

To: City Executive Board

Date: 6 April 2017

Report of: Scrutiny Committee

Title of Report: Workplace parking levies

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee on workplace parking levies

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of Scrutiny

Executive lead member: Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Board Member for Planning and Regulatory Services

Recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee to the City Executive Board:

That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations set out in the body of this report.

Background

1. The Scrutiny Committee considered the County Council's decision to develop proposals for a workplace parking levy (WPL) and a congestion charge in Oxford. This item took place at a meeting on 28 February 2017 and the Committee would like to thank Martin Kraftl and Stewart Wilson from Oxfordshire County Council, and Jo Colwell, Environmental Sustainability Service Manager, for attending and contributing to this discussion.

Findings and recommendations

2. The Committee heard that County Council's cabinet had approved the development of proposals for both a WPL and a congestion charge at their meeting in November 2016. Officers were at the pre-planning phase of the project and hadn't yet started any engagement activities. The County Council had however held discussions with a former director of Nottingham City Council, which was the only local authority in England to have implemented a WPL.

3. In response to questions about the Nottingham WPL scheme the Committee heard that the charge was approximately £375 to £400 per space per year. Nottingham had used the proceeds of their WPL scheme to fund a tram system and a connected bus service. Employers were liable for the charge and it was up to them whether the charge was passed on to employees. Businesses were only charged for the spaces they used and Nottingham City Council had exempted groups such as hospital workers and employers with fewer than ten employees. As no proposals had yet been developed for a WPL scheme in Oxford no decisions had been taken about what sorts of exemptions might be applied here.
4. The Committee commented that public transport would have to be significantly improved for a WPL scheme to be widely supported in Oxford. The Board Member responded that if nothing was done then the issues with parking and traffic jams in the city would only get worse and it was unlikely that improvements such as high speed rapid buses could be funded without such a scheme. Businesses would benefit from more staff getting to work on time and had the option of avoiding the charge by not providing car parking spaces, which could instead be used for more productive means.
5. The Committee questioned whether a congestion charge could have the same benefits and impacts as a WPL. The Committee heard that the County Council was looking at both but that initial findings were that the running costs of a congestion charging scheme would be higher and it would therefore raise less revenue for improving transport links into the city.

Recommendation 1 – That the City Council supports the County Council’s development of proposals for a workplace parking levy and a congestion charge given that both approaches have the potential to generate significant additional funding for transport improvements in the city and reduce congestion.

6. The Committee raised concerns that a WPL could encourage more people to park their vehicles in residential areas and catch buses to work in the city. The Committee heard that a WPL was likely to be applicable to the whole of the city and potentially to parts of neighbouring local authority areas that border the city as well. The Committee suggest that consideration would need to be given to how people could be discouraged from parking in residential areas to avoid the WPL, perhaps through the introduction of a citywide controlled parking zone.
7. The Committee questioned whether it would be possible to vary the price of a WPL in different parts of the city, e.g. charging higher rates in the city centre. The Committee heard that this suggestion was worth considering but could have unintended consequences, such as city centre businesses deciding to relocate away from the city centre.

Recommendation 2 – That consideration is given to how the City Council could help to mitigate and manage the wider impacts of the future implementation of either a workplace parking levy or a congestion charge on parking in the city, for example through additional controlled parking zones.

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