

Report to the Housing Scrutiny Panel

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Portfolio: Housing – Councillor D Stallan

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Subject: Unauthorised Parking on Housing Estates



Recommendation:

The Panel is asked to consider the outcome of the consultation, finalise its views, and make recommendations to the Housing Portfolio Holder on the following three issues:

- (a) Whether the additional £300,000 available in the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Programme from 2009/2010 be made available to fund further off-street parking schemes matched funded from the General Fund;**
- (b) Whether the maximum permitted amount of grass verge to be removed in order to construct a vehicular crossover be extended beyond the current policy of 6 metres in length; and**
- (c) Whether enforcement action is taken against residents who park their vehicles on grass verges.**

Report

1. The Housing Portfolio Holder has identified problems with parking and increased congestion on housing estates and recommended to the Cabinet that the Housing Scrutiny Panel consider the options to help alleviate the matter. The Scrutiny Panel considered a report on this issue at its meeting on 18 March 2008.
2. Although the Scrutiny Panel reached an initial view on the way forward, both the Scrutiny Panel and the Housing Portfolio Holder agreed that all Members should be consulted on their views

Background

Unauthorised Parking

3. Many of the Council's estates were built during the late 1940s and 1950s and were designed along garden village principles with cul-de-sacs, greens and grass verges. With the subsequent growth in car ownership, residents are experiencing severe parking problems on estates where parking both on and off road is at a premium. In addition, due to the introduction of permit parking, many side roads are becoming further congested (possibly by commuters) particularly in the Debden and Epping areas, with vehicles being forced onto grassed verges.
4. Complaints received by Housing from the public are very much on the increase; these include increased telephone calls, letters and occasionally petitions.
5. The complaints are about two main issues. Firstly, residents are unhappy that more vehicles are being parked on grass verges causing damage to the open green spaces, which are costly to

repair and can be dangerous to pedestrians and children playing. When, in response, enforcement action is taken by the Council, in the form of installing bollards, jockey rails or shrub planting, other residents complain about having nowhere to park with cars being displaced into already heavily congested side streets. Therefore, there is a need to agree a policy on the approach to be taken on unauthorised parking. Secondly, residents complain about the lack of off-street parking and put forward suggestions for schemes that could be constructed where they live.

6. In addition to receiving complaints from the public, Officers receive enquiries from Members. Some Members ask that enforcement action be taken to prevent vehicles from parking on the grassed verges with other Members asking officers not to take action as it will displace vehicles and cause problems in side streets.

7. Furthermore, residents often cross over large areas of grassed verge (in excess of 6 metres) illegally, parking vehicles in their front garden. Housing Management undertake the necessary enforcement action in as many cases as they are able within existing staffing resources.

Off-Street Parking Schemes

8. The Council is currently undertaking consultation exercises on a number of off-street parking schemes, which have been given priority under the agreed scoring system. A report will be submitted to the Cabinet during 2008 setting out the outcome of the consultations with costs and designs of each of the schemes. A copy of the Off-Street Parking Ratings Schedule is attached at Appendix One. It should be noted that when the list was drawn up, permit parking was not in force and therefore has not been taken into account within the scoring, although this is now being assessed.

9. The budget for off-street parking for 2008/2009 is £288,000 which includes amounts carried forward from previous years. Of this amount, £161,000 is Housing Revenue Account (HRA) funding with £127,000 General Fund. There is currently budget provision of £80,000 per annum in future years, with £43,000 funded from the HRA and £37,000 from the General Fund. As off-street parking schemes are very costly, it is anticipated that this year's budget will only fund around three schemes depending upon the costs of designs and re-locating any utilities.

10. At its meeting on 10 March 2008, the Cabinet was due to consider a report on the HRA Five-Year Forecast and agreed that HRA balances be reduced and maintained within the range of £3m to £4m. This results in an additional £300,000 each year being available from 2009/2010 in the Capital Programme, which could be made available to fund further off-street parking schemes. If the additional HRA funding were to be made available for this purpose, then this would have to be match funded by around £300,000 per annum from 2009/2010 from the General Fund from capital receipts which would result in an additional £2.4 million being available over four years from 2009/2010. This could provide around 25 additional schemes.

Vehicular Crossovers – 6 Metre Rule

11. Under the Council's current policy, the maximum permitted amount of grass verge to be removed in order to construct a vehicular crossover to allow residents to park their vehicles/s in their front garden is 6 metres. The 6 metre rule was agreed by the former Housing Committee on 23 March 1999 and re-affirmed by the Cabinet on 25 November 2002 and 10 April 2006. If the 6 metre rule was extended, this would enable, generally, for up to two vehicles to be parked off-road, although this would remove one available space on the street for the public to use on a first come first served basis.

Scrutiny Panel's Initial View

12. Having considered the three issues at its meeting on 18 March 2008, the initial view of the

Scrutiny Panel was as follows:

- That all the available additional HRA funding should be used for off-street parking schemes match funded from the General Fund;
- That the 6 metre rule be extended to 12 metres to enable more residents to be able to park one or more vehicles off road; and
- That all parking enforcement action should be postponed until the first two recommendations take effect.

13. The Tenants and Leaseholders Federation was consulted at its meeting on 13 March 2008. It agreed that all available additional funding should be used for off-street parking schemes. Although it agreed that the 6 metre rule be extended, it felt that residents should be required to use surfacing such as "grass crete" in an attempt to maintain the current green environment. However, officers have concerns about this material being used as in wintery weather grass verges could still become damaged and unsightly. Furthermore, the Federation's view was that enforcement action should be taken with immediate effect to remove vehicles from grass verges.

Member Consultation

14. As explained earlier, both the Scrutiny Panel and the Housing Portfolio Holder agreed that a formal consultation exercise be undertaken with all Members, as this issue affects estates across the District. Only four completed survey forms were received. The result of the survey is attached at Appendix Two. Additional comments received from Members are attached at Appendix Three.

15. The Scrutiny Panel is asked to consider the outcome of the consultation, and formulate its final recommendations to the Cabinet.