

Council – 1 March 2022

Responses to Public Questions

Question 1

Shaun Balding to ask Cllr Geoff Williamson, the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability:

In respect of the reasoning for such a substantial change to the parking permit costs can I ask the following.

The Total Costs RPZ 2021, which appear to have been used to calculate the 2022 values, were £214,818.18

1. In this figure what is the role of Business Support Engagement and a Customer Support Engagement - why are residents having to pay for a Business Support Role?
2. How has 15% of the contractors been measured to make sure its 15%?
3. Why have has the hard copies allowance been used for 2022 budget calculation. We no longer have paperless vouchers.
4. What is the "Income RPZ Related (Permit and Voucher Sales) value made up from?

Response from Councillor Geoff Williamson

I would like to begin by thanking Mr Balding for his questions.

On the first question, the Business Support Officers process enquiries through emails, telephone calls, and also online when validating Resident Permit applications and undertaking database administration. The function includes a range of activities that allow the Resident Permit Zone schemes to operate, which in summary include:

- Providing technical assistance relating to Resident Permit applications and Penalty Charge Notice challenges.
- Issuing visitor vouchers, processing, renewals, vehicle dispensations, managing expired permits, taking payments and making refunds.

The Customer Service function duties involve helping customers walking in to the Council's offices. These customers are generally those that prefer not to use the online system. The team process the permit application end to end on behalf of the customer.

An assessment of overall costs took into account the percentage of officers' time in "Business Support" and "Customer Services" when engaged specifically in delivering this service to residents, and these needed to be included as part of the calculations to achieve full cost recovery.

On the second question, in order to effectively manage Resident Permit Zones, Civil Enforcement Officers patrol daily and record this time on their hand held computers. The data was analysed using the council's parking enforcement IT system and the report verified that 15% of the total patrol time in East Herts was undertaken within the Resident Permit Zone boundaries.

On the third questions, visitor vouchers continue to be available in hardcopy form to supplement the virtual type available online. Some residents prefer to purchase hardcopy versions and the vouchers can be purchased in the council's offices. Whilst the residents' Permits themselves are of the virtual type (hardcopies are no longer issued) the visitor vouchers continue to be offered as an option to residents.

Finally, the income relates to the sale of Residents' permits, Residents' visitor vouchers and Carers' permits.

There was no supplementary question.

Question 2

Robert Beahan to ask Cllr Geoffrey Williamson, the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability

I understand the need for Residents' Parking Zones to be funded by users to ensure a balanced overall budget for the council.

However, the lack of debate and scrutiny on this matter at both the Audit & Governance Committee and the Executive Committee has been very disappointing.

Having written to all members of both committees, I'm still waiting for anyone to respond to me, so my question remains:

Why has East Herts Council created this situation, whereby residents are facing more than a 70% increase in permit cost for 2022? Should a higher increase not have been administered in previous years rather than allowing this huge hole in the finances to develop?

Response from Councillor Geoff Williamson

Previously the Council has subsidised the cost of RPZ permits and only uplifted the fees in line with the council's general fees & charges increases which are applied each year, which has generally been at 2.5%. Following the approval of the Council's new Fees and Charges Policy in December 2021 which includes the need to recover the full cost of services, the RPZ costs uplift is now proposed for implementation as the previous uplifts have not achieved full cost recovery. As a result arguably holders of RPZ permits have benefitted from this situation over the years, and even at the new levels, the

fees are still lower than can be seen elsewhere, for example North Herts where a 12-month permit costs £84.

There was no supplementary question.

Question 3

Gary Jones to ask Cllr Geoff Williamson, the Executive Member for Financial Sustainability

“As a practising Christian I am very concerned about turning Sunday into a day like any other. For many, it is a day of rest and a family day. Today, the Council budget recommendation is to charge for all East Herts carparks on Sundays. My question is about whether that is a sensible course.

The Council papers describe a calculation based on a proportion of weekly revenue. The additional revenue in the next year is only £70,000. There is no reference to costs in that year. What would be the extra costs associated with Sunday parking charges across East Herts for:

- Additional enforcement officers on Sundays 7.30am to 8pm annually
- Changing all existing Monday to Saturday restrictions to include Sundays, so that 30 minute and 1 hour restrictions and other single yellow line restrictions can operate as on weekdays, and only those with RPZ permits can use RPZ designated spaces on Sunday?”

Response from Councillor Geoff Williamson

“Thank you Mr Jones. I will start by saying that we think it is important that we recognise that there are a range of faiths within East Herts, and also those who have no faith. By introducing Sunday

charges we don't believe that we are treating one religious group more or less favourably than any other.

To answer your specific points:

Firstly, there are actually no extra costs associated with Civil Enforcement Officers patrolling the car parks on Sundays, as they currently patrol on Sundays already, in line with the existing parking enforcement framework.

Regarding the potential for vehicle transfer from car parks to the public highway, it is not possible for us to calculate the costs involved in changing the on-street parking controls without knowing the number of roads that might be involved, but East Herts officers will work together with Hertfordshire County Council to keep the situation monitored."

Supplementary question from Gary Jones

Does the Executive Member acknowledge the implications of Sunday charging on residents, churches, workers, businesses and town centres, for example the young family with a Residents Permit, the church volunteer, the weekend worker and the small independent business in the town centre?

Response from Councillor Geoff Williamson

There is a broader point that this allows users of the car parks across the week to be treated equally across the week and those users of car parks on a Sunday have not been singled out specifically.