

## **OUTSOURCED SERVICES SCRUTINY PANEL**

**5 FEBRUARY 2013**

Present: Councillor S Rackett (Chair)  
Councillors S Counter, G Derbyshire, S Greenslade and  
A Joynes

Also present: Councillor Jackie Connal

Officers: Partnerships and Performance Section Head  
Transport and Infrastructure Section Head  
Parking Services Manager  
Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer (JK)

### **18 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE/ COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

There were no apologies for absence.

### **19 DISCLOSURES OF INTEREST**

Councillor Derbyshire said that he held a permit for the Cassiobury Controlled Parking Zone (CPZ).

### **20 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 26 November 2012 were submitted and signed.

### **21 UPDATE ON ACTIONS**

The Panel received an update on actions from previous meetings.

The Chair noted that PR1, indicators to be added to the performance report, had been included in the next item.

The Panel noted that no remedy notices had been issued under the contract with SLM. Work was being undertaken under all the actions.

RESOLVED –

That the report be noted.

### **22 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

The Panel received a report of the Partnerships and Performance Section Head giving details of performance information collected and appending the performance indicators for the third quarter of 2012/13.

The Partnerships and Performance Section Head advised that as this was a new scrutiny panel, the performance report was evolving as Members decided which indicators would be most useful to monitor.

She drew the Panel's attention to the new indicators for this report. For HQ Theatres, the number of community hires was reported. For the parking service, the number of penalty charge notices (PCNs) issued and the number of appeals was included in the report.

The Chair underlined the importance of considering whether there were other indicators that Members wanted to be reported.

RESOLVED –

that the performance of the identified outsourced service indicators at the end of quarter 3 2012/13 be noted.

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### **BRIEFING ON THE PARKING CONTRACT WITH VINCI**

The Panel received a presentation on the contract with Vinci.

Councillor Derbyshire asked for details of the car parks that the Council controlled. The Parking Services Manager replied that these were the Avenue Car Park, the Town Hall Car Park, Longspring Car Park and the Harebreaks Car Park. He added that the Council also undertook enforcement in the leisure centre car parks.

The Parking Services Manager explained the structure of the contract costs and advised that the contract with Vinci was a quality-based, rather than punitive-based, contract. In the latter, it could be worthwhile for contractors not to meet their contractual obligations and pay a small fine. The Council's contract with Vinci was fixed-cost and the only way the costs could go up would be if the Council extended the contract by asking for more hours or a wider coverage.

In response to a question about risk-sharing, the Parking Services Manager explained that if the contractor did not meet the performance targets they were not paid.

Councillor Derbyshire noted that Vinci reported on their performance monthly and this was the basis of the payments. He asked how this data was audited. The Parking Services Manager explained that the data was not audited by a third party but he audited the data through tracking records. He had access to the system and could access the same reports and he checked the accuracy for every report. He was satisfied that the systems in place were adequate.

The Parking Services Manager explained the performance system and advised that Vinci were currently operating at two 'bits'. It was extremely difficult to attain six bits, the highest level of performance. He noted that in January the Council had had 500 additional hours of enforcement at no additional cost. However, this

did not lead to additional payments as the level of errors was too high. The performance was good but the key performance indicators had not been achieved.

The Parking Services Manager outlined the contract costs and noted that Watford needed match day signage. Once Saracens left Vicarage Road, less enforcement would be needed there.

The Parking Services Manager noted that Watford managed the contract on behalf of Three Rivers and Dacorum. This gave consistency and allowed the councils to pool resources as required. Three Rivers and Dacorum contributed to the salary costs for the Watford staff who managed the contract.

Following a question from Councillor Counter, the Parking Services Manager referred to the Annual Parking Report which listed the level of the fine for each offence. The Chair added that these levels were set in legislation and the Council had no control over the levels. The Parking Services Manager reminded the Panel that the Traffic Management Act governed everything the service did.

The Parking Services Manager said that the objective of the PCNs was to encourage compliance rather than to raise revenue. He reported that the number of PCNs was falling and this was what happened as compliance increased. Although there was a concern that there would be a drop in income, the objective of the service was not to increase income. It was preferable to educate rather than enforce.

Councillor Counter asked if the situation was different in London. The Parking Services Manager advised that although there were some differences, the objective remained the same. He added that a good parking enforcement regime would see a steady decrease in PCNs and increasing success at parking tribunals.

Councillor Derbyshire commented that there must be a level where the number of PCNs would plateau. There would never be complete compliance so equilibrium would be reached. The Parking Services Manager replied that he anticipated that this would be the case. He expected that the decrease in PCNs would continue this year and next year but may level out after that. Should any new controlled parking zones be introduced, this would be likely to increase the level of PCNs.

The Parking Services Manager referred to the number of appeals and noted that some PCNs were challenged informally rather than through an appeal. He outlined the different avenues available for appealing against a PCN. Watford was the top-performing authority in Hertfordshire for winning appeals. Of the 80 appeals so far this year, Watford had won 73. He added that there was no charge for the public to appeal against a PCN.

Following a question from the Chair about information given to the public, the Parking Services Manager explained that a formal notice of rejection had to be

sent when an informal challenge was unsuccessful. This notice outlined the appeal options.

The Chair noted that Dacorum lost 44 percent of PCN appeals and asked if the staff were the same. The Parking Services Manager replied that it was different staff but they worked to the same policies. There were different reasons why appeals were won and lost.

The Parking Services Manager advised that the service should be self-financing and if there was any surplus it was ringfenced for the service or other traffic-related projects. The intention was to provide the best-possible service while keeping permit costs low.

Councillor Derbyshire referred to the financial information and said that he was pleased to see a small surplus in the last financial year but there could be a loss in the following year. The Parking Services Manager replied that his role was to monitor contract costs; he outlined ways that the costs of the contract had been reduced.

Councillor Joynes asked whether a free time-limited ticket could be made available in some areas. The Transport and Infrastructure Section Head advised that a scheme was being trialled in Queens Road. This type of scheme did mean a reduction in the revenue stream. The Portfolio Holder would make a decision whether to take the scheme forward.

Councillor Joynes referred to problems in Leggatts Wood Avenue where customers at the bank blocked residents' drives. The Transport and Infrastructure Section Head responded that officers were aware of the problem and Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) had been to the area.

In response to a question about Beechfield School, the Parking Services Manager advised that enforcement at schools was difficult. There were 28 schools in the Borough and they required enforcement at the same times of day. There was a five-minute observation period for cars parked on yellow lines and CEOs tried to encourage people to move on. Enforcement was immediate when cars were parked on school zigzags but it did take a minute to issue a PCN. Problems were best resolved by working with schools and the advantage of enforcement at schools was that it was easy to contact the perpetrators.

Following a question from Councillor Joynes, the Parking Services Manager advised that photos of cars could only be taken if a contravention had taken place. It was only possible to get the owner's details from DVLA if an offence had taken place.

The Chair reported that he had been part of a Task Group established by Hertfordshire County Council on school parking. It had been useful to see the variety of practices and the report may be of interest to the Panel.

**ACTION – Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer**

The Transport and Infrastructure Section Head referred to the scheme at Holy Rood School where the Council had worked with the Safer Routes to Schools team from Hertfordshire County Council. A lay-by was removed and zigzag restrictions were installed. He underlined the importance of having the school's support

Councillor Greenslade asked about school travel plans and outlined the problems at Berrygrove School and the Transport and Infrastructure Section Head replied that often these plans needed updating. He was aware of the problems the Councillor described.

The Parking Services Manager referred to the problems of oversized vehicles in CPZs. There was a limit to the length of vehicles and the size was not indicated on the vehicle documentation. These issues were dealt with reactively but permits could not be rescinded without proof of the vehicle's length.

The Parking Services Manager outlined some recent achievements of the service including a new mapping system and electronic text notes. He referred to Operation Clamp which was a partnership to tackle Blue Badge fraud. There was significant abuse but it was a difficult issue to tackle.

Councillor Derbyshire noted that Blue Badge holders could park on both single and double yellow lines. He asked whether there were any plans to change this. The Parking Services Manager advised that this was in national legislation and Blue Badge holders could park for up to three hours if they were parked responsibly. CEOs could request that they do not obstruct the road but it was not enforceable. The Chair added that the Police could take action for genuine obstruction.

Councillor Derbyshire referred to the improved situation at King Street. The Parking Services Manager advised that it was not possible to put in yellow lines where there were loading restrictions.

The Parking Services Manager informed the Panel that shorter opening hours for the parking shop were being considered as services were being made available online. The shop was currently open from 0800 to 1830 Monday to Saturday. The Chair suggested that the profile of times that people visited the shop should be monitored. Members noted that the presence of a shop was important for residents who did not have internet access.

The Chair referred to details of the write-offs in the Annual Parking Report. He noted that the level in Watford was 15 percent and he estimated that this was approximately £100K. The level for Dacorum was approximately £50K. He asked what could be done. The Parking Services Manager explained that write-offs in Watford had always been relatively high. This was due to the demographic profile of the town. He advised that last year the Council had changed bailiff companies and it was hoped that there would be an improvement. There were currently two firms operating for Watford and they were competing for the contract which would be awarded to the company with the best results. They

were dealing with people who had had no intention of paying. He added that he met regularly with the bailiffs.

The Chair suggested that it would be useful in future to see write offs compared with others in the family of similar authorities. It was important to compare like-for-like.

**ACTION – Transport and Infrastructure Section Head / Parking Services Manager**

Councillor Joynes asked if it was possible to have a breakdown of income by permit zone.

**ACTION – Parking Services Manager**

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## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Chair outlined the conclusions and actions from the meeting –

- the Panel to receive a comparison of write-offs for other councils in the local authority family
- the Panel to receive a zone-by-zone breakdown of income from permits
- the Panel to receive the report of the Safer Routes to Schools Task Group set up by HCC.

The Chair added that he recalled that the HCC Task Group had had a list of participating schools in the Safer Routes to Schools scheme. Ward councillors may be able to encourage non-participating schools to sign up.

**RESOLVED –**

that the actions and conclusions from the meeting be agreed.

**ACTION: Transport and Infrastructure Section Head, Parking Services Manager and Committee and Scrutiny Support Officer**

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## **SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORT**

The Chair asked the Panel to consider and circulate any contributions for the report.

Chair

The Meeting started at 7.05 pm  
and finished at 8.25 pm