

**Environment, Regeneration and Streetscene Services Scrutiny
Committee**

**(Multi-Location Meeting - Council Chamber, Port Talbot & Microsoft
Teams)**

Members Present:

28 July 2023

Chairperson: Councillor S.Pursey

Vice Chairperson: Councillor T.Bowen

Councillors: W.Carpenter, A.Dacey, R.Davies, N.Goldup-
John, S.Grimshaw and S.E.Freeguard

Officers In Attendance D.Griffiths, J.Stevens, A. Collins, S.Curran,
I.Rees, S.Cook, J.Woodman Ralph and T.Rees

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors W.F.Griffiths, J.Hurley, S.Jones and
C.Phillips

Observers Councillors S.Paddison, S.Reynolds,
C.Clement- Williams and A. Lockyer

1. **Chair's Announcements**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

The Chair noted that the Members of the Scrutiny Committee had agreed to scrutinise the following items from the Cabinet Board agenda:

Item 5: Commercial Property Grant: 14 Orchard Street, Neath (Pages 3 - 16)

Item 6: Parking Review Options Report 2023 (Pages 17 - 52)

2. **Declarations of Interest**

There were none.

3. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny**

Commercial Property Grant: 14 Orchard Street, Neath

Members enquired whether there was a tenant secured for the building.

Officers advised there has been interest, but the condition of the building means nobody can go in until it is refurbished. Officers see it as an important building in relation to Gwyn Hall.

Members also enquired about the ownership of the building. Officers advised that the ownership isn't included in the report, but officers can advise members outside of the meeting.

Members also expressed their praise for the team involved for bringing this scheme forward as it will enhance the area.

Following scrutiny, members were supportive of the recommendations to be considered by Cabinet Board.

Parking Review Options Report 2023

The Cabinet member for Strategic Planning, Transport and Connectivity thanked the chair for the invitation to the meeting and advised that he and the officers were happy to answer any questions.

The chair gave a brief overview and chronology of the Task and finish group and the report before the committee from the officers on the task and finish report recommendations.

Members highlighted that on the IIA assessment first stage, it states a further stage isn't required as its only carpark users that are affected.

Members stated that because the Council doesn't give discretionary amounts to disabled users for parking, that the statement in the IIA is wrong as disabled people do use car parks. Members also stated that as many disabled people are on fixed income, they wanted to know why the next stage assessment is not required.

Officers explained that the Blue Badge scheme applies to on street parking and that it does not apply to off street parking in terms of any concessions. Officers also advised that within the authorities' car parks, the disabled parking bays are located as close to the exits and

accesses to the car parks and the pay and display machines to aid with accessibility issues.

Officers advised that the Blue Badge scheme nationally is not fiscal or assessed on a means tested basis. Meaning that the ability to pay is not a consideration.

Members asked if as an authority they are taking cognisance of how it would be affecting disabled people on a fixed income. Members felt that the IIA didn't take that into account.

Officers explained that there are some wider principles to consider. If someone has a car and are able to run, insure and tax it, then generally they are in a better financial position than a lot of residents within the local authority. Officers stated that car owners can generally afford to pay some contribution in terms of parking charges to help the Council maintain those facilities.

Officers highlighted for members that all of the car parks cost a considerable amount of money to maintain as well as the increase in energy costs, general maintenance of the buildings and security. Officers explained that there's a balance to be struck, but the Blue Badge scheme is not means tested so it's not a fiscal issue in terms of ability.

Members highlighted that during the task and finish group, they looked at the possibility of allowing disabled users an extra hour as people with a blue badge may take extra time to exit or enter their cars. It may also take them longer to shop.

Members wanted to know if that could be taken on board even if it is to look at doing it in certain car parks within the towns that they get an extra hour.

Members stated that given the parking increases are on the hourly rates as proposed, and not on the all day parking rates, It may disproportionately affect disabled users who may take longer. Members suggested that it may make them go over that hour threshold and therefore need to pay more than they would have otherwise paid.

Officers advised that the recommendation is due to the current financial pressure, based on the parking budget, blue badge holders would pay the full charge.

Officers advised that they recognise and are guided to take into account the issues of disability and that's why the authority locate all of the disability parking close to access of the play and display machines.

Officers explained that they made a recommendation based upon the primary issue of the concession of a blue badge is for on street and not off-street parking. And that it is a difficult budget position where officers have got to try and break even on the parking account.

Members were advised that with the blue badge scheme, holders get 3 hours on double yellow lines provided they put on the badge and the clock at the time. Blue badge holders are also exempt of any time limit within the limited waiting bays. Officers stated that it's very important that Blue badge holders read the badge book because a lot of holders don't realise the concession that they actually have on street.

The chair explained that the principal of what the committee had put forward was to make sure that concession was consistent and extended into the surface car parks as well. The chair advised that he recognised the limited opportunities for people to park on the street around the town centres.

The chair stated that he took the point there are some concessions but felt that the principal was ensuring that that was available in the car parks as well.

The Chair stated that there's a limited amount of blue badge parking bays in the car parks and asked the Cabinet Member what was the financial calculation assessment around this recommendation?

The Cabinet Member advised that in his opinion, if someone has a Blue Badge then they are entitled to park where they are allowed and that not all disabled people are unable to pay for their parking. The Cabinet member explained that as a disabled person with a Blue Badge he has no problem with parking because the Blue Badge concession and the facilities are there for him to use on road parking.

The cabinet member said that he agreed with the officers that blue badge holders should read the book because there's lots of concessions for people with the Blue Badge. The Cabinet member advised that he doesn't think Blue Badge holders would want to be put into a category where they can't pay their way.

Members responded to the Cabinet member and clarified that the committee's recommendation was designed to level the playing field in the sense that an abled body person could make a shop within an hour. Members stated that somebody who is disabled, may take longer and therefore would have to pay a higher charge because they have a disability. Members explained that the idea of the committee is to balance out things so that somebody who's disabled shouldn't be unfairly penalised and having to pay more to park for longer because of their disability.

Members challenged the impact assessment as they believe that the proposal does impact on disabled people more than able-bodied people and highlighted that many blue badge holders do not have a second income.

Members wanted to know if the IIA was legally sound, and that due regard has been given to people who are disabled and that impact assessment only responds to people are using a car park.

Officers advised that it is an on-street scheme, legally the blue badge is an on-street concession. Officers advised that if members feel strongly about that, as this is a national scheme, they can lobby central government to change the Blue Badge scheme.

Officers explained that they are applying the concession in line with the blue badge scheme. Officers explained that nothing has changed on that blue badge scheme, from under previous administrations dating back to 2010 at least.

Officers stated that they don't know if the IIA open to challenge or not. Officers reiterated that the concession is an on-street scheme and advised members that they could be challenged as a council, but it's at the discretion of the Council in their view. The officer's view is that it is not a determined aspect.

The Chair clarified that there may be a mixing up of two things. He advised that the committee members were talking about the decision that is proposed in the report and the impacts of the decision in the report on disability, that includes disabled people, parking in car parks.

The Chair advised that is a slightly distinct thing from what the National Blue Badge scheme is and there is a duty as a Council and what members are questioning is whether the decision to say that

there's no impact on disability as a result of this decision is correct or not.

The chair stated that is distinct from what the National Blue Badge scheme is and that they are slightly separate questions.

Officers reiterated that in the blue badge scheme, its sections are clear. It does not apply to off street parking. Members were told that the disability and the blue badge are intrinsically linked so you can't separate them.

Officers advised that the Blue Badge scheme also says to holders to check with off street car parking what the charges and concessions are. Officers said they don't think they have broken any legislative position on not. Officers said that the challenge around the disability is a is a different matter.

Officers explained that ultimately it is for the cabinet to decide whether on this item whether they want to proceed or to review it further and get a formal legal opinion.

The legal officer advised that they were unable to advise on the Blue Badge scheme itself and has looked to the officers for their expertise on that subject and could be taken away further on the legal impact if input was required on that. However, the issue in regard to the integrated impact assessment is whether members have all the information they need to make the decision in hand.

The legal officer said that it would go back to the officers for their view that influenced the integrated impact assessment, to provide all the information members would require, and that they have due regard to all of the issues. The legal officer explained that it may be, that it could be an impact and members would have that to take into account.

A cabinet member asked if mipermit was available in all the car parks and suggested that the authority should make it available more widely so residents can do it off their phone. This would be helpful for people who feel pressured that they need to get back in time. Officers confirmed that mipermit was available in all car parks.

Members stated that they were glad to see that the removal of the charge for carers permits.

Members asked the cabinet member why Pontardawe is being treated differently regarding the parking price increase across the borough.

The cabinet member advised that under previous administrations there was a long debate on the Pontardawe parking situation of the free hour parking.

The Cabinet member explained that as the Task and Finish Group report didn't make a recommendation on this point then the Cabinet member and the officers decided to keep it as it was to help the traders by keeping it the same. Although Pontardawe was brought in line with other areas regarding Sunday parking no longer being free and the other price charges.

Members asked that if it is acknowledged that free parking in Pontardawe is helpful to increase footfall in town centres then why does that not apply to Neath and Port talbot?

Officers advised that previously there had been an economic review of town centres in terms of type and size of retail offer in town centres. Pontardawe was determined as having a smaller offering than Neath and Port talbot which was one of the fundamental determinations of previous administrations. In discussions with members that position hasn't really changed.

Members clarified whether it was a political decision.

Officers advised that the underlying decision was that the type of offer available in Neath and Port Talbot was bigger than in Pontardawe. It is a matter for the cabinet to decide.

Members advised that as a Task and finish group they were asked how to raise money from parking by the coalition but can't understand why Pontardawe is protected from that increase compared to Neath and Port talbot when trying to raise funds.

Members stated that Neath and Port talbot VIVA work very hard to get people to come into the town centres and they want clarity on whether there is going to be consultation with traders and organisations before the charges are raised, especially Christmas parking arrangements as the cost-of-living crisis gives people tough decisions on price of parking.

Officers advised that they weren't approached directly by Neath or Pontardawe town centres, but town centre managers meet with them on a regular basis and all town centres knew there was a parking review.

Officers explained that there was a specific enquiry submitted by VIVA Port Talbot to the authority and responded to via democratic services. Officers stated that the response was that if they have any concerns about parking fees they can contact the chair of the committee and it doesn't sound like they followed that advice.

Members advised that VIVA Port Talbot spoke to them about their concerns around the parking charges and the lack of impact it will have on Pontardawe compared to Port Talbot.

Members asked why there has been a lack of engagement on this when making decisions and not listening to businesses there?

The Cabinet member advised that he felt there hasn't been any lack of engagement and felt that the route to contact the chair of scrutiny or chair of the Task and finish group put it in the lap of VIVA to do that.

The Cabinet member explained that it was not a political decision to safeguard Pontardawe as the decision wasn't made by the current administration and had been made by a different administration for Pontardawe to have an hour free parking.

The cabinet member advised that the Task and Finish recommendations didn't include anything on Pontardawe, so the decision was to keep the hour free as it was but put up the charges in line with everywhere else as well as Sunday charging.

The Cabinet member stated that he felt this was fair across the board.

The chair asked if there had been any consultation with the traders on the proposal.

The chair also expressed that he was uncomfortable with the position that when a proposal to make charges to parking charges is put forward by an administration that traders were directed to him as a scrutiny chair as the decision will be taken by cabinet members. The chair stated that while he is happy to receive feedback, ultimately it

should be for the Cabinet to have those discussions with traders as the cabinet are accountable for making the decisions on parking.

Officers advised that should the decision be taken to go ahead with the recommendations then the authority would be legally required to advertise the charges and any traffic orders for on street and off-street parking. During that period anyone who would want to object to these charges can do so in writing. So VIVA can object to them as part of statutory procedure within 28days. It won't be a consultation process.

Cabinet members advised that they need to take it back to look at with officers who should be the point of contact when concerns and complaints come in but can also see the appropriateness of it going to the Chair of the Task and Finish group, but it could have come to cabinet as well or a point of contact with officers who could then feed it back.

Cabinet members asked members of the task and finish group if they raised the concerns on behalf of VIVA in the task of finish group sessions and whether it is not reflected in the report.

Members explained that it is the coalition that are making the decision and the task and finish group would just look at it. Members advised that VIVA Port Talbot's questions were brought up via the members within the task and finish group and as members they wanted to raise these issues to the people that are making the decision, which is the cabinet members, to ensure that that they are considering this.

Members stated that there is a difference between the statutory notification and the consultation.

Members said that they felt that there seems to be a confusion over the decision makers and the people scrutinising the decisions and there is a need to make sure that they get an answer from the decision makers.

The Cabinet member reiterated that this was a decision made by the previous administration with regards to Pontardawe and asked the scrutiny chair for feedback and guidance as to where the committee's going with Pontardawe?

The chair clarified that the committee has not made the resolution on it so he was unable to speak for all the committee's views. He

clarified that the original report given to the Task and Finish group by officers asked them to consider a proposal to scrap the hour parking in Pontardawe.

The chair advised that the Task and Finish group made no comment on that proposal, but because that proposal was put in as an option to raise revenue, the cabinet members had made the choice to retain the free hour parking in Pontardawe after considering that report.

The chair advised that as the context of this is raising income. The chair explained that raising income and charges is having an impact on town centres, so the committee was seeking clarification on why that decision was taken to retain the free hour while placing a burden on other town centres.

The Chair advised that he felt that question had been answered and stated he wanted to clarify that was the basis of the questions that had been asked by members.

Members said that they believed that VIVA need to be consulted as they are trying to reinvigorate the town centres.

Members also advised that the traders they have spoken to in Neath didn't know anything about the proposed parking increases nor did the residents. Members explained that the £5 increase in on -street parking is going to affect everyone in the Neath Centre as will the increase in the car parking charges.

Members advised that they don't think there's been consultation with everyone and that neither neath or Port talbot traders seem to have known enough about the charges and questioned whether the town centre managers should have informed them.

Members raised the issue that the public don't seem to know about season tickets for the town centre parking as well as the Knoll and Margam Park. Members advised that there seems to be issues with the website. Members wanted to know if there is any way that the authority can advertise season tickets more as they help make the cost of parking far cheaper.

Officers explained that it was an oversight as it was taken for granted that there was a need to promote the season tickets and the officers are in consultation and working with the head of leisure services to

see if they can get a better solution around the country parks which are not under parking services management.

Officers advised that they recognise that there are opportunities there that we can potentially enhance that offer, not just for season tickets but as the task and finish Group and the head of leisure highlighted, opportunities where the authority might even be able to develop a menu of offers within the authority.

Officers used an example that someone might decide they may want to go to the aqua splash or visit Avon Park or going to Margam Park and you could buy all of those in a single transaction with the authority.

Officers said that it was a very positive thing that came from the task and finish group, and it was an oversight not to include in the report and that it would be marketed. Officers also said that they would work with the communications team to get the message out so that it could be shared by members via social media.

On the proposals around providing free bus travel put forward by the committee, the chair advised that he accepted the response that funding something like that from the parking budget would be challenging, but wanted to know if the cabinet are prepared to follow what Swansea do, in showing support for the local bus industry and maybe prioritise it from other funding other than the parking account, if it was felt that it was something that was really important because of all the challenges facing the bus industry and passenger numbers.

The Cabinet Member explained that he didn't disagree with member's idea, but fundamentally, at this time, due to the pressure that this Council is under he can't see any way that the authority would be able to. The cabinet member explained that in relation to funding figures they have approximately £80,000 and reality at this time he doesn't think that's feasible.

Cabinet members stated that they know that in the Amman valley they may lose an early morning service which people may lose jobs over. The cabinet member stated that there is a balance of trying to necessitate what is needed.

Cabinet members commented that it is a great idea and the cabinet board want to support it going forward, but it is a chicken and egg situation where if you can get more people on busses the service

would become more viable then it's a great idea, but it's a really difficult job prioritising and just keeping the really essential services.

Cabinet members also commented that the finances that are just not there, the bus service is very volatile at this moment with services being cut back, so there are big priorities from an officer and cabinet perspective it is being looked at.

The cabinet member suggested that despite this they would be prepared to meet with the Chair of the scrutiny further down the line to listen to their options, you know listen to some of the recommendations, but whatever proposals come forward the finance needs to come with it from somewhere as well.

Officers gave an overview of the current bus situation and explained that they are very concerned now with the stability of bus services in the County and more widely across the region. Officers explained that there are potentially going to be some very difficult decisions on bus services coming forward.

Members were advised that the BES (Bus Emergency Scheme) that was introduced in response to the pandemic and it kept local bus services alive, because without BES the bus companies wouldn't still be here that are currently operating today.

Officers explained that the scheme was going to end in March 2023 but Welsh Government have extended that to the end of July and have entered into a new transition funding agreement.

Members were informed that the money is much less at the national level than it was previously. Officers explained that the knock-on effect of that is that essential services will probably be reduced. Officers explained to members that while the authority was considering giving a free service for a couple of weekends on the run up to Christmas, the authority could be best spending that money to sustain some bus services across the county to get people to the health appointments to work and to learning all year around. It's a real challenge and in the current climate, officers can't see how that's going to be deliverable.

Officers also explained that in reference to other local authorities such as Swansea who run a scheme like that. Swansea has much higher parking fees and charges than in this authority and what Neath and Port Talbot propose is still cheaper than Swansea's charges. The

higher parking charges in Swansea will probably release some funding, but also Swansea has got a very big BID which contributes to some of those initiatives and the Council had taken a decision themselves that they would put their own funding into that.

Officers advised that unfortunately, the authority is not in that position, and this is why officers have recommended that it is not sustainable. Officers stated that they don't believe it would ever be sustainable from income from the parking account and would have to be part of the budget prioritisations programme that Council would need to consider going forward.

Officers advised members that they may need to put more subsidy in to keep the essential services going and not free services at a couple of weekends at the Christmas period.

The Chair thanked officers for putting the bus situation into context and felt that the key point is that if cabinet members felt it is something they may wish to prioritise then it can be prioritised in the budget setting process.

The chair advised that there are a lot of benefits to doing a scheme like that and the challenge is, does the authority need to allocate some funding to safeguard existing services versus a scheme like this.

The chair stated that if cabinet members have an open mind that if funding is available, if it's something they do agree is a good thing and it's something they would like to do then if that funding becomes available is it something they would consider.

The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Economic Growth explained that in his new role in covering Town centres, the member wants to get out with the local members who cover the town centre areas and try to get better engagement with them on something like this, getting feedback prior to when reports are done as well from local members.

The chair agreed and commented that it was unfortunate that allocations were put in the budget before the details were looked at in this instance. The chair commented that there's a lot of benefit in doing that work in advance as with the allocations being put in the budget before details were looked at may have caused a degree of difficulty, especially in the fact that it is nearly August and a decision

has not yet been made on parking charges and the authority is not going to make that income targets as a result.

Members stated that their community couldn't access transport to their own communities in Neath and Port Talbot due to the difficulties of having just two buses a day and often they are so full, people can't get on. Members said that this, coupled with even the poorest having to be able to run a car to travel out of communities has led to a community transport scheme having to be set up.

Members commented that the Council need to look at subsidising services and making sure that communities are served. Members feel that is something that other councils are managing to do and it's not happening in this authority.

Members advised that they want support to enable bus transport for outlying communities and not penalise them by over charging for parking at the same time. Members stated that this acts as an indirect tax to keep the Council functioning and the budget balanced.

Officers highlighted that the Welsh Government are going to be struggling with the budget and it's incumbent on all to lobby the national government and Welsh Government to invest in transport.

Officers advised that the budget scenario for the authorities is extremely challenging when you try to manage the budget with all the pressures that are emerging and with new demands on all the services.

The cabinet member for Streetscene highlighted that they had similar issues with busses in their community and cutbacks to morning services would mean people couldn't get to work, he advised Members to try and influence the powers to be in the assembly.

Members explained that the task and finish group carefully chose the amended hours for the seafront charges to put the greater burden of the charge on visitors and not unfairly penalise residents who want to use the sea front and the associated business as well they asked why it's been amended to shift the existing enforcement hours.

Officers noted that the task and finish group wanted to operate the seafront charges between 9:00am and 6:00pm and explained that officers work until eight, which means for two hours down on the sea front they wouldn't be enforcing anything. Officers said that they

understand the reasons of the committee, enforcement officers need to be there during the peak times in the afternoons between 8am and 8pm.

Members queried if the enforcement officers could be utilised elsewhere during that time as they feel that 6pm is reasonable and is the same as the town centre.

Members were concerned that businesses on the beach front would be getting penalised for the extra two hours, potentially missing out on people that would visit.

Officers stated that the authority has been compared with some other authorities in regard to terms of providing free parking or free initiatives. But on the other hand the authority has not been compared with the likes of the City and County of Swansea where they charge until 10:00 PM at night for parking.

Officers explained that they have been tasked as officers to try and generate money and have flexed on the Sea Front parking, giving some concession to support the arrangement.

Officers advised they have got a responsibility to maximise the enforcement hours.

Officers explained that in the peak period in the summer, the seafront is popular, and officers would tend to enforce that area to maximise enforcement to generate the income and to get compliance with indiscriminate parking.

Officers stated that they have almost been given an impossible challenge in being asked to make money and to provide free services.

Officers advised that this strategy is going to be monitored and if the authority thinks there are benefits or non-benefits, then that would be reviewed in 12 months' time from implementation.

There was a discussion between officers and members around the rationale of changing the charging hours to meet the enforcement hours.

Members expressed the view that it didn't make sense as the authority can raise a significant amount of income between 9:00am

and 6:00pm which is the peak time in terms of visitors of the seafront and the charges are doubling as part of the proposals which is going to be significant income generation.

Members wanted to understand why officers can't re-deploy the enforcement staff elsewhere for those remaining two hours and wanted to understand the financial rational on why not to change charging hours to those that don't match the enforcement hours.

Officers said there are fundamental challenges with treating one area in isolation to other areas, in reference to the Seafront vs the country parks and other visitor attractions in terms of providing concessions in one area over another.

Members explained that the seafront is quite a distinct area as its not a gated park and contains businesses and is a destination.

Members highlighted the difference in parking in the Town centre compared to the seafront if you wanted to have a meal in the evening as charging on the Seafront would be until 8pm in the on street laybys.

Members wanted to unpick the rational of the 8am to 8pm hours is from officers.

Officers explained that during peak periods the intention is that they try to maximise income and to enforce those operational hours to make sure that the people are paying.

Officers explained that the authority should be extending the charge across the piste to 10:00pm or for example in Neath multi Storey car park is open till 11:00 PM the authority should be maxing that out and charging to 11:00 PM.

Officers advised that there are some fundamental challenges for members regarding principles where there's no clear overview of that strategy.

There was a discussion between officers and the chair regarding his definition of residents visiting the seafront. Officers wanted the chair to define what he meant by the 'local area'.

Officers explained that if the residents lived in the local area of the Port Talbot region then you were within an area that you could walk or cycle to the seafront. If it was a wider authority area the officers

explained chair meant that they were choosing to drive to the seafront then you would have to expect to pay a charge and can then make a choice about where to go. Officers wanted to clarify if the chair meant local seafront residents or the wider authority, but if you chose to drive to the seafront you would expect to have to pay a charge to park.

The Chair clarified that it is about people who live in the local authority area who have to drive to the seafront because there is poor public transport and that members agreed that the importance of charging and enforcement at the seafront but did not want the charging to adversely affect businesses and residents who visit for recreation, mental health or exercising purposes.

The Chair stated that the recommendation of the Task and Finish Group was to place the charging burden on visitors rather than local residents who use it as an amenity space who can't otherwise walk or cycle to the seafront.

As visitors tend not to turn up in the evening then residents who would like to have a meal in one of the businesses could do so without the charge which is why they wanted to strike a balance with the charging period suggested.

The Chair wanted to understand the rationale of the response. The current hours are 7am-10pm, Task & finish suggestion 9am-6pm, the current proposal is 8-8 the only explanation has been because that is the enforcement hours, but they don't understand the rationale of it as the chair feels that the enforcement hours should fit the charging hours. The chair asked if they make a reasonable decision of the charging hours, what is the rationale behind the charging hours in the report?

Officers explained that they have looked at the proposal and have reduced the charging hours down, but they have been tasked with getting additional income in to reduce the deficit. From the enforcement side, they feel it doesn't make sense to reduce the hours of income and lose 3 hours without enforcement and that additional income lost.

Members raised concerns about illegal parking during the summer and wanted to know whether other options were considered before the task and finish group were asked to help find the £300,000 for parking.

Members also wanted assurances that people are going to be fined or ticketed if they illegally park and if they do illegally park, is it going to cost the legal department money to chase up fines which are not paid?

Officers explained that there is one tariff on the Seafront so the only time a person would get a ticket is if you don't purchase one. Officers advised that if the proposals go ahead, then they can dedicate an officer to the seafront to the limited waiting bays to enforce them and the car parking.

Officers also clarified that it was enforcement and not the legal section would take this on as is currently the case. Officers clarified that if a PCN is issued for not having a pay and display ticket or no ticket through the app, then enforcement will chase it and take it all the way.

Members raised the concern that anybody from the local area who visits the beach front at the moment for free for a limited time, won't in the future unless they do it early morning or evening.

Members explained that this would be off putting to a lone female walking a dog and wanted to know if local people had been consulted.

Officers explained that by introducing the charges, people should have a better opportunity to have a space to park due to churn as a result of the time limit. Whereas now people are parking at 8am and going at 11pm which would be preventing residents parking.

Members raised concerns that a full range of the priorities as a Council need to be looked at to make the authority area a lovely place to work and live and by having the charging at the times suggested it may rule out certain members of the public who cannot afford to come down three times a week to the to the beach who currently use the seafront for their mental health etc.

Members enquired about the parking in the evenings and whether there was going to be an hourly or 2 hour charge in the bays. Officers advised that parking will be £4 per day but the bays will be £1.00 per hour maximum stay of two hours. The bays will only be charged at peak times and then during the winter period they will be

free. Members were told that the main carparks are going to be a flat rate of £4 a day in the recommendations.

Members raised the IIA in relation to the seafront and explained that they have family members who that can't walk more than a few yards without having to stop.

Members were concerned that their family members would never be able to walk or cycle to the sea front and when they park in the car park across the road, it takes approximately 20 minutes to get from the car park to the sea front.

Members felt that this would adversely affect disabled people and felt that the IIA needs to be re-done.

Officers explained that with regard to the limited waiting bays along the sea front, the Blue Badge scheme applies to them and Blue badge holders can park in the limited waiting bays with exemption of the time limit and also exempt the payment as well.

Members raised the point that the task and finish group had recommended exploring the possibility of overnight campervan parking on the sea front, this would raise revenue and increase visitors, but noted it had not been included in the report and wanted to know if it was going to be considered?

Officers advised that they are due to take a sea front strategy report to the head of Leisure services regarding the whole sea front and the camper van parking will be part of that remit and they will also look at it countywide and whether it can be introduced elsewhere within the county borough.

Members felt this was a great idea and were glad this would be looked at.

Members raised concerns relating to anti-social behaviour in car parks on the beach and the need previously for gated carparks at night to combat this. The members raised worries that people wouldn't want to park their campervans there given the anti-social behaviour.

Members were advised that officers are aware of the issues there and they will take that forward with the head of Leisure Services as part of the strategy and it may be such that a location is identified that

might not be in the current car parks that exist at present. Officers didn't know at this stage, and it might be a designated area that would be much more easily managed.

Members also enquired about one of the recommendations that the Task and Finish group raised about looking at mitigation measures around the immediate residential areas around the seafront and suggested that this recommendation may push people into trying to seek on-street parking in residential streets.

Officers advised that they recognise the risks associated with the parking charges. Officers suggested that the residential on street parking schemes policy document probably needs to be reviewed as it is a little bit inflexible in the way that it's applied.

Officers advised that there is an opportunity to review the policy position which have hotspots that we can review that policy position.

Officers also explained that in regard to residents parking, the upcoming revolution in terms of EV infrastructure and charging needs to be considered. Officers wanted to re-assure scrutiny and the cabinet and that that EV Charging infrastructure residentially needs to be picked up as a, separate piece of work and possibly a task and finish group specifically.

Members had questions in relation to the Neath pedestrianised zone and were concerned that in the evenings in Neath it can be extremely dangerous with the traffic moving into the town that time of night with the pavement cafes.

Members were concerned that the proposal of an evening closure doesn't spill over into the morning sessions as traders have said they would be disappointed if the authority shut the town in the morning session that runs until 10.30 am.

Officers explained that the town centre is complex in the way that it receives goods and services and deliveries to the businesses. Officers advised that they need to undertake a proper feasibility review into a any changes that are made to the orders at Neath.

Members were advised that a very detailed and in-depth consultation with the traders would be needed as by restricting it in the way suggested by the task and finish group could have a potentially detrimental effect on businesses as they will need access and egress

during that time of the day as previously post 5pm parking used to be prohibited but this was changed at the request of members to support the nighttime economy following an assessment.

Officers suggested that it does need to be considered as a feasibility and that it needs to be a put on the list for consideration as part of the end of year prioritisation programme of things that will be considered for feasibility going forward.

Officers advised that pedestrian safety is important, and they feel that the whole security around the town centre needs to be reviewed along with a fresh look at how the town-centre is managed there.

Officers said that there is an undertaking that, if that gets prioritised in autumn, that will be looked at in depth and following a detailed consultation with the traders and the town centre locally elected members.

Members agreed with officers and felt that consultation was vital, members didn't want to see changes having a negative effect on the town centre prospering.

The chair stated that he recognised this is something that was worth looking at and appreciated the challenges in the the highways capital programme and prioritising this. He asked officers if speaking to colleagues in regeneration and town centres to consider if it's not being able to be funded out of highways work this clearly has benefits for town centre regeneration from reviewing this and it may be another avenue that could be explored?

Officers agreed and explained that they know there are opportunities for town centres to secure grants and that may well be an opportunity where they could do a joint approach and are happy to work in any way to achieve that feasibility there for the best outcome of everybody taking on board the concerns that Members raised.

The Cabinet member advised that there are two current consultations regarding town centre strategies as well, but also the re-engagement of the traders. He said he is trying to involve everything as part of the consultation and make sure it gets fed back through the consultations so it can influence process.

Members commented that local members are going to be consulted with the review of the town centre, which they were happy about, but

members noted that there's two other consultations, and a feasibility exercise going on within the towns that members were unaware of. Local members asked when they were going to be included?

The cabinet member explained that he had only just heard about this week and would ensure that the local councillors would be included.

Officers also advised members that in relation to the Place plans, the regeneration team is working with consultants, the urbanists to do what is called a place plan for the town centres. This would be for Neath, Pontardawe and secondary and tertiary town centres like Tai Bach, Britton Ferry etc. They are going to draw up a series of documents for a setting out a potential public realm regeneration projects that they might want to consider for the town centres in the future and the work is still ongoing.

Officers advised that this is not going to be completed until the end of the calendar year. But when we do have the produce from the urbanists, there will be a series of workshops and consultations which will include local members. It will be brought forward for constant full consultation.

Members were also advised that the authority had secured a grant this year for feasibility on the town centre as well to see how the town centre can be enhance active travel and walking. Officers explained that until they have done a feasibility study, they aren't in a position to consult. Officers stated that the local members will be part of that consultation as well.

Members made a comment relating to continuous administrations using car parking as a means to provide council services. Some members suggested that as a principal it is fundamentally wrong. Members suggested that Council services can't be provided based on car parking when it is unknown how many people are going to use the car parks.

Members suggested that Car parking is not a cash cow, requested that members look at car parking and next year when budget setting comes around members hoped that car parking isn't factored in and is just an additional bit of income to spend on discretionary services rather than anything else.

Following discussion, the following amendments were put forward by the scrutiny committee.

Option 6 - That the charging hours be amended to 9am to 6pm

Option 7 That the charging hours be 9am -6pm

That additional recommendation 1 reads that Blue badge holders be granted an extra hours parking on top of the existing tariffs in town centre's to reflect the additional time disabled people require, this is to ensure there is no adverse impact on disabled people as a result of the increase in hourly parking charges.

That an additional recommendation be added:

That a full consultation is undertaken on these proposals with the community, including businesses and residents before implementation of any changes.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to the Cabinet Board with the amendments.

4. **Urgent Items**

There was none.

CHAIRPERSON