



CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL CAR PARKS TASK AND FINISH GROUP

**MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD AT PENALLTA HOUSE, YSTRAD MYNACH
ON FRIDAY 21ST FEBRUARY 2020 AT 2.00 P.M.**

PRESENT:

Councillor R. Gough – Chair

Councillors:

L. Harding, D.W.R. Preece (Vice-Chair), J. Ridgewell and J. Roberts

Together with:

C. Forbes-Thompson (Scrutiny Manager), M. Jacques (Scrutiny Officer), D. Smith (Principal Engineer – Traffic Management) and S. Wilcox (Tenant & Business Support Officer)

1. TO APPOINT A CHAIR AND VICE-CHAIR FOR THE ENSUING YEAR

Nominations were sought in respect of the position of chair of the task and finish group. It was moved and seconded that Councillor Rob Gough be appointed as Chair of the Caerphilly County Borough Council Car Parks Task and Finish Group and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that Councillor Rob Gough be appointed Chair of the County Borough Council Car Parks Task and Finish Group.

Nominations were sought in respect of the position of Vice Chair of the task and finish group. It was moved and seconded that Councillor D. Preece be appointed as Vice Chair of the County Borough Council Car Parks Task and Finish Group and by a show of hands this was unanimously agreed.

RESOLVED that Councillor D. Preece be appointed Vice Chair of the County Borough Council Car Parks Task and Finish Group.

2. TO RECEIVE APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors C. Elsbury and T. Williams.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were declared.

4. CAERPHILLY COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL CAR PARKS TASK AND FINISH GROUP – PRESENTATION ON PREVIOUS REVIEW

During a presentation the Scrutiny Manager advised Members on the focus, findings and key issues from the previous Task and Finish Group on CCBC car parks. Members were reminded that the issue was returning for in-depth scrutiny following the transfer of responsibility for civil parking enforcement from Gwent Police to Caerphilly County Borough Council in April 2019. The Scrutiny Manager explained that the previous inquiry focussed on car parks with over 25 spaces, parity of provision, usage, Park and Ride Services, income generation, the context for charging, misuse and enforcement issues, and costs for maintenance and security. Members were shown slides detailing a breakdown of parking spaces and occupancy rates at key car parks in the county borough. The Task Group was also given details from a 2015 Welsh Government Report which highlighted the complexity of car parking as an issue. The report claimed that charging was one aspect of a complex interplay of factors influencing willingness to travel by car, time and money spent, and business activity in town centres. That it is very difficult to separate the influence of car parking charges from other factors.

Members were advised that the previous inquiry had found that a blanket free parking strategy was generally found not to benefit target visitors as the free spaces were used primarily by town centre workers rather than shoppers, and consequently had an unexpectedly negative impact on footfall. The Scrutiny Manager also highlighted that a previous conclusion was that beyond anecdote, there is very little published evidence which links changes in car park charges to changes in town centre footfall. Also, whilst visitors to town centres suggested that car park charges impact on how long they remain shopping in towns, the general availability of spaces was felt to be more important than cost in their overall decision about visiting. Traffic flow and parking signage was also felt to have the same, if not greater, effect on their decision to visit a town centre.

Members were made aware of Welsh Government recommendations in the 2015 report which concluded that car park charging should not be viewed in isolation from other factors such as availability of parking, signage, and traffic flow. The report also recommended that Local Authorities considered impacts of car parking charges in the broadest possible sense and collect robust data on the impact of changes to charging policies. The Scrutiny Manager concluded the presentation with a synopsis of comments from Members of the previous Task and Finish Group on car parks.

Discussion ensued and it was highlighted by officers that car park condition surveys were yet to be carried out. One Member asked about any current surplus income and was advised by officers that currently no funds were unbudgeted, but there was the possibility of greater flexibility with civil enforcement income in the future.

One Member highlighted the importance of traffic regulation orders and double yellow lining as a way of increasing occupancy in car parks and reducing on-street parking. The Member was strongly against a free parking strategy.

5. TERMS OF REFERENCE AND METHODOLOGY FOR REVIEW

The Scrutiny Manager highlighted suggested next steps for the Task Group. Members were advised that they should agree terms of reference and methodology for the review, and consider issues such as concessions, development related impacts and events.

The Chair suggested that town and community councils be contacted and made aware that the issue of car parks was being revisited. It was agreed that the viewpoint of these councils would be important in terms of consultation as the inquiry progressed.

In terms of methodology in the initial stages of the inquiry it was broadly agreed that the Group should make site visits to some of the principal car parks in the county borough before the next meeting.

Officers advised Members that the terms of reference for the previous Task and Finish inquiry had been prompted by a desire to reach parity between Bargoed and Blackwood in terms of car park charging. Discussion ensued on the Terms of Reference for the current Task and Finish Group. One Member pointed out that there was a difference in terms of issues and implications at car parks in town centres and parking facilities in more rural areas. For example, the impact on trade and commerce by changes to parking policies was more significant for urban areas than to more rural parts of the county borough. The Member suggested that this be reflected in the Terms of Reference. One Member suggested using income made from parking charges at each individual site to cover the maintenance costs at that location. The Scrutiny Manager outlined the Terms of Reference for the previous inquiry into car parks, it was broadly agreed that the parameters were similar and that therefore the previous Terms of Reference were still applicable. It was therefore decided to retain the same Terms of Reference as the previous inquiry.

The agreed terms of reference are 'to determine if the current strategy and regime for the management and operation of the Councils Highway owned off-street car parks is still appropriate and what alternative options should be considered in future.'

The Chair suggested that officers provide Members with an update on the Park and Ride service at the group's next meeting. It was also agreed officers provide a update on enforcement procedures. The Chair suggested that the inquiry would also benefit by receiving information on the energy costs at car parks, income generated per site, staff and resources costs, and the rateable value per car park.

Discussion ensued in relation to the impact of transport by railway and future positioning of charging points as part of the Council's Electric Vehicle Strategy. Officers also advised Members that a £300,000 Capital Bid had been put forward to replace pay and display machines. Members heard how these new ticket machines were equipped with internal dryers which help prevent ticket rolls from getting wet due to the weather conditions and in theory would help to reduce maintenance costs.

Members agreed that proposed site visits to car parks with over 25 parking spaces should take place before the Task Group's next meeting, and the last two weeks of March was put forward as a suggestion.

The meeting closed at 15.10 p.m.

Approved as a correct record and subject to any amendments or corrections agreed and recorded in the minutes of the next appropriate meeting they were signed by the Chair.

CHAIR