

Cabinet Meeting 14th July 2026

Mayoral Car Parking Offer Minutes

A report by the Head of Economy, Regeneration & Housing Delivery was submitted (a copy of which is appended to the Minute Book) providing details of the grant proposal made to the Council by the Mayor of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA).

The Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste & Street Scene, Councillor Kerr introduced the report and made reference to the comments of the Overview & Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) Panel, who had put forward 2 recommendations in relation to the report.

In response to questions from the Cabinet regarding the recommendation from the Overview & Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) Panel to wait for the Car Parking Strategy before making a decision, the Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste & Street Scene, Councillor Kerr advised that the consequence of doing so could lead to the Mayor withdrawing the offer.

In discussing the report, the Cabinet discussed the following points;

- that there was no such thing as 'free parking', and the bill would not be paid by those taking advantage of the free 2 hours. It was a universal subsidy paid for by all residents to benefit the few who happened to use car parks;
- from a financial perspective it would be prudent to support the proposal. Any opportunity to help invest and put money into the Council's market towns should not be declined;
- it was a difficult decision as there were better ways of spending the money, however it was offered to the Council packaged in a certain way, and residents may be confused if the Council refused money that was giving them free parking;
- the Mayor had made the political decision to prioritise subsidising car parking over sustainable transport. There was scepticism about free parking being advertised as a silver bullet for high street regeneration, though reference was again made to the fact that there was no such thing as 'free parking'. However, the grant proposal was a beneficial option for residents;
- reference was made to the CPCA reducing bus services across the region and the impact that would have on residents, and the money might have been better spent on such services. There was frustration that those using the car parks would not pay for their parking, it would be everyone else. However, there was reluctant support for the proposal;
- although the proposal may help some residents, shops and the bottom line of the Council, it was important to note that the money would come from the taxpayer and was being used in a specific way to support what was being called 'free parking', at the political choice of the Mayor. Furthermore, evidence also showed that free parking did not clearly bring more footfall into the town and did not help shops earn more money.
- the proposal was being labelled as a trial, which was not the case as the Council would cease to exist at the end of the period proposed, and it was not for the Council or the Mayor to decide what Parking looked like after May 2028;
- the recommendation from the Overview & Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) Panel requesting the Business Case was welcomed;
- there were other services the Mayor could preferably have used the money for, such as buses, bus shelters, train stations, light rail or road improvements;

- there was concern whether this was the right use of public money and whether it genuinely served the residents who needed help the most. The report acknowledged there was no evidence base to suggest a direct causal link between free parking and increased local retail spend or growth in the night-time economy;
- concern was also raised around the threat to bus routes which would impact those who did not own a car and who would not benefit from free parking; the residents that most needed the Council's help were not those driving in to town centres after 4pm;
- the Cabinet was keen that the Mayor listened to the discussion of the meeting and of the Overview & Scrutiny (Performance and Growth) Panel meeting; and
- the Mayor had reached out earlier in the day regarding an ongoing conversation about the proposal, but there were no details around what that may include.

In response to a question from the Cabinet, the Deputy Chief Executive and Corporate Director – Place advised that in respect of any clawback arrangements, that had not been expressed to date, however the Council regularly entered grant agreements and Officers would approach such matters cautiously and would not put a grant agreement in place if it was going to put the Council at undue risk from those clawback arrangements. He also clarified that in terms of recommendations 1, 2 and 3 which related to agreeing the receipt of the funding, those delegations already existed with Officers to do that, and what was being sought was the agreement of Cabinet to then use that funding to implement the scheme and to secure the practical powers needed to implement it.

Whereupon, it was

RESOLVED

that

- (1) the proposal for grant funding, which has been made by the Mayor of Cambridgeshire & Peterborough Combined Authority (CPCA), be noted;
- (2) it be noted that sufficient powers exist for Officers to accept said grant funding in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder;
- (3) Officers, on behalf of the Council, should undertake steps to formally accept the funding – including formalising necessary grant agreements and payment profiles etc, be endorsed;
- (4) the use of the grant funding to implement a 'free after 4pm parking Monday to Friday' scheme based on the recommended option (at section 3) as set out within the report, be agreed; and
- (5) authority be delegated, for the implementation of the aforementioned scheme, to the Corporate Director (Place) in consultation with the Executive Councillor for Parks and Countryside, Waste and Street Scene as necessary including:
 - (a) to make and confirm necessary changes to the Parking Places Orders where required and to make and confirm the Notice of Variation required to implement the agreed charges;
 - (b) to make and confirm necessary changes to the Parking Places Orders where required and to make and confirm the Notice of Variation to reinstate the current (until 1800 Monday to Friday) chargeable hours from 1st April 2028 or sooner if the operation of the scheme results in unintended or unforeseen detrimental

impacts including but not limited to financially impacting the Council (e.g. where loss of income exceeds the grant contribution), or other detrimental impact occurs to people, place or the Council as a consequence of operation; and

- (c) to undertake any other activities necessary to implement, vary or cease the scheme including any necessary changes and reinstatement works.