

**Minutes of the Environment and Regeneration
Select Committee**

**Wednesday 24th July 2024 at 6.00 pm
in Committee Room 2, The Council House,
Priory Road, Dudley**

Present:

Councillor A Ahmed (Chair)
Councillors C Bayton, D Bevan, K Casey, A Davies, I Kettle, K Khan,
E Lawrence, P Sahota, and A Tromans.

Dudley MBC Officers:

R Cooper (Head of Financial Services), J Deakin (Head of Waste and Fleet Operations), I Grosvenor (Finance Manager), F Mahon (Head of Energy, Sustainability and Climate Change), N McGurk (Director of Environment), R Millard (Senior Financial Accountant) and K Buckle (Democratic Services Officer)

Also in Attendance:

Councillor P Bradley (Deputy Leader Communities, Climate Change and Economic Delivery)
Councillor D Corfield (Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services)

Mr M Richards (Member of the Public by invitation)

Together with 4 members of the public.

1. **Apology for Absence**

An Apology for absence from the meeting was submitted on behalf of Councillor C Eccles.

2. **Appointment of Substitute Members**

It was noted that Councillor A Tromans had been appointed as a substitute Member for Councillor C Eccles for this meeting of the Committee only.

3. **Declarations of Interests**

No Member made a declaration of interest, in accordance with the Members Code of Conduct, in respect of any matter considered at the meeting.

4. **Minutes**

Resolved

That, the minutes of the meetings of the Corporate and Economic Strategy Select Committee held on 6th March 2024, the minutes of the Climate Change Select Committee held on 14th March 2024 and the minutes of the Highways and Environmental Services Select Committee held on 21st March 2024 be approved as a correct record and signed.

5. **Procedure to be followed**

The Chair advised that the procedure to be followed for the meeting would involve the public forum, as outlined on the agenda however he would invite members of the public to address the Committee following the presentation of each item on the agenda following the Members comments, questions and suggestions on those items, with a 30-minute time limit being allocated to the public forum.

The Chair provided assurance to members of the public present that they would be provided with the opportunity to express their views and ask any questions in relation to the items that were open to debate.

6. **Programme of Meetings and Business Items for 2024/25**

The Committee received a report on the programme of meetings and potential items of business for the Committee during 2024/25 and it was noted that any requests for additional items suggested by members, would be considered by the Chair in conjunction with the Lead for Law and Governance.

Councillor P Sahota suggested that the regeneration projects that were taking place throughout the Borough be scrutinised in terms of progress updates, due to arising problems and any funding issues, as many had been managed through a risk matrix and it was essential to request the Director to provide updates prior to the meeting in March 2025 when the Regeneration Strategy and Programme was scheduled to be considered by the Committee.

Councillor C Bayton referred to the consideration of Brookes Bar and Bistro forming part of the review of the ongoing viability of halls and associated catering facilities, including options to operate on a concession basis which was programmed to be considered by the Committee in September 2024 advising of the potential conflicting time scales in relation to the ongoing scrutiny of that item by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Chair confirmed that he would consider the suggestions made and requested Members to email him directly in relation any further suggestions.

Resolved

- (1) That the report of the Lead for Law and Governance on the programme of meetings and business items for 2024/25, be noted.
- (2) That the Lead for Law and Governance, following consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair, be authorised to make all necessary arrangements to enable the Committee to undertake its work during the 2024/25 municipal year.
- (3) That the terms of reference for the Select Committee, as set out in the Appendix to the report submitted, be noted.
- (4) That the suggestion for consideration of the item on the Regeneration and Strategy programme outlined above be considered by the Chair in conjunction with the Director of Regeneration and Enterprise.

- (5) That the consideration of Brookes Bar and Bistro should it form part of the item to be considered on the review of the ongoing viability of halls and associated catering facilities, including options to operate on a concession basis be deferred to a later date if necessary to do so.
 - (6) That the Members of the Committee be requested to email the Chair suggestions in relation to additional items that members wished the Committee to consider as part of the work programme for 2024/25.
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7. **Environment Policy**

The Head of Energy, Sustainability and Climate Change presented the report submitted and in doing so sought approval of the Committee to the Environmental Policy for Dudley Council which would inform future policy directions of the Council in relation to the environmental impacts of delivering the Council's operations.

The Environmental Policy that was appended to the report submitted was referred to which encompassed the work that had been completed during the previous 12-month period, including declaring a climate change emergency and producing the Council's first Climate Change Action Plan, which included the action to produce the Environmental Policy referred to.

The Environmental Policy recognised that the operation of the Council through their services and activities impacted on the local environment and global connections there was the requirement to measure, understand, and to mitigate the impact to reduce it as much as possible, through a regional, national and international level.

The Environmental Policy set out the Council's commitment to the environmental performance and influenced others to do the same, and encouraging others to implement environmental policies.

The number of themes that the Environmental Policy covered were referred to.

The Environmental Policy also encompassed the Council's vision for the Borough forging the future for all 2030, which included seven themes one of which was the environment referencing the vision to have an affordable and attractive environment place to live and the quality of the natural environment.

The benefits of adapting the Environmental Policy were also referred to.

It was advised that once the Environmental Policy once adopted would be made available to the public, communicated to all staff, and provided to bidders via the tender process and any contractors working on site for the authority.

It was noted that an extensive consultation on the Policy had taken place including consideration of the Climate and Sustainability Board.

Arising from the presentation of the report, Members raised questions and Officers responded where appropriate as follows: -

- (a) Councillor K Casey sought reassurance that every Directorate would adhere to the Environmental Policy and requested that in view of the pace of change whether reviewing the policy should take place more frequently than every three years.

In response the Head of Energy, Sustainability and Climate Change stated that in terms of consultation, the Climate and Sustainability Board would carry out separate consultations with the procurement and communications and public affairs section, and whilst it was acknowledged that further work was required to cascade the Policy to all Directorates, assurances were provided that the Directorates would adhere to and comply with the Policy and further work would take place to raise awareness once the Policy had been adopted.

In relation to the review of the Environmental Policy, it was advised that best practices of other Authorities had been considered and the suggested time frame would be for a review of every three years, nevertheless, the Policy could be reviewed more frequently. It was noted, however, that the Climate Action Plan would be reviewed and updated annually and updating the Policy could tie into that reviewing period also.

- (b) Councillor C Bayton thanked the Head of Energy, Sustainability and Climate Change and Councillor P Bradley for involving her in the consultation process, and provided assurance that the Climate Change clause that required completion on corporate reports would be re-inserted into reports from September, 2024, following concerns that had been echoed in relation to the removal of that clause and it was believed that the inclusion of that clause would provide re-assurances moving forward.
- (c) Councillor P Sahota referred to the need for the Director of Environment to champion the Policy and ensure that the other Directorates adhered to it.

- (d) Councillor P Bradley thanked Councillor C Bayton for sharing her knowledge with him and thanked the Head of Energy, Sustainability and Climate Change and her team for conducting work on producing the Environmental Policy. Assurances were provided that Directorates would remain informed in relation to the Policy as it formed part of ensuring the Authority was more sustainable and addressing climate change was fundamental to that sustainability.
- (e) Councillor A Tromans read out a question from a constituent as follows: -

“I believe that there is a very good case for Stourbridge to become a pesticide free town. There is a culture shift towards more nature friendly forms of gardening and a greater understanding of the harms that pesticides and herbicides do to the urban and rural environment. No mixed G or glyphosate that has been classified as a mixture of glyphosate and classified as a probable human carcinogen by the International Agency for Research or Cancer. It was appreciated that the operation operatives do not spray during rainfall to avoid run off contamination. However, glyphosate still causes significant harm, it is highly persistent in soil and kills plant food sources for birds, insects and other wildlife. As rural areas become increasingly contaminated by pesticides after fertilisers and its habitats are destroyed or fragmented wildlife seeks refuge in our towns and cities. According to the State of Nature Report 2023 distributions of pollinator species including bees, hoverflies and moths have decreased by 18% on average, whilst those species providing pest control such as the two spots ladybird had declined by more than a third (34%)”

Councillor A Tromans put the question “would this Council consider phasing out the use of Mixed G or Glyphosate in urban areas”.

In response the Director of Environment reported that approximately previously the Committee considered alternatives, however, no agreement was reached on alternative pesticides, however, the Committee could request a further report to be submitted to revisit the subject. It was acknowledged that alternative products were costly or less efficient and it was suggested that there could be some discrepancies in terms of the data referred to in the request outlined

Councillor A Tromans undertook to forward the question raised by the resident to the Director of Environment in order that a formal response could be formulated.

- (f) Councillor A Davies was pleased that the Environmental Policy included the third bullet point contained therein which encompassed problematic weeds with residents contacting all elected members in relation to weed problems, acknowledging that the Authority had a part to play in the treatment of those weeds referring to the work carried out by the Climate Change Committee which included exploring the different options available. Councillor A Davies explained that other authorities had adopted alternative methods of treatment including Brighton and Hove Authorities, however, those Authorities had to abandon their policy as there were growing concerns from residents on the condition of their areas, including weeds not being removed, growing tall, which made areas unsafe for drivers and pedestrians using alternative methods of treatment.

At this juncture the Chair invited members of the public to speak.

Mr M Richards referred to the fact that a climate emergency had been declared in 2020 and queried how the Committee could effectively act on the climate emergency without a designated Climate Change Committee. Mr M Richards advised that he had concerns regarding the environment, had campaigned for the environmental issues, and he was not convinced in that the subject would be presented to all Council Committees, and that they would have a responsibility for it.

Mr M Richards also expressed concerns regarding the lack of urgency towards the measures taken to deal with the climate emergency.

Further concerns were raised in relation to the length of time between updates in relation to the climate change emergency and a request was made that the work programme be amended, and the Climate Change Action Plan be considered at the next meeting.

In response the Director of Environment stated that the Committee was operating in the same format as the Climate Change Select Committee and was specifically established to scrutinise those recommendations and actions of the previous Committee.

It was agreed that in 2022 that further work to address the Climate Change emergency was required as an adequate response to the climate emergency, which had not been provided, however particularly during the previous 12 months that work had been escalated including Policy and guidance with that work continuing with the Climate Change website, which was regularly updated together with the Climate Change Action Plan.

The Chair also provided assurances that he would ensure that the environmental element was scrutinised, and that the Committee could be more flexible to ensure that that climate change was included within the work programme to encompass Climate Change.

Mr T Weller echoed those concerns raised by Mr Richards concerning the delays in addressing climate problems.

Mr Weller stated that “we are told that Britain is one of the most nature depleted countries in the world, and yet at Merry Hill Shopping Centre where I had my vertical gorilla garden that I had been tending since the 1990’s there were two areas of important land that had been designated for years for housing/residential purposes”.

Mr Weller stated that Daniels Land was a nature reserve between Brierley Hill Health, the Brierley Hill Adult Social Care Centre and Dudley number one canal which was possibly a site of Special Scientific Interest as it could have grey crested newts which had also been identified at Fens Pool.

Mr Weller stated that to seriously consider climate change high plateau land should be considered for housing.

A request was made by Mr Weller for Daniels Land to be redesignated as a nature reserve and not to designate that land for housing and high plateau and to be designated for affordable housing, and for those without cars who could easily access Brierley Hill Town Centre or the Merry Hill Shopping Centre.

Mr Weller referred to the excellent work of Councillor C Bayton whilst serving on the Combined Authority when an inconclusive report was written suggesting that the tram/trains should be in situ on the Dudley main line railway, which should travel between London and Edinburgh, however, had since been converted into a tram line between Wednesbury and Dudley and that there remained the section between Flood Street in Dudley travelling to Stourbridge. There followed a request that to preserve nature, the tram line should not encompass the embankment at Merry Hill destroying more trees and shrubs and to retain the tram on the railway line.

Mr Weller requested Members and Officers to address the Climate Emergency and to improve the environment, ensuring that the tram was installed on a more cost-effective basis, preventing delays in installing the service, to retain the tram on the railway to Stourbridge to connect with the National Railway network or to stop the tram at Flood Street.

Councillor C Bayton expressed concerns relating to the removal of the Climate Change Select Committee, which had been raised as a concern at the full Council meeting in May 2024, whereby the Leader had provided assurances that Climate Change would run through as a theme throughout all Committees. Those present were advised that it would be pertinent to raise climate change issues at all Council Committees.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted on the Environmental Policy, be noted.
- (2) That the Environmental Policy appended to the report submitted, be approved.
- (3) That the Director of Environment be requested to forward a formal response to the question raised by Councillor A Tromans at the meeting.

8. Medium Term Financial Strategy – Presentation on the Dudley Borough Parking Strategy 2024-2030

Members considered a joint report of the Chief Executive, Director of Finance and Legal Services and Director of Environment on the Medium-Term Financial Strategy as approved by the Cabinet on 15th July, 2024 with emphasis on proposals set out in paragraphs 9 and 12 and Appendix F to the report submitted.

The Director of Environment referred to the presentation relating to the Dudley Borough Parking Strategy 2024-2030 reporting that regeneration projects were continuing and referred to the increasing number of vehicles on the Borough's roads.

It was advised that the aim of the new strategy was to support the regeneration of the local economy with a focus on keeping the road network, particularly in central areas in a good state of repair, traffic free, free from congestion and the detrimental effects of traffic and pollution.

It was noted that it was essential to have the correct balance of demand for parking and the growing population with the main driver and keeping the traffic flowing which was key.

It was advised that the primary objective was to encourage motorists to park outside town centres or use other forms of transport, which would restrict the number of vehicles entering the town centres and help towards increasing the number of spaces available for those who need them. It would also impact positively on climate change reducing pollution, providing cleaner air for those who wished to visit town centres.

It was noted that the maintenance on the Borough's 57 car parks had not kept pace with maintenance requirements such as surfacing, lining, signage, drainage, boundaries, green assets and cleaning and investment was needed together with further reviews being conducted.

It was accepted that the implementation of a strategy would take time, however, the strategy would provide clear aims and goals which would be measured over time.

The Strategy contained two phases for off street parking, which involved the Borough's car parks and on-street parking which would include parking on the road in bays. The ideal solution would be to introduce revised parking charges off streets, and then implement the wider strategy.

It was stated that to make any changes and to implement the fees and charges there would be a legal process to be followed, that would be carried out by consultation, over a three-month time period. Traffic Regulation Orders (TRO's) would also need to be developed and professional services would be required to support that area of work.

The infrastructure, which included pay and display machines and poles for displaying signs, would need to be procured and financed. Any income obtained would need to be reinvested back into the road network.

It was advised that any Strategy that was developed would support the enforcement efficiency.

It was noted that the Authority had tendered and awarded a contract to an enforcement company.

There was a need to investigate developing parking solutions with local businesses, the development of town centres, examining the needs for footfall, and whether there was the need for disabled, taxi and loading bays together with consideration of accessibility and whether people were using those bays for the correct reason.

Diagrams of the car parks within various areas were displayed at the meeting to Members, together with a diagram of the areas of TRO's which included double yellow lines and parking bays. Details of indicative zones in terms of on-street car parking were also noted.

It was noted that a strategic review of parking had been undertaken utilising specialists, with parking assets being reviewed including parking that were currently chargeable, free parking that was underutilised and unrecognisable as car parking and could be viewed as a disposable option.

The review of the charging strategy was aligned to the local, the West Midlands and the National Transport Policy. The civil parking enforcement contract would commence on 1st October 2024.

Preferred models for the Strategy had been examined and prepared alongside finance colleagues, the preferred phase in methodology over the period of the strategy, with a view to develop the parking strategy for implementation in October 2024. As part of gathering information, obtaining data, and examining the model, benchmarking had been conducted on other Authorities and their off street car parking charges and it was noted that Dudley was the only Authority that currently provided two free hours of car parking.

The Director of Environment outlined the details of Phase 1, the off street car parking model and details of the charging structure together with the income that that could be generated over the current and following financial year. The Phase 1 model assumptions were outlined and included the assumption that there would be a 50% decrease in tickets that were previously free, a 40% decrease in three, four or all-day tariffs due to price increases. For clarification it was stated that the short stay car parks would offer one, three to four hours parking and long stay would offer one, two, three hours and all-day parking.

It was advised that season tickets would be calculated based on the day rate and current working patterns and that the modelling was based on current pay and display car parks only excluding free car parks.

The proposal was to re-introduce charges for one and two hours and implement revised tariffs for current pay and display car parking from 1st October 2024. and the enforcement contract was to commence on the same date, which would support the Strategy. The development work would commence on Phase 2, which included monitoring the impacts of the charge infrastructure, understanding people's behaviour, any concerns relating therefrom, ensuring that people were utilising car parks, removing cars from streets which caused hazards, pollution and posed a danger with continued monitoring taking place.

It was noted that each Township would be revised based on zone principals and the local situation would focus on outcomes and impacts across the different zones and townships. Consultations would then commence on TRO changes and installation of infrastructure for on street parking, ensuring that data was obtained which supported the requirement

and need to park on streets. Data would also be considered on where people were parking which was inconsiderate, inappropriate, and causing hazards in order to implement TRO packages within those areas.

Following this, there would be the introduction of charges on current free car parks alongside on street charges, which would encompass capturing data on whether people were utilising those free car parks taking longer walking journeys, or whether those free car parks were not being utilised and if so other options would be considered, including the possibility of disposal, with a view to present the future car parking estate across two years.

The work that would take place in the background included raising orders, reconfiguring charges on the pay and display machines and the SWIFT parking app.

It was reported that there was the aim to submit proposals to the Cabinet and full Council in August 2024 with the need to display notices for 28 days prior to the proposals being implemented. Information would be advertised on the Council's website together with a press release that would be issued to ensure that the right information was in the public domain.

The full Strategy at-a-glance general principals as included in the presentation submitted were referred to.

The Phase 2 indicative implementation and planning would include on street parking, taking areas such as Dudley, Halesowen and Brierley Hill within 2025 through to 2026. It was intended to re-evaluate the impact to inform the future strategy in 2028.

Arising from the presentation and the report submitted, Members asked questions and made comments and suggestions and the Director of Environment responded where appropriate as follows: -

- (a) Councillor A Davies referred to the proposal particularly for the one-hour fee of £2.00 which placed Dudley at a higher starting point compared to all of the other authorities who Dudley were benchmarked against, and raised concerns in relation to the detrimental effect that may have on town centres including the businesses in particular, Amblecote and Brierley Hill which included adding a £2.00 fee onto a shopping bill.

In relation to Phase 2, Councillor A Davies commented that each area would differ, however, there were many areas, within his Ward in particular terraced houses with no parking other than on street, forcing residents to pay to park outside their homes.

In response the Director of Environment stated that areas had not been identified for on street car parking as there was the need to examine the data following the implementation of Phase 1, and any proposals for on street parking or TRO's would be consulted upon to consider residents' views ensuring that parking was available.

It was accepted that other authorities utilised a tiered approach to car parking fees, however Dudley was very specific and had challenges within the town centre with multiples of commercial activity and that was the reason for the pricing of £2.00 for one hour.

Data had been obtained to advise that people had navigated away from town centres and were utilising retail parks and it was not believed that the Strategy would have a detrimental effect upon town centres, as people would park for a specific purpose in specific areas.

Councillor A Davies referred to the need to monitor the situation as he was of the view that the tariff would impact upon people purchasing products in town centres, and it was suggested that there be a separate charging bracket for small specific locations whereby charging could be slightly lower and shorter stay car parks to ensure markets and sole traders do not suffer as a result of the Strategy.

- (b) Councillor E Lawrence raised a question in relation to varying the charges for different car parks, stating that the £2.00 charge was high and suggested varying the charges within local areas such as Kingswinford, and suggested tiering for a lessor amount of time.

Assurance was requested that that the income generated be re-invested back into the car parks.

Further Assurances were requested for extensive consultation be undertaken with local Councillors in relation to the proposals for on street parking, in particular concerns raised in relation to local residents and imposing on street parking in residential areas.

In response the Director of Environment provided assurances that consultations would take place and data from residents and local Councillors was imperative to inform the proposals.

In terms of investment, it was unrealistic to expect re-investment to take place immediately following the implementation of Phase 1 of the Strategy, and the Director made a request for the specific details in relation to those car parks that required immediate re-surfacing

to be referred to him following the meeting. Implementing a long-term plan for Dudley with investment and the Council's financial stability were key aspects of the Strategy.

- (c) Councillor C Bayton appreciated the need for a Strategy and the requirement for it to feed back into the local transport plan and referred to the main reason for the Strategy to be implemented in view of the financial position of the Council.

Councillor C Bayton referred to the impact of on street car parking from Russells Hall Hospital and the impact of residential parking in Town Centres.

It was stated that any behavioural changes to reduce car usage relied upon good quality public transport, and although improvements in the way public transport was delivered in the region were taking place, it would take time before the impact of that was experienced.

Councillor C Bayton raised a question in relation to the cost of the infrastructure for the car parks and the on street car parking to ascertain at which stage those costs would be re-couped by the car parking charges.

In relation to Leisure Centres, Councillor C Bayton raised concerns, in relation to the high usage of the Duncan Edwards Centre, the cost implications on memberships with the increase in car parking fees, and the possibility of those members choosing to attend private leisure centres with free parking. There was a suggestion that those car parks that were directly attached or within proximity to leisure centres provided financial provision for parking fees.

In response the Director of Environment stated that the Parking Strategy would address issues in relation to parking at Russells Hall Hospital and surrounding areas. It was agreed that there was a financial driver with implementing the Strategy, however, the Strategy and vision was required for Dudley, whilst it was acknowledged that there would be challenges.

It was advised that the cost of the Infrastructure for Phase 2 would be calculated upon the basis of where the need was for on street car parking with work commencing once the formal decision had been made and that information would be shared with Members and consulted upon.

In relation to Leisure Centres, it was stated that the Strategy would constantly be reviewed by examining data and there was the ambition for the public to utilise more forms of public transport.

Councillor C Bayton requested that TRO's be implemented on a more expedient basis as a TRO within her Ward had taken two years to implement, and a more responsive action was required.

Councillor C Bayton referred to an unintended consequence in relation to car parking charges affecting membership figures at the Leisure Centres, which may impact on the Council's income.

- (d) The Chair raised an issue in relation to the lack of data on the costings for the infrastructure in terms of Phase 1 and the car parks. In response it was stated that in terms of the car parks it was approximately £3,000 for implementing those changes to charges.
- (e) Councillor K Casey raised questions in relation to the reduction in parking tickets and requested for information on the financial detail in relation to that reduction, in particular the 40% reduction referred to in the presentation submitted.

In terms of the proportion of monies raised from the new charges, Councillor K Casey queried what proportion would be ring fenced for improvements to car parks.

The Director of Environment stated that figures in relation to maintenance could not be provided, however, there was a clear aspiration that maintenance should commence, and it was important that the income generated should contribute towards the Council's overall financial position.

Councillor K Casey raised concerns in terms of the damage that may occur to the local economy prior to that impact being reviewed.

In response to a question from Councillor K Casey in relation to the work that had been conducted with local businesses in major town centres, to investigate parking solutions alongside businesses, it was stated that those solutions would be investigated in relation to Phase 2 – on street car parking and introducing parking charges on car parks had not affected the local economy, and there was the need to engage in separate conversations in relation to the town centre economy regarding what improvements could be made in view of members of the public migrating to retail parks including Merry Hill Shopping Centre.

The Director of Environment referred to the proposal which had focused on the first three years of the Strategy and outlined the six-year Strategy. It was noted within years four, five and six of the Strategy there would be a focus on conversations with businesses who may be able to provide discounts and incentives to encourage footfall into town centres.

It was reiterated that there was not the belief that the local economy was driven through parking.

Councillor K Casey emphasised the requirement to consult with businesses sooner, and felt it was key for engagement and to investigate potential solutions should be conducted now as footfall may be lost in two- or three-years' time.

The Director of Environment reiterated that a 28-day consultation would take place as part of the proposals, whether that be with businesses or residents.

It was noted that in relation to on street car parking there would be significant consultation with Members, business owners and local residents to ensure that the package was suitable for everyone whilst acknowledging that not everyone would be favourable to the proposals.

Councillor K Casey raised concerns in relation to smaller areas that would struggle with the proposals, in particular on street parking, given the quality of public transport, and requested information on that improvements including what work had been ongoing with partners to satisfy those improvements.

The Director of Environment stated that there was a need to increase demand, which would offer more benefits for the authority in terms of public health and wellbeing, with the current road network not being suitable due to the level of parking on roads. The overall objective and aim would be to ensure that the public would park in car parks and not on roads which, would result in areas being more suitable for cyclists and a reduction in public travel journeys resulting from bus lanes being introduced which all formed part of the wider strategy.

The Head of Financial Services advised that the 40% reduction in parking tickets for three and four hours and all day tickets equated to a £150,000 reduction in revenue for a full year.

In response to a further question from Councillor K Casey in relation to the cost of £3,000 to change the pricing on car parking machines, the Head of Finance stated that this would include a software update to the relevant supplier and a change in tariff boards

- (f) Councillor P Sahota agreed that the Strategy was long overdue, whilst acknowledging the current cost pressures for residents and businesses in the current financial climate, however, concerns were raised in relation to the price increases being proposed particularly in relation to £2.00 charge for one hour in comparison with other Authorities benchmarking figures and queried whether the pricing structure had been investigated by a specialist in that area.

Councillor P Sahota suggested that the pricing should be tiered in view of the strategic, local and town centres with the differing shopping needs, which would need to be addressed.

A request was made in relation to the plan to mitigate parking in residential areas, which would result from a higher charging strategy as there were no residential parking permits within Dudley.

Councillor P Sahota echoed the concerns of Members in relation to leisure centres and the need to focus on the proposal to deduct the parking fee from the membership fee.

It was further suggested that Dudley link with the Town Board who had established three thematic groups investigating the development of regeneration projects, and it was noted that each of the groups had funding streams that could be utilised together with Town Plan funding.

The Director of Environment stated that in terms of reviewing the tariffs, he was more than willing to further examine those tariffs that were contained in proposals submitted. It was advised that there were no specialists that worked within the area referred to.

It was noted that the introduction of two hours free car parking was approximately five years ago and prior to the pandemic, parking was chargeable, and although the pandemic had a significant impact on the economy the previous charges had not.

Parking Permits may well be an option when considering TRO's with other options that may be available. It was emphasised that this was a strategy and not a parking solution, therefore, there was the need to investigate in terms of areas whether the provision of chargeable bays and permitted areas were suitable.

The comments in relation to Leisure Centres were accepted.

Work continued with regeneration colleagues together with different boards daily to discuss regenerating areas, providing opportunities for the Authority and the possibility of re-investing monies back into the community and specific areas.

The Director of the Environment confirmed that in considering the tiering suggestion that it would be difficult in terms of the proposals before the Committee at this meeting, however, once investigations had commenced in relation to Phase 2 the data for local areas and local town centres adjacent to those areas would be analysed , and it was believed that during the six years of the strategy, the tiered approach may well be adopted.

- (g) Councillor D Bevan echoed many of the comments made by Members suggesting that a thirty-minute option would be valuable, and queried whether there would be a grace period following that option prior to a parking ticket being issued.

In response the Director of Environment stated that it was believed there was a 15-minute grace period, however, that had previously been exploited, therefore, in view of new enforcement contract that 15-minute period would be vigorously enforced by officers.

Councillor D Bevan requested confirmation of how useful the Borough wide Parking Survey was and how was that fed into the Strategy.

In relation to the Phase 2, Councillor D Bevan referred to the indicative implementation planning slide and commented that there was no reference to the evaluation until year three, and that there was a need to be proactive and not reactive and to adapt quickly as opposed to waiting until year three if the Strategy was not working.

The Director of Environment stated that the Strategy would constantly be evaluated which would include assessing the impact of the implementation of the proposals on the next phases and this would also involve a dedicated team. The aim was that TRO's were delivered within the same year.

It was noted that the Borough Wide Parking Survey had been very useful, and it informed the Authority of figures and data regarding the usage of car parks and the income from that usage, however, the data in relation to moving cars throughout the day from non-paying

spaces was not available. External consultants also supported that review, as the focus was also on the surrounding areas to car parks and data on the amount of people who were not utilising car parks.

It was emphasised for the need of the baseline to build upon, which would need investment as the requirement was to provide a far better service than it currently was with the aim to constantly improve car parking.

- (h) Councillor A Tromans expressed his appreciation for the long-term strategic thinking surrounding the provision of the Strategy proposals.

Councillor A Tromans suggested that the Committee examine resident parking schemes at a future meeting particularly in relation to parking moving to on street as a result of the fees increasing in car parks.

In response to a question in relation to card payments, the Director of Environment stated that all machines would accept card payments with all machines being updated during the final phase last year. There was also the option to utilise the SWIFT app.

It was noted that vigorous enforcement would assist with resident permit schemes or differing schemes for residents and that enforcement was imperative to ensure the public abide to those schemes.

- (i) Councillor I Kettle referred to his own personal experiences with a parking machine in Stourbridge, and issues with private parking companies.

It was suggested that a firm commitment could not be provided that income from parking fees would be re-invested back into the road network as that would be termed as discretionary spending.

Councillor I Kettle requested that on street parking options should include the examination of all 24 Wards.

Councillor I Kettle raised further concerns regarding the proposals impact on the economy particularly in Town Centres together with the financial impact on those parking for employment reasons within those areas.

It was commented that there was the need to put car parks into good repair prior to increasing charges was expressed and the need to minimise congestion and improve commuting times for those who were economically active.

Councillor I Kettle referred to the contribution of the Local Authority to subsidise public transport, together with the transport budget of the Combined Authority.

The Director of Environment confirmed that all current chargeable car parks were included within the proposals.

- (j) Councillor K Khan expressed his concerns on the devastating impact the proposals contained within the Strategy would have on local businesses and requested to reduce the fee of £2.00 per hour to £1.00 per hour over a trial period.

A further request was made for the exact addresses of the proposed parking within the Cradley area, and it was confirmed that details of all the current chargeable car parks would be circulated to Members.

- (i) Councillor A Davies suggested that a higher revenue could be obtained from a lower rate for a one-hour parking charge and that that the revenue could further decrease should the public utilise cheaper tariffed privately owned car parks within Town Centres and local areas.

Councillor A Davies further suggested that a recommendation be that the Cabinet request Officers to revisit the pricing structure taking into account the concerns raised by Members outlined above.

The Chair invited members of the public to speak.

Mr M Richards referred to the substantial improvements required to public transport, to prevent the increase in online shopping and the public shopping at retail parks, which would impact on the environment further.

Mr M Richards requested that an evaluation take place on the Strategy's effects on climate change given the possibility of dispersing cars into other areas.

A Member of the public raised concerns in relation to the Strategy having a detrimental effect on the approach roads to Dudley with the public making earlier journeys to find on road free parking spaces which was currently causing problems in Hall Street.

There followed a question on whether the enforcement period would be on a 24-hour basis as that may affect events at the Dudley Town Hall or on the nighttime economy within Dudley.

The Director of Environment confirmed that enforcement would continue to operate on the current model including weekends and evenings.

The Chair thanked Members, Officers and Members of the public for their contributions to the meeting.

Resolved

- (1) That the Medium-Term Financial Strategy and the presentation on the Parking Strategy and as reported on at the meeting, be noted.
- (2) That the Director of Environment be requested to submit a report to a future meeting of the Committee on resident parking particularly in relation to parking moving to on-street parking as a result of the fees increasing in car parks.
- (3) That the Director of Environment be requested to forward to Members the exact addresses of the chargeable car parks within the Borough.
- (4) That the Cabinet be recommended to re-consider the following: -
 - (a) The Off Street (car Park) proposed charging as contained in the presentation submitted together with the effect on the Authority's revenue should alternative private parking be available at lower tariffs.
 - (b) The proposal to increase the one-hour parking fee to £2.00, considering the comments made by Members above.
 - (b) Issues surrounding Leisure Centre car parks, the impact on any memberships, a reduction in the Authority's revenue and the impact on those local residential estates within proximity should vehicles become displaced to those residential areas.

- (c) To further investigate the effect of displacement of vehicles onto residential areas throughout the Borough.
 - (d) That extensive public consultation to include that with local businesses be commenced on Phase 1 of the Parking Strategy 2024-2030 as soon as is practicably possible.
 - (e) To examine the possibility of a tiered approach to proposed charging in smaller local shopping areas.
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9. **Questions Under Council Procedure Rule 11.8**

There were no questions to the Chair pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 11.8.

The meeting ended at 8.30pm

CHAIR