

TITLE	Referral from Council – Petition: Car Parking Charges
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	The Executive on Thursday, 24 November 2022
WARD	None Specific
LEAD OFFICER	Assistant Director Governance
LEAD MEMBER	Executive Member for Active Travel, Transport & Highways – Councillor Paul Fishwick

PURPOSE OF REPORT (INC STRATEGIC OUTCOMES)

A referral has been made to the Executive by the Council at their meeting on 17 November 2022.

A Motion in the following terms proposed by Councillor Pauline Jorgensen was agreed at the Council meeting on 17 November 2022:

‘I would like to propose that this petition is sent back to the Executive and that the Executive consider the feedback from residents, the feedback from businesses and also options and the impact assessment of increasing the charges and what that will actually do to revenue in order to come up with a more thought through proposal.’

The Executive is asked to consider what further action it wishes to take, if any, with regards to this referral.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Executive:-

- i) agree that no further action is needed in respect of the referral
- ii) agree to take some actions in respect of the referral
- iii) agree to support the proposed actions set out in the referral in full.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Chief Financial Officer’s statement relating to the petition is as follows:-

“The Council must act urgently to address its in year forecast overspend and set a balanced budget for next year. Options to reduce expenditure are constrained by the fact that approximately 80% of Council services are statutory. The 2023/24 budget presented to Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee shows a funding gap of just over £4m. This figure already takes into account cost reductions and income generating options across all Council Services, including the assumed increase in car parking charges in 2022/23. Avoiding the opportunity to generate additional income from car parking will increase the calculated budget gap for next year to in the region of £4.6m. The Council will be required to approve a balanced budget for 2023/24 when it meets in February 2023.”

The petition contained in excess of 1,500 signatures which is the threshold to trigger a debate at Council and as a result was considered by Council on 17 November 2022, a Motion was proposed by Councillor Keith Baker in the following terms:

‘From January 2023 Wokingham Borough Council will double most car parking charges. It will also start charging for parking on Sundays, Bank Holidays and in the evenings up to 10pm. We call on the Council to drop these punitive increases for the following reasons:

- Residents face significant cost increases in every part of their lives due to the Cost of Living crisis. It is wrong to raise charges at this time.
- Retailers in our town centre are recovering from the effects of Covid. They do not need their trade damaged by punitive car parking charges.
- It is in the interests of every resident that we have a vibrant and active town centre which draws people to visit. These charges will be a disincentive to visiting your local town and damaging to the local economy.’

Upon being put to the vote, this Motion was **not supported** by Council.

A further Motion was proposed by Councillor Pauline Jorgensen, the full wording is provided below:

‘A lot of businesses have said very clearly why this particular policy as it stands is a problem to them, they have also during the Scrutiny meeting gave some sensible mitigations against some of the worst impacts.

Residents have said very clearly why it’s a problem and why it shouldn’t be done. Also the impact of the changes obviously were not taken into account. Even at Scrutiny we found that the assumptions were that there would be no change in revenue, despite the swingeing increases in charges.

I would like to propose that this petition is sent back to the Executive and that the Executive consider the feedback from residents, the feedback from businesses and also options and the impact assessment of increasing the charges and what that will actually do to revenue in order to come up with a more thought through proposal.’

Upon being put to the vote, the Motion was **supported** by Council.

The Executive is asked to consider what further action it wishes to take, if any, with regards to this referral. The following courses of action could be considered by the Executive: That the Executive:

- i) agree that no further action is needed in respect of the referral
- ii) agree to take some actions in respect of the referral
- iii) agree to support the proposed actions set out in the referral in full.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council faces severe funding pressures, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. It is therefore imperative that Council resources are focused on the vulnerable and on its highest priorities.

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	See other financial information below	-	-
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	See other financial information below	-	-
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	See other financial information below	-	-

Other Financial Information

The Chief Financial Officer's statement relating to the petition is as follows:-

"The Council must act urgently to address its in year forecast overspend and set a balanced budget for next year. Options to reduce expenditure are constrained by the fact that approximately 80% of Council services are statutory. The 2023/24 budget presented to Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee shows a funding gap of just over £4m. This figure already takes into account cost reductions and income generating options across all Council Services, including the assumed increase in car parking charges in 2022/23. Avoiding the opportunity to generate additional income from car parking will increase the calculated budget gap for next year to in the region of £4.6m. The Council will be required to approve a balanced budget for 2023/24 when in meets in February 2023."

Stakeholder Considerations and Consultation

Considered as part of Executive report on 29 September 2022

Public Sector Equality Duty

Considered as part of Executive report on 29 September 2022

Climate Emergency – This Council has declared a climate emergency and is committed to playing as full a role as possible – leading by example as well as by exhortation – in achieving a carbon neutral Wokingham Borough by 2030

Considered as part of Executive report on 29 September 2022

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2

Not applicable

List of Background Papers

None

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Service Governance

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