

Combined Authority Mayoral Car Parking Subsidy
Comments of Overview & Scrutiny Panel (Performance & Growth)

- 1.1 The Overview & Scrutiny (Performance & Growth) Panel discussed the report at its meeting on 1st July 2026.
- 1.2 Councillor Ferguson sought clarification on whether any assessment had been undertaken to determine both the beneficiaries of the proposal and those who would bear its cost. He expressed concern that the Organisation could be perceived as endorsing, or partially funding, a campaign commitment, with the associated costs ultimately being met through council tax contributions, including by residents who may derive no direct benefit from the proposal.
- 1.3 The Panel was reminded that the decision to allocate funding in this manner was a matter for the Mayor, who had chosen to utilise his budget accordingly. It was noted that the budget from which the funding was drawn was funded by contributions from across Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.
- 1.4 Councillor Ascroft requested further information regarding the financial implications of the proposal. She sought clarification on whether any additional or indirect costs would be incurred, including costs associated with updating parking payment infrastructure. She also enquired about any costs that might arise upon the conclusion or withdrawal of the Scheme, and requested confirmation of the duration for which the funding would be available.

In addition, Councillor Ascroft requested sight of the supporting business case, including evidence relating to anticipated impacts on town centre footfall. She emphasised the importance of establishing baseline data and projected outcomes, noting that it would otherwise be difficult to assess the economic success of the Scheme or determine the impact of any additional funding provided.

- 1.5 The Panel was advised that, as this was a Mayoral Scheme, responsibility for undertaking the associated research and developing the supporting evidence base rested with the Mayor. It was noted that the Council's role was limited to its inclusion within the Scheme as a provider of car parking facilities and that undertaking such research did not fall within the Council's remit. The Panel also noted that the Scheme was intended to continue throughout the period of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).
- 1.6 Their attention was drawn to section 8:2:5 of the report which included a breakdown of the costs requested by the Member.

- 1.7 Councillor Tomlinson noted that the Mayor's manifesto had indicated that funding would be made available to support the implementation of a free car parking scheme. He sought clarification on the process by which the various options had been considered and evaluated, and how the proposal had developed from the Mayor's initial approach to the recommended Scheme now before the Panel.
- 1.8 The Panel was advised that no initial budget envelope had been proposed for the Council. Following early discussions, the Organisation considered the comments received and subsequently provided indicative costings to the Combined Authority to support the further development and refinement of the proposal. Officers have highlighted the associated financial implications to ensure that the Combined Authority is fully aware of the potential budgetary impact of the option under consideration.
- 1.9 Councillor Tomlinson went on to ask for confirmation that the Mayor is the one who asked for the 4pm to 6pm scheme as set out in the main report which was confirmed to the Panel that yes this was correct.
- 1.10 Councillor Tomlinson expressed concern regarding the latest letter from the Mayor, which had been circulated to the Panel as a supplementary document. He commented that the correspondence appeared to follow a decision that had already been made, leading to some uncertainty as to its purpose and timing.
- 1.11 The Panel was advised that the proposal before them represented the original option for consideration. It was noted that the Mayor had subsequently requested that the Council consider the provision of free parking; however, any decision on this matter would be for the Council to determine. The Panel was further informed that the Chief Executive had been asked to consider the inclusion of an additional hour within the proposal.

Officers confirmed that the principal report before the Panel was the proposal currently open for consideration. It was also highlighted that the alternative option would have financial implications, unlike the main proposal, and would therefore require a budget amendment to be approved by Full Council.

- 1.12 Councillor Ferguson noted that the scheme would remain cost neutral only if residents' parking behaviours remained unchanged. He sought clarification on the measures and performance indicators that would be used to assess the success of the scheme and monitor any changes in parking patterns.

- 1.13 The Panel was advised that the scheme would be monitored through the Council's budget management processes. Members were informed that the recommendations included a safeguard which would delegate authority to reverse the scheme if necessary. It was further noted that a contingency provision had been incorporated within the budget. Officers confirmed that both income levels and any changes in user behaviour would be monitored to assess the ongoing impact of the scheme.
- 1.14 Councillors Ferguson and Ioannides stated that they did not support the proposed additional hours, citing concerns regarding the financial risks and potential budgetary implications associated with the extension.
- 1.15 Councillor Martin referred to the criteria previously submitted by the Council to the Mayor for consideration and highlighted the emphasis placed on supporting the evening economy, which aligns with the Council's Economic Strategy. He noted that this objective is not explicitly referenced within the current Corporate Plan. Councillor Martin further observed that Council car parks are already free of charge after 6.00 pm and suggested that this existing arrangement more closely supports the evening economy.
- 1.16 The Chair queried whether, if Council car parks were already operating at or near capacity until 6.00 pm, the proposal might encourage increased footfall and activity within the town centres during the period after 6.00 pm.
- 1.17 Councillor Kerr commented that the available data indicated that car park utilisation falls after 4.00 pm..
- 1.18 Councillor Gardener queried whether the proposed scheme could be terminated early should it become apparent that residents were using the car parks primarily because of the free parking offer. He also sought clarification on whether any costs or financial penalties would be associated with ending the arrangement before its intended completion date.
- 1.19 The Panel was advised that the Council had not yet been provided with the Grant Funding Agreement and was therefore unable to confirm whether any penalties or costs would be incurred in the event of early termination. Officers noted, however, that any such obligations would be carefully considered and taken into account as part of the Council's decision-making process. In response, Councillor Gardener advised the Grant Funding Agreement should be seen before a decision is made.
- 1.20 Councillor Ferguson reiterated the importance of ensuring that the Council was clear regarding the precise nature of the proposal being adopted, including

where responsibility and ownership for the scheme would ultimately rest. Attention was drawn to point 2.3 of the report by Councillor Tomlinson

- 1.21 Officers confirmed that the proposal under consideration formed part of a scheme led by the Mayor. It was further clarified that, should the option to introduce an additional free parking hour be pursued, this would require approval by Full Council due to the associated financial implications. It was noted that this is the Mayor's scheme, not Officers of this Council.
- 1.22 In response to a question from Councillor Tomlinson, it was confirmed that Members had previously indicated that any such scheme should be applied across multiple areas within the district, rather than being limited to St Neots as originally proposed by the Mayor.
- 1.23 Councillor Martin put forward a motion for an additional Recommendation for Cabinet to not go ahead as planned. This motion was seconded by Councillor Tomlinson.
- 1.24 Councillor Tobias commented that he had not seen any evidence demonstrating that the scheme would deliver tangible benefits for residents. He therefore requested clarification on the research undertaken and the evidence base used to support the proposal.
- 1.25 The Panel hears the new Recommendation and a vote is called.

6 Members are For, 0 Against and 5 Abstainers.

Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for Cabinet to make a decision upon the recommendations within the report, and additionally, the Panel request that the Cabinet consider adding the following recommendation to their report;

- 1) That we do not go ahead as currently planned
- 2) That we write to the Mayor, explaining that we will wait for the Parking Strategy and determine what the best option is from this.
- 3) Any future recommendation that comes forward to the Panel does not include a delegation to vary or cease the Scheme to Officers. Any variation or cessation of the Scheme should come through the Democratic cycle and be a decision for elected Councillors not Officers.

1.26 Councillor Tobias put forward a motion for an additional Recommendation for further details around costing from the Mayor. This motion was seconded by Councillor Ioannides.

1.27 The Panel hears the new Recommendation and a vote is called.

3 Members are For, 0 Against and 8 Abstainers.

Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for Cabinet to make a decision upon the recommendations within the report, and additionally, the Panel request that the Cabinet consider adding the following recommendation to their report;

- 1) That further details of full costings and the business case be shared as to who the parking proposal funding will actually benefit and how.

1.28 Following the discussion, the Panel were informed that their comments would be added to the Cabinet report in order for an informed decision to be made on the report recommendations.