legacy figure;
- it was queried why enforcement had been included under expenditure when it was already dealt with in a different manner;
- in response to a question, it was confirmed that the model enabled income to be identified for each car park;
- the responsibility for engagement with stakeholders would sit with officers;
- although a Council-wide approach was recognised, Members also had to represent the views of their Ward constituents;
- while it was proposed that surpluses could be used for roads infrastructure or other community services projects, it was queried if, alternatively, it could be used for community projects;
- Tain High Street was under severe pressure and it was vital this fragility was not exacerbated. It did not appear that an assessment of the economic impact on communities which were already struggling had not been taken into account and, it was suggested, that if this had been done, towns like Tain would have been removed from the list. Similarly, there had already been strong representations from the community and businesses in Nairn against the introduction of charging in the town centre. Accordingly, whilst it was understood why a universal approach might be preferred, certain communities should be excluded at the outset and that the Council instead move ahead with those car parks where it could be delivered. A Town Centre Health Check Report had recently been produced identifying 14 fragile communities but no mention had been made of it in the report. In response, the Depute Leader explained that it would be for the Area Committees to take these concerns and representations on board. It was confirmed impact assessments were part of the new policy process;
- although there might be general opposition to parking charges in some areas, there might also be pockets of support. Whilst some Members suggested that certain locations be removed at the outset, it was in their best interest to show that a clear, proper and transparent process had been followed;
- It was suggested that the impact on an area was best gauged by Local Members and it seemed unfair that some decisions would be taken at single Ward Area Committee while others would be taken by substantially bigger Committees;
- Ideally a list of all off-street car parks falling within this policy should have been included in the report;

- the proposal not to impose penalties on areas where a decision was taken not to introduce charging was welcomed;
- it was questioned if the process could be completed within the 4 month timescale proposed in the report;
- clarification was sought in relation how the policy affected Common Good car parks;
- the income generated would not address all the community services budget pressures. A Seminar on the make-up of the Community Services budget was scheduled for November and as many Members as possible were encouraged to attend;
- guarantees were sought, and provided, that there would be true additionality and that there was no risk of area community services budgets reducing as a result of introducing car parking charges;
- there was a danger that the policy could result in some areas being better off than others;
- public parking behaviour meant that people would be willing to pay for parking if they could see they were receiving an enhanced service;
- clarification was sought, and provided, as to what the various passes and permits would cover. In this regard, Highland-wide parking permits were available and these, in time, might become more popular but it would be necessary to determine how the income generated from that would be shared;
- clarification was sought if charging staff to park in Highland was being taken forward;
- more use was being made of charging points for electric vehicles and further information was sought if more were going to be introduced, if there would be a parking charge imposed and if their use would be time limited;
- clarification was sought around charging for Blue Badge spaces, motor homes and overnight parking;
- clarification was sought as to how any free parking periods would be resourced. It was explained it was up to each Area Committee to determine their own parking arrangements to best suit the needs of their communities, whether this was in relation to permit charges, charges for business vehicles or phases of free parking. This flexibility of tariffs offered local solutions to be put in place;
- assurances were sought that there was sufficient capacity within the Council to deliver this policy given that there were already delays in delivering Road Traffic Orders. It was suggested instead that the consultation should take place before Traffic Orders were drawn up. However, it was explained that it was important that a defined consultation process was in place and this was the best mechanism to achieve this;
- the general consensus was that Option C (50%/50% service/local share of surplus income) was fairer, as opposed to Option B (60%/40% service/local share of surplus income) which saw Headquarters retaining the majority of the income. While more than 50% could be given to Local Committees the costs in running car parks had to be borne in mind;
- this policy would address the corporate Highland-wide responsibility to protect jobs and develop services whilst also making a commitment to local communities;
- whilst some income to local communities might appear modest, it could make a big difference;

- Skye had an increasing number of tourists and, while this had been good for the local economy, it had put great pressure on the roads and infrastructure of the island and created issues in terms of traffic management in some areas. Introducing parking charges would help to manage traffic, secure additional investment and to under-write capital borrowing to create additional car parks. It was acknowledged that the tourist boom might not continue indefinitely and it was important therefore to maximise the large income generating potential while it existed. However, it was emphasised that if Skye was to introduce charges across the island and this was to generate income for the Council, the percentage coming back to the area had to reflect this potential. The majority of Skye residents supported car parking charges if there were also options for season tickets, local decision making and a proportionate allocation of any surplus;
- this parking policy had potential to evolve in terms of the Council taking over the running, for a fee, of car parks in the ownership of other bodies, thus generating further income;
- disappointment was expressed at the short timescale that Members had had to consider the report and it was suggested that this was due to a lack of agreement within the Administration;
- there was concern that the two phased approach might result in further delays;
- it was recognised that this change in parking policy would require the Scheme of Delegation to be amended for Area Committees and, for it to be implemented early in 2020, it would need to be agreed at the Council's December meeting; and
- it was confirmed that the policy would be reviewed on a regular basis to monitor uptake, progress and to reflect changes that might develop as the policy rolled out. It was hoped that at least half of the car parks would have car parking introduced and Members called for regular updates to Committee with a formal review taking place before the end of November 2020.

Thereafter, the Committee:-

- i. **AGREED** the new policy for off-street car parking as set out at Section 5 of the report;
- ii. **AGREED** to a two-phase roll-out (option 2) to the introduction of the new policy as set out at Section 6.7 of the report;
- iii. **AGREED** to Option C (50%/50% service/local share of surplus income);
- iv. **AGREED** that the policy be reviewed by 30 November 2020, with a standing item on progress being reported to Committee in the interim; and
- v. **NOTED** the suggestion that any additional local income should be focused on spending on roads infrastructure; and
- * vi. **AGREED** that the Scheme of Delegation to Area Committees and necessary amendments be confirmed at the December 2019 Highland Council.

The meeting ended at 1.25 pm