

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee
held in The Council Chamber, Council Offices, Ely on
Tuesday 27th November 2012 at 4.30pm

P R E S E N T

Councillor Michael Allan (Chairman)
Councillor Allen Alderson (as Substitute for Councillor
Tony Cornell)
Councillor David Ambrose Smith
Councillor Sue Austen
Councillor Will Burton
Councillor Tom Hunt
Councillor Neil Morrison
Councillor Robert Stevens
Councillor Hazel Williams, MBE

I N A T T E N D A N C E

Councillor Anna Bailey
Councillor Tony Goodge
Councillor Richard Hobbs
Councillor Bill Hunt
Councillor Peter Moakes
Councillor Tony Parramint
Councillor Mike Rouse
Councillor Gareth Wilson
Julie Cornwell – Partnerships Officer
Darren Dixon – Head of Community Services
Linda Grinnell – Head of Finance
John Hill – Chief Executive
Adrian Scaites-Stokes – Democratic Services Officer
Sharon Jones – Anglia Revenues Partnership

44. **PUBLIC QUESTION TIME**

The following was received from Mr. Christopher and Mrs Valerie Bent:

I am Christopher Bent, and I reside with my wife at 56 Broad Street, Ely where we have lived for almost 30 years. Our home is a typical terraced cottage with no access for parking.

In the period from 2007 to date I have been active in pressing the council to consider the plight of residents in the central city zone with vehicles but no parking space on their property. I was party to a petition presented to the relevant committee in 2008, and further questions in 2009 – to no avail.

As I believe that parking charges should apply, I cannot claim now to speak on behalf of all the original petitioners, but I can convey the general dismay that our elected representatives have failed to address the issue of parking for residents in our situation.

Broad Street is predominantly double-line no parking, with three areas of daytime controlled bays. In order to conform to the Ship Lane early morning restriction and any on-street regulations, for six days out of seven, it is necessary to move our vehicle in the early morning and again in the evening, in addition to any other usage; a fruitless exercise, environmentally unsound and extremely frustrating.

What we do not understand is why the principle of the Business Permit Scheme has not been extended to residents trapped by a similar problem. The final sentence of proposal 4.4 clearly illustrates the discriminatory nature of the recommendations – I quote “- *will provide additional long stay car parking that will benefit the town centre worker and the tourist*”.

I respectfully put forward a suggested Proposal 4.3; that the final sentence should read:

The Business Permit Scheme will be retained, and extended to allow city centre residents, who can demonstrate that they have no parking space available on their property, to have the same opportunity to purchase a combined ticket including a full year parking based on weekly ticket rate.

The Head of Community Services reminded the meeting that residential on-street parking was the responsibility of the County Council. Work had been done on this and it had revealed that between 100 and 150 residents had expressed a need for this. If these parking spaces were provided it would equate to a car park the size of Ship Lane. It also had to be borne in mind that the long stay car parks were at maximum capacity. If these residents were offered parking then all residents would have to be offered it, which would be very difficult to provide. Contact had been made with the County Council over this and it had made a commitment to look at this issue, in cooperation with this Council, in the new year.

The Chief Executive stated that a copy of the question and its answer would be provided for the Development and Transport Committee for its consideration.

45. APOLOGIES AND SUBSTITUTIONS

Apologies were received from Councillor Tony Cornell. Councillor Allen Alderson substituted for Councillor Cornell for this meeting.

46. **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

Councillor Will Burton declared a prejudicial interest on account of his position as a City of Ely Councillor who had taken part in discussions over car parking in Ely.

The Democratic Services Officer advised the Committee that Dispensations had been applied for and given to all the Members present at this meeting, including those in the public gallery, to enable them to discuss matters relating to Agenda Item 6, Council Tax Support.

47. **CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman made the following announcements:

- The minutes from the previous meeting were not ready due to the shortness in time between the two meetings.
- There was a change in the agenda order, in that agenda item 8 would be considered before agenda item 7.

Councillor Will Burton left the meeting at this point, 4:37pm.

48. **CAR PARKING IN ELY**

The Committee considered a report, reference M172 previously circulated, which set out a joint proposal from the City of Ely Council and this District Council for car parking in Ely.

The Head of Community Services advised the Committee that, in recognition of the public petition previously received relating to this issue, options had been reviewed with the City of Ely Council and the County Council. Consequently, a joint proposal had been drawn up for a charging scheme. It aimed to reflect the importance of the city centre, took account of low paid workers and reflected that although all taxpayers in the district currently paid for car parking in Ely only 50% used it. Also important was the impact of tourists and visitors who used the car parks who were not council taxpayers.

It was very difficult to accurately assess who would use the car parks once charging was introduced. Therefore, prudent projections had been made on income and how the car parks would be used. The proposals reflected the high occupancy levels of the car parks. Any town centre needed to have high turnover of parking to thrive.

Growth projections indicated that over the next 10 to 15 years the people wanting to use the car parks would increase by 20%. This meant that an additional 800 people per day would want to park, therefore a mechanism was needed to allow for parking and to increase the number

of spaces available. To address the management of the car parks, it was proposed to re-instate the long stay parking provision in the Fore Hill car park and make the Newnham Street car park short stay only.

The Council had agreed its Mid-Term Financial Strategy, which looked to make savings. The new proposals would generate less savings than previously expected but the scheme aimed to break even.

The Portas Report had also been taken into consideration and one of its proposals was for free parking. It was therefore proposed that the first hour's parking be free in the short stay car parks. The proposals would not affect the Angel Drove car park.

If the income from the new parking scheme exceeded the expected income then the excess would be used for projects to support the town centre. Any other surplus could be used to possibly reduce the charges, increase the number of spaces and invest in on-street or off-street enforcement, including residents' permits. It was proposed to form a joint body with the City of Ely Council to oversee all expenditure and income. A guarantee would be given that no increase in charges would be implemented for the remainder of the City of Ely Council's and this District Council's current terms of office.

It was also intended to retain the business permit scheme. With regard to on-street parking, the County Council had given a commitment to look at Civil Parking Enforcement during the next financial year. This was expected to take between 6 and 12 months to complete.

Councillor Sue Austen asked about disabled parking and in reply the Committee was informed that those drivers would be given an additional 2 hours free parking. The Council was currently monitoring car parking spaces to check whether enough spaces were available for those drivers.

Councillor Robert Stevens queried the limit on parking before or after 8:30am, as it was unclear what would happen. This limit was obviously aimed at preventing commuters from filling up car parking spaces all day, however if this issue was addressed it would prevent residents having to move their cars unnecessarily. There was also a question over people purchasing a parking ticket who, if they had to use their cars during the day, would have to purchase other tickets if they used a different car park. The Head of Community Services acknowledged that these were difficult issues and attempts had been made to keep the scheme as simple as possible. He contended that if that a time limit were not in place then it would mean that some people would not be able to park due to commuter parking.

Councillor Hazel Williams assumed that the city's supermarkets would help supply short stay parking by use of their car parks. This was something that should be included in the report, as if they had free

parking this could have a knock-on effect on the Council's charges. Although not against charging, there was concern that there was a short time for consideration between this Committee considering the issues and Development and Transport Committee looking at it in less than a week. That Committee would not be able to consider this Committee's comments beforehand.

The Chief Executive explained that there was a difference between Member comments and the Committee's resolutions. This Committee had a chance to put together a resolution, and every endeavour would be made to provide the Development and Transport Committee with it and any comments from this meeting. This would also include the public question received and its answer.

Councillor Allen Alderson asked about the mechanisms to be used for free parking. Presumably if no ticket were obtained then people would be liable for fines. The Head of Community Services explained that the parking ticket machines would have a button to allow the issue of a ticket for free parking for a hour. There would be a period when the new scheme was introduced where people would be given warnings but without enforcement. Lessons had been learned from the experiences of Newmarket, so the scheme would be heavily promoted.

Councillor Neil Morrison asked why the Committee had not been provided with all the necessary paperwork, as the Development and Transport Committee had received two additional appendices. Would the schedule of charging in the Angel Drove car park be changed to charge for parking on Saturdays and Bank Holidays? A proposal had been made previously to engage a Police Community Support Officer to deal with on-street parking problems and the Police should implement this. It was explained that there was nothing in those appendices that had not been covered in the report to this Committee and there were no differences in the proposals to be considered by both committees. The report also covered the change to charging at Angel Drove which would now include those extra days.

A proposal was made that this Committee request that Development and Transport Committee seek a commitment from the Police to use its on-street powers to implement enforcement, and this was agreed.

Councillor Hazel Williams reminded the Committee of the total chaos experienced by Newmarket when it introduced its charging, where people started to park on-street as there was no Civil Parking Enforcement in place. As the implementation date for this Council's charging was 1st July and the results of the County Council's review would be later, then Ely would also suffer the same chaos. This would mean that residents would not be able to find anywhere to park. Therefore the off-street parking and on-street parking schemes had to be married to avoid this potential disaster.

Councillor Williams therefore proposed that Development and Transport Committee consider the impact of the timetable for Civil Parking Enforcement on this Council's off-street parking regime and residents on-street residential parking in Ely. Upon being put to the vote this proposal was declared carried.

Councillor Williams stated that, with the potential increase of 800 people wanting to park daily in the future, thoughts should be given to keeping cars out of the city. The only practical solution was a park-and-ride scheme. The Sainsbury bus could be used for this and support obtained through negotiations with Tesco when they moved. This should be included in the report and as part of a transport strategy.

The Head of Community Services reminded the Committee that a park-and-ride scheme would be considered in connection with the new leisure centre, which would also provide 300 parking spaces. Plans were in place for this but any park-and-ride scheme had to break even.

Councillor Gareth Wilson reminded the Committee that the Council had a hole in its budget. There was a real problem as taxpayers in the south of the district did not use the Ely car parks but paid for them. The proposals before the Committee had some good points but did not look after residents or poorly paid shop workers. The suggested charges would mean they would have to find an additional £500 per year. Civil Parking Enforcement was needed throughout East Cambridgeshire, as this would benefit the villages. It was inevitable that some people would park on-street whatever charge was made and this would cause a problem. Free, or virtually free, parking was needed for some people. The city ought to have a park-and-ride scheme, from both sides of Ely, and there was no good reason not to use the Downham Road site for a temporary car park on Thursdays. This could then help reduce the amount of parking needed in the city centre.

Councillor Hazel Williams agreed about the park-and-ride and proposed that the words "including park-and-ride" be included under paragraph 4.1 (ii) after 'increasing car park capacity in the City'. This was agreed.

It was resolved to RECOMMEND TO DEVELOPMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE:

- (i) That Development and Transport Committee seek a commitment from the Police to use its on-street powers to implement enforcement;
- (ii) That paragraph 4.1 (ii) be amended to include words "including park-and-ride" after 'increasing car park capacity in the City';
- (iii) That consideration be given to the impact of the timetable for the review of Civil Parking Enforcement and the Council's off-

street parking regime and on residential on-street parking in Ely.

The meeting adjourned at this point, 5:40pm.

Councillors Anna Bailey, Tony Goodge, Bill Hunt, Peter Moakes and Mike Rouse left the meeting at this point.

Councillor Will Burton returned to the meeting, at 5:42pm.

The meeting re-convened at 5:43pm.

49. **LOCALISATION OF COUNCIL TAX SUPPORT**

The Committee considered a report, reference M173 previously circulated, on the requirement to devise a local council tax support scheme to replace the existing national council tax benefits scheme, to commence on 1 April 2013.

The Head of Finance tabled the Risk Assessment appendix and advised the Committee that any localised scheme had to be approved by Council. Under the new scheme, pensioners must be protected, even though the Government had recommended a 10% cut in support to councils. In October, the Government announced its grant for next year, providing that the scheme met its criteria. Unfortunately, this grant would leave a shortfall of £600,000. The Council's scheme aimed to close this gap by concentrating on raising some additional revenue, as detailed in paragraph 6.1 to the report. The Government also allowed a premium charge to be made on long-term empty homes. By amending the scheme, to reduce the contribution from working age claimants to 8.5%, the Council would be eligible for Government grants next year. This would enable the scheme to be cost neutral. However, the figures may change once the actual Government funding package was known.

Councillor Robert Stevens queried what would happen to a property if someone died. Sharon Jones replied that it would depend if the property were subject to probate.

Councillor Tom Hunt asked whether there was a clear view from the consultation of anything unpopular. The Head of Finance stated that the responses had been quite even with no particular outstanding issues.

It was resolved to RECOMMEND TO FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE:

That the draft localised Council Tax Support Scheme be recommended to full Council.

50. **NEIGHBOURHOOD PANELS**

The Committee considered a report, reference M175 previously circulated, which reviewed the performance of the Neighbourhood Panels.

The Head of Community Services reminded the Committee that the Neighbourhood Panels were brought in during 2005 and rolled across the district in 2008. This was a 5-year review and looked at their purpose and what they had to offer.

The Partnerships Officer advised the Committee that Appendix A to the report showed the attendance at recent Panel meetings. The key finding was the reduction in agency attendances, because they were looking at the resources they deployed to the meetings. The County Council were no longer sending any senior officers to the Panel meetings. Generally Member representation was also reducing, particularly in the West, South and Soham & East Panels. Some parish councils were no longer sending representatives any more. One reason the Panels were set up was to engage with the communities. Unfortunately, public attendance was also dwindling significantly. Most of the public attendees were repeat visitors.

Every Neighbourhood Panel had raised priorities during the period reviewed and these were summarised in Appendix B. The same issues were still being raised after 5 years, although there had been some successful initiatives undertaken to address those issues.

The Panels were now running alongside the recent Shape Your Place website. This was an additional way to engage with the communities and so far the website had received 5000 unique visitors.

The Head of Community Services informed the Committee that officers were seeking feedback from the Panel Members. The response from the other consultation had been poor and had not been overly positive, with the exception of the Ely Panel. Concerns had been expressed over the Panels' purpose, what attendees could get out of them and that parish councils did not view the Panel as engaging with the public.

In summary it was stated that the attendance of parish councils and the public was decreasing and the number of issues were declining. This Council was committed to invest more resources into the Panels and support new technology, such as the Shape Your Place website, to engage communities.

Councillor Allen Alderson declared that the three parish councils in his ward did not want to send representatives as they thought they got nothing from the Panels. The range of issues coming up was getting narrower and came up month after month.

Councillor David Ambrose Smith said that if parish councils wished to meet together they did not need a Neighbourhood Panel to do so. The Panels had stopped parish councils from dealing with issues, as those issues were referred to the Panels instead. Shape Your Place was marvellous but he wondered what happened to the data it generated. It

was revealed that the data was 'owned' by the County Council who retained it. It was hoped that the County Council would become more relaxed about the data, share it and make the information available.

Councillor Tom Hunt thought there was a clear flow of accountability at the Ely Neighbourhood Panel meetings. People could see that problems were being dealt with. The people attending could also be representing others. The cost of the Ely Neighbourhood Panel was money well spent.

Councillor Hazel Williams suggested that the Ely Panel was a special case, as it was slightly different to the others. The Panels had proved useful, as they had short-circuited the system to get things done. Shape Your Place dealt with a lot more issues than the Panels and there was a role for the parish councils in this. There were better ways to engage with the public and issues should be picked up elsewhere.

Neighbourhood Panels were a good idea when they started but they had now run their course. If they only engaged 1% of the district's population then they were not serving their purpose. This issue needed to be re-thought.

Councillor Richard Hobbs had left the meeting by this point, 5:36pm.

Councillor Robert Stevens thought the Police tended not to get involved in parish councils but they thought it was important to continue with the meetings. Perhaps a change of name would help, for example calling them Neighbourhood Forums. The timings of the meetings should be considered to avoid the times when people might not be able to attend. The South Panel had big problems due to the fact it covered 15 parishes and meetings were held in 4 different venues. Guest speakers were a good draw if they spoke on a relevant subject.

Councillor Neil Morrison informed the Committee that at the Littleport Panel most of the attending public were elderly, as very few had access to a computer. If the Panels were taken away then they would get no engagement. It was noted that the Panels cost £13,000 and it was questioned whether the Police made any financial contribution to costs. The Committee was advised that the Police put no financial resources in, only officer time.

The Chief Executive thought it clear that there were different experiences across the area. There were major concerns about certain panels but options had to be articulated to the Panels, asking for their views. There were a whole range of changes that could be made and a service review would be required. A revised set of recommendations was tabled setting out that option. The revised recommendations were duly agreed.

It was resolved to COMMUNITY AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE:

- (i) That the on-going performance of Neighbourhood Panels be noted and the issues identified be considered;
- (ii) That a Service Review of Neighbourhood Panels and Shape Your Place be instigated for the 2013/14 round.

51. **ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN THE NEW HOMELESSNESS STRATEGY**

The Chief Executive apologised that the Head of Housing had had to leave so was not now available to present this report. As this report would not now be recommended to the next Development and Transport Committee it could be re-timetabled and this could mean an extra Scrutiny Committee meeting.

This item was deferred to a future meeting.

52. **FORWARD AGENDA PLAN**

The Committee considered its Forward Agenda Plan.

The Chief Executive reminded the Committee that the presentation by the Fire Authority, due 21st January, would now be considered by full Council instead, so that it fitted in with their timetable. The next meeting would be considering the Council's budget. The current forward agenda plan was sparse but it would be populated once the new calendar of meetings was out.

The Forward Agenda Plan was received.

The meeting closed at 6:39pm.