

Parking Permit Scheme Modernisation

Overview

The project aims to both achieve savings for the council and provide a modern, efficient, and easier method for Oxford's residents and businesses to obtain permits.

With the closure of Speedwell House, the push towards a 'digital first' and 'self-service' approach to providing services, and the need to make savings, it is appropriate that the operations of the Parking Shop are modernised.

To achieve these aims, we are proposing two major changes:

- i. Separating the customer-facing part of the scheme (processing applications, issuing permits, taking payments, and answering queries) from the enforcement aspects of scheme, and incorporating it within the customer service centre
- ii. Implementing an online application/renewal system, initially with paper permits as now but moving to the procurement of a virtual permit system, removing the need for physical permits

By these changes, savings can be achieved by:

- Having routine administrative tasks carried out by a team of administrative staff, who also undertake similar tasks for schemes such as blue badges and school bus passes. These tasks will diminish under a virtual system
- Replacing individual processing of applications whilst a customer waits with batch processing in an office.
- Not having to keep a parking shop open six days a week for a total of 55 hours per week, allowing work to be conducted during office hours
- No printing costs for physical permits once a virtual system has been implemented

Current costs

The current costs of the parking permit scheme are intertwined with parking enforcement. However, it is possible to make some reasonable assumptions about the costs of administering the role of the parking shop.

From an income of £908,038.59 in 2013/14, 60% came from parking permit fees, with the remainder coming from penalty charge notices. Outgoings came to £652,893.82, of which 51% was contractual costs. Of the remaining £430,213.57, 39% went on staff costs, 20% on equipment purchases, and the remainder on other costs.

Outside of staff and IT costs, the biggest regular expense is printing. £22,000 was spent in the same year on the paper visitor permits, with an additional £4,000 on the special paper for all the other permits, and around £330 for 6,000 application forms. The costs of keeping

the shop open in Speedwell are covered by facilities management but are likely to be another £1,000.

Likely costs and savings of proposed solutions

It is likely that it would cost £30,000 to procure a fully virtual permit system, with an additional start-up cost of £5,000 for our IT team to test and install the system. Once purchased, an annual site licence and service fee of around £8,000 is likely, with £2,000 from our IT staff to maintain the system.

Staff costs would be integrated with the customer service centre, and tasks relating to administering the scheme (such as processing applications, checking documents, printing and despatching permits) would be handled by administrators who would also handle similar tasks for other services. Tasks requiring specialist knowledge, such as determining eligibility in tricking cases or ensuring the dataset is up to date after liaising with the civil enforcement team and other partners, would be handled by an appropriately-trained senior member of staff. Integration with the customer service centre will require some initial costs.

Without the need to equip, maintain, and staff a physical parking shop, operations would be carried out during normal office hours and most customer interactions would either be undertaken online or handled by standard call centre staff. A team of three is the minimum required to keep the service operating at current workloads. During the interim phase of online applications with paper permits, savings in staff costs and time would be achieved by a switch from processing and issuing permits in front of a customer to processing applications in batches.

Once a virtual system is in place, staffing costs and time would be further reduced as the system would handle the applications and issuing of permits. Specialist staff would only be required to answer the more complex queries from the public, handle exceptional cases, and ensure the accuracy of the database.

Note that any surplus made by the scheme must by law be reinvested in environmental or traffic schemes, or operations.

Recommendations

CLT are asked to:

- i. Approve the plan to move the customer-facing aspects of the parking permit scheme to the Customer Service Centre
- ii. Approve the plans to move to a fully virtual permit system by the end of 2016, with an interim scheme of online applications and paper permits operating during the transitional phase
- iii. Close the Parking Shop by the end of December 2015
- iv. Discuss and suggest any additional options for savings.