

QUESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC
Thursday 25 May 2023

1. QUESTION from Bury Meadow Residents Association (Dilys Thorpe attending)
Re: Recent changes in parking permits for residents

As Co-Chair of Bury Meadow Residents Association, there are concerns about the recent changes in parking permits for residents. Roads within our residential area are predominantly residents' parking only. With the paper permits we could ascertain whether a car parked all day was a resident, or a vehicle not entitled to park there. Now, this is not the case and speaking to parking enforcement officers, it appears the task of checking parking permits is taking approximately 6 times as long as before, and a higher number than expected are leaving the job. Also, with the 2-hour parking spaces, non-residents will park over the 2 hours as the infrequency of being caught makes a parking ticket cheaper, exacerbated by enforcement officers taking longer to check vehicles.

My question is whether this system piloted in Devon before being implemented and, if so, the reaction from residents and whether parking enforcement officers were consulted and their views. I would also like to understand where and how any public consultation was advertised / undertaken and the outcome of this, for example the percentage / number of residents in favour.

Has this new system been fully costed (e.g loss of income due to not being able to check as many vehicles, or recruitment costs such as plans to hire additional staff to cover vacancies and compensate for the increased time to check vehicles) and what are the systems for those unable to use digital technology or in periods of technological failure e.g. internet outages, poor signal coverage.

Whilst the world is becoming more digital, the paper-based approach was effective and was a better fit for purpose.

REPLY BY COUNCILLOR HUGHES

I understand your concerns and agree that our residents parking schemes are reliant on effective enforcement from our parking team.

Our new virtual permit system was introduced following a review undertaken by members of the Exeter HATOC, with recommendations being made to Cabinet in December 2020 and new Policy agreed.

As part of the review, officers and members looked at the technology available and worked with the enforcement team to develop proposals. The system that was launched in Devon this year is well established and used by many other Authorities across the UK, including Bristol, Bath & North East Somerset, Dorset, and Somerset. The system improves customer experience as there is no delay due to posting permits and change of vehicle details is quicker and without additional cost. Enforcement is improved as permits that have been purchased incorrectly can be cancelled immediately and permits cannot be altered or duplicated.

It is not the case that using the new system takes “6 times as long” as checking a physical permit. Officers can use either the handheld device to scan the vehicle registration plate, or, quickly type the first couple of digits in to bring up a list of live permits in that area.

We have no issues with staff retention but it is natural to expect some turnover of staff in a team as large as our parking service. This calendar year we have had one colleague leave to pursue a new career and a part time member of staff has retired. We continue to appoint to vacancies that have formed during the pandemic (when recruitment was challenging) and in the same period we have recruited 16 new officers.

In terms of trialling the approach, the service has been using the same technology to manage daily and weekly trade permits for contractors since January 2020, so officers are familiar with the system. The team also continue to review our approach to enforcement and work with other Authorities to establish best practice and continuously improve our service.

The service was costed and a small increase to the base permit price was proposed to support the technology required to maintain the service. There was also a review of charges to encourage use of lower emission vehicles put forward in the same proposal. Both of which were reported to Cabinet. There are no costs expected due to loss of income.

The Traffic Regulation Order was advertised on 1st June 2022 for a period of one month (closing on 1st July). Adverts were placed in the Western Morning News and proposals were also direct marketed to over 14000 active permit holders (approximately 47% of all permit holders) who had provided email details at time of application. In total 769 residents responded and their comments were considered at our Cabinet Meeting on 14th September 2022 before any decision was made to proceed. This is available to view online.

We do understand that the transition to the new service will change how people purchase their permits and that some would prefer to see paper permits in vehicles. If there are vehicles which residents believe are parked in contravention, this can still be reported on our webpage.