

Meeting date: 28 May 2020
Report to: Cabinet Member for Environment & Highways
Subject/report title: Parking Services – COVID19 Update
Report from: Head of Highway Management
Report author/lead contact officer: Paul Tovey



Wards affected:

All Wards | Bickenhill | Blythe | Castle Bromwich | Chelmsley Wood |
 Dorridge/Hockley Heath | Elmdon | Kingshurst/Fordbridge | Knowle |
 Lyndon | Meriden | Olton | Shirley East | Shirley South |
 Shirley West | Silhill | Smith's Wood | St Alphege

Public/private report: Public

Exempt by virtue of paragraph: Select an Exemption paragraph from the Quick Parts drop-down list

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 To provide an update on the Council's Parking Services and to seek approval to continue operating the special arrangements considered necessary during the COVID19 period of movement restrictions and support the Council's recovery plans and priorities.

2. Decision(s) recommended

2.1 Cabinet Member is asked to:

- (a) Approve the continued suspension of all parking charges operating in the Council's managed car parks and on-street parking bays.
- (b) Note the summary of measures taken to both support our customers, stakeholders and partners during this un-precedented period.
- (c) Note the current situation in respect of the Abandoned Vehicle, Civil Parking and Bus Lane enforcement services.
- (d) Agree to receive a further update report at the scheduled decision-making session in July 2020 or in June as part of emergency decision making arrangements if the circumstances require this.

3. Matters for Consideration

- 3.1 Since the Government introduced the emergency COVID19 movement restrictions on the 23rd March 2020, there has been over a 90% reduction in the number of customers using the council's parking facilities in Solihull Town Centre, Knowle and Shirley.
- 3.2 The majority of those people still using these facilities are either key workers who can't work from home or local residents shopping for essential food and medical supplies. Many of these key workers already have access to free parking through the Government's emergency measures.
- 3.3 On the 20th April 2020, Cabinet Member approved suspension of all parking charges across the borough, which was implemented shortly afterwards and has been well received by customers, stakeholder and our partners.
- 3.4 As a consequence, the cash collection service has also been suspended; equipment maintenance costs reduced and other small operating efficiencies introduced to minimise on-going operating costs with our service partners at NSL Ltd.
- 3.5 Despite the serious health risks faced by our frontline staff, the car parks have continued to be opened, closed and inspected to ensure they remain safe for our customers.
- 3.6 Following the Government's recent announcement of their phased recovery plan, the service is still facing challenges to meet the Social Distancing advice. As visitor numbers to Solihull Town Centre are expected to increase in the coming weeks here are some examples of the types of problems faced and mitigating actions being put in place:
- **Public Lifts** – restricted capacity in the lifts at both Lode Lane and M&S multi-storey car parks.
 - **Stair cases** - Some are narrow at several of our car parks and one-way systems have been introduced to minimise these risks.
 - **Access Doors** - Doors are being locked open to avoid customer contact.
 - **Warning Notices** – Copies of the COVID19 transport and health and safety advice has been posted in all car parks. These key messages help to serve as a helpful reminder that they need to follow Social Distancing advice.
- 3.7 Following advice from the Department for Transport the enforcement of on-street parking restrictions and the enforcement of bus lanes were suspended. Officers have continued to monitor the key transport corridors and local retail centres, and the feedback received confirms that generally compliance is good, with very few contraventions being observed.
- 3.8 The Abandoned Vehicle service has continued during COVID19 and pleased to report that demand has remained low despite the un-certain financial climate. Due to the temporary closure of the local scrap metal facilities the service has had to amend its operating procedure. At the present time, only vehicles that are considered to be dangerous e.g. burnt out and considered to be dangerous are being removed. Due to limited storage facilities all other abandoned vehicles will remain where the vehicle

was abandoned until the situation improves. The DVLA are also dealing with any un-taxed vehicles in the same way at the present time.

- 3.9 Looking forward, with the Government's phased recovery plan now published the service expects to see usage and demand for parking to steadily increase over the coming weeks, and therefore needs to be flexible and ready to quickly respond to and adapt its services to any future government advice as this emerges.

4. What options have been considered and what is the evidence telling us about them?

- 4.1 At this stage, the temporary parking management measures are working well and have been well received and provide a safe environment for the essential journeys. The service continues to keep an open mind in respect of the available options, which range from retaining temporary free parking offer; introducing reduced charges to the re-introduction of the former tariff. The customer usage and financial data suggest that making any changes at this time would be difficult to justify.
- 4.2 The measures already in place are consistent with those being used in neighbouring council's and in line with the Government's latest advice. However, this is being updated regularly and will be used to help inform the next steps in the recovery plan.
- 4.3 Until such time as the demand for parking space increases significantly it is suggested that the most appropriate option will be to retain free parking in all areas; continue to monitor compliance with those areas covered by parking restrictions and gather evidence to help inform and identify if and when any changes are necessary.
- 4.4 The Abandoned Vehicle Service will continue to work with its partners to keep the streets of Solihull free from dangerous vehicles, there are no outstanding reports of such vehicles in the borough and the number of customer requests is being closely tracked as in previous difficult economic periods the number of vehicles being abandoned has increased.

5. Reasons for recommending preferred option

- 5.1 The temporary changes to the Parking Service have been implemented in response to the current COVID19 pandemic and although now in the recovery stage, it is widely accepted there may be a long way to go before travel demands returns to its previous level.
- 5.2 There is no significant demand or advice from Government indicating that the reintroduction of parking charges or enforcement is required at this particular time. It is recommended, therefore, that the current temporary measures should remain in place, be monitored and a further update provided at the next decision-making session in July, unless the circumstances require an earlier review in June. The anticipated benefits of making no charges at this time include:
- Reduced risk of transmitting the COVID19 virus through our customers.
 - Provide a consistent service to all residents and retailers.
 - Aligned with neighbouring highway authorities in the region.

- Demonstrate the Council's support to its local residents, retailers and commercial operations, some of whom who will be struggling financially at this difficult time.
- Increase the number of customers using the retail facilities that are currently open, particularly in Solihull town centre.

5.3 The Council has the ability to react quickly to the changing COVID 19 situation and therefore, can reconsider this situation in a relatively short period of time utilising the emergency decision making powers if considered necessary.

6. Implications and Considerations

6.1 How the proposals in this report contribute to the delivery of Council Plan priorities:

Priority:	Contribution:
Securing inclusive economic growth.	Suspending parking charges will help to reduce the initial impact of the COVID19 pandemic on the Solihull economy and may also help to support it during the recovery stage.
Planning & delivery for Solihull's low carbon future (to include biodiversity implications).	No significant impact due to the expected short duration of this situation.
Managing demand and expectation for public services.	Making such a decision to suspend parking charges will reduce the number of requests being managed by the Parking Services team and provide some positive news for customers and retailers during these difficult times which is expected to be well received and supported.
Developing our approach to services for adults and children with complex needs.	Not applicable
Making the best use of our people and physical assets.	No change

6.2 Consultation and Scrutiny:

6.2.1 Due to the COVID 19 situation this matter has not been considered by Scrutiny Board and there is no requirement to carry out statutory consultation when the Council proposes to vary its parking charges, this process is usually done by serving a public notice only.

6.3 Financial implications:

6.3.1 Typically, at this time of the year the parking service generates around £200,000 of income per month towards the Council's annual income budget. The COVID19

situation is expected to place a considerable financial pressure on the overall £3.9 million car parking income budget in 2020/21. The overall financial impact from this pressure will depend on both the duration of the COVID19 movement restrictions and then subsequently how long the retail and commercial sector takes to recover.

6.3.2 The loss of income from car parking will be incorporated into the Council's monitoring of the financial impact to the Council of COVID 19. This will also be monitored as part of the quarterly revenue financial monitoring process for this portfolio.

6.4 Legal implications:

6.4.1 None at this time.

6.5 Risk implications:

6.5.1 There are significant RED risks associated with the COVID19 pandemic and its Financial and Reputational impact.

6.5.2 The situation is being considered as part of the overall risk management approach taking place across the Council as part of the COVID19 situation.

6.6 Equality implications:

6.6.1 The request received was to just make two of the Council car parks free. On review this approach was not considered to be fair and equitable to all of the retailers supported by the council facilities and the customers that use them. The recommendation to suspend all parking charges is therefore not considered to have any equality implications.

7. List of appendices referred to

7.1 None

8. Background papers used to compile this report

8.1 Environment and Highways Cabinet Report – 20th April 2020

8.2 Government COVID 19 advice

9. List of other relevant documents

9.1 Requests to suspend parking charges from Mell Square retailers