

**Formal Request for a
scrutiny enquiry:**

**The electronic system
for residents' parking
permits adopted by
Swansea Council**



**Councillors Peter May
and Irene Mann**

Councillor Mary Jones

Chair of Scrutiny

Swansea Council

Wednesday 25th April 2018

Dear Mary

Please can we formally ask to include the issue of the electronic system with regard to Residents' parking permits in the Scrutiny Work Programme. A full justification to our request is tabled below.

Peter May and Irene Mann

1. What is the problem or nature of concern?

The electronic residents' parking issuing system. The effectiveness of the handheld technology used by parking wardens. The clear uncertainty over the whole issue of temporary permits and its effect on the overloading parking bays beyond their capacity. The lack of a visual indicator such as a paper permit.

2. Which areas or community groups are affected?

Areas in the city that have residents parking

3. What would help solve the problem?

A review of the electronic software and handheld equipment to ensure that it is fit for purpose. Researching and implementing the methods other authorities' successfully use for good practice.

4. What other avenues have you already explored?

Questioning of the cabinet member. A full transcript of the questions asked and answers given is reproduced below in Appendix B. Initial investigations as to how other authorities administer and deliver their residents' parking systems.

5. Why you think the issue should be looked at by scrutiny / what would you like scrutiny to do?

There are proven anomalies and inefficiencies in the system which are failing the residents and need to be investigated. Scrutiny can examine these issues and advise the cabinet member on proposals for a better system. We are therefore asking you to include this issue in the work program.

We would like scrutiny to look at and suggest solutions to the issues and ideas raised in questions 1, 3 and 4

APPENDIX A – LINK TO NEWS STORY DEMONSTRATING THAT IT IS QUICKER FOR WARDENS TO MANUALLY INPUT REGISTRATION NUMBERS AS THE TECHNOLOGY WHICH IS SUPPOSED TO SPEED THINGS UP IS FAILING.

<https://www.walesonline.co.uk/news/local-news/technology-supposed-speed-up-work-13791053>

APPENDIX B – FULL TRANSCRIPT OF FORMAL WRITTEN QUESTIONS ASKED TO THE CABINET MEMBER BY COUNCILLORS PETER MAY AND IRENE MANN TOGETHER WITH HIS RESPONSES

22nd June 2017

This question covers two aspects of the residents' parking service.

1. Extension of the duration of a temporary permit from one month to two months.

Uplands residents have expressed concern as to why this change was made and the manner by which it was implemented. The purpose of a temporary permit is to give a grace period to those who need time to get the correct documentation in order for their vehicle to apply for an annual permit. A common observation is that one month is more than enough time for someone to do this. Resident parking spaces can be at a premium in the Uplands ward and the perception is that extending duration of a temporary permit puts more pressure on available spaces.

Please can the cabinet member answer the following questions:

- a. What consultation was carried out with residents before implementing the change.
- b. What was the evidential basis for making the change and please can the relevant numerical supporting data be published in the answer.
- c. Please can the cabinet member consider reverting the duration of the temporary permit back to a month.

2. Removal of the paper permit

Since the removal of the paper permit, feedback from Uplands residents has been that this has been a retrograde step. Observations include that wardens are spending more time to check individual vehicles by having to put details into their machines compared to quick visual checks. Residents are also concerned that they can not see themselves who is and is not eligible to park in a bay and therefore now unable to challenge a motorist without a permit.

Finally, residents have told us that they have seen that the absence of the paper permit encourages parking in bays by non-permit holders as they are no longer noticeable. These situations particularly affect overnight parking when there is little or no enforcement. In a modern society residents often print off a variety of tickets after purchase online for events or travel.

To protect against fraud these tickets often have bar codes or QR codes which can be quickly scanned.

In posing this question, we do appreciate that a small proportion of applicants would not have access to technology and would have to have their permits printed for them.

- a. How much of a saving (in pounds) has actually been made by removing the paper permit?
- b. Does the council have the capability to allow permits to be printed by the resident themselves on completion of a successful application.
- c. Would the cabinet member please consider looking into this as a way forward.

Response of the Cabinet Member for Environment Services

1. *This was an operational decision based on complaints from residents about having to apply for an extension and to reduce workload for the authority. As it is not a Policy change there was no requirement to formally consult. I can also confirm that unfortunately numerical data is not held as to the number of complaints received*

Under the previous rules all residents could get two month temporary permits. They would be initially issued with a temporary virtual permit and if their doc's were not returned they would have to come in or apply for a second, therefore, increasing workload and leading to poor customer service and unnecessary demand.

As such the overall demand for permits shouldn't change and there would be no benefit in changing the rules to allowing a temporary permit to only run for one month All residents living in areas where there are resident bays are subject to same application process.

2. *The removal of the Paper permit has generally received positive reaction from residents and signals the council clear intent to remove unnecessary processes and move to a digital agenda like most modern businesses.*

It has also allowed the council to look for financial savings and operational efficiencies as the process generates approximately 7500 permits each year which is both time consuming and laborious to print. The permits were created by the Contact Centre and by becoming paperless it is now controlled by the Parking Processing Team as part of their normal duties which has allowed the transition from Paper format to electronic version without compromising the residents.

These permits are now fully automated and the residents will be provided with an acknowledgement when the application is successful which will not produce a paper permit to be displayed in the car. This works in the same way as the abolition of the paper tax disc which is not required to be displayed for vehicle excise duty and universally accepted as a positive step forward.

I appreciate that this is not an ideal solution for some people who would prefer to see the permit however efficiencies prevail and this is a faster, more efficient option for residents than previously.

In answer to your question as a saving in pounds I am afraid that this has not been quantified, however, it is less staff intensive, no printing necessary, no postage required and stationery needed. With regards to the residents printing the Permits – This is not possible as the permit is an electronic format and the only item that could be printed would be the Acknowledgment of a successful application. Civil Enforcement Officers, at this moment in time do take extra time to check the permits, however a database has been created to identify vehicles that have a permit and those that do not so that the handheld devices will not require the CEO's to input the details as it will notify the CEO with an Audible alarm as the CEO passes the vehicle thus removing the need for any input to check the Permit situation.

26th October 2017

Paperless Resident parking permits.

When answering our question in June it was mentioned that vehicle recognition technology would replace the time-consuming practice of manual input of registration details by enforcement officers. We have had several observations from residents that parking enforcement officers are still manually entering registration numbers into their machines to check permits. Please can a progress update be provided as to when parking enforcement officers will be able to use vehicle recognition technology to check whether a car has a valid permit.

Response of the Cabinet Member for Environment Services

Automatic Number Plate Recognition has previously been trialled using hand held devices from our current back office management software and hardware supplier. During the demonstration, involving the Civil Enforcement Manager and Civil Enforcement Officers, the system was very slow and laborious; it was still quicker to input the Vehicle Registration Marks of each vehicle manually. Once the technology improves we will revisit the system and consider all options going forward.

6th March 2018

This question is about the residents parking permit issuing system.

The documentation needed to apply for a full 1 year residents' parking permit is a council tax number or tenancy agreement, and a V5 log book to prove that the vehicle is registered at the permit address in Swansea. Applicants for residents' parking permits who cannot supply the V5 can apply for and be granted a temporary 2 month permit online.

The council uses software from a company called MiPermit to carry out this issuing function. a. On expiry of the temporary 2 month permit, does the MiPermit system block an immediate fresh application and issue of another temporary 2 month permit for the same vehicle at the same address if the applicant still does not have the correct documentation. b. If it does, how long does an applicant have to wait before the MiPermit system will allow a successful application for another temporary permit for the same vehicle and address.

Response of the Cabinet Member for Environment Services

*Answer 1a - The Council no longer issues temporary permits, this was the process under the old paper system. All requests are now made online and a permit becomes valid immediately upon successful application online, however, if the necessary evidence is not supplied within the deadline requested then the permit will be revoked. The evidence we require is: The V5C log book for the vehicle showing it is kept at the address in Swansea where they live and giving their name as the owner Utility bill or driving licence at the Swansea address. They must appear on the electoral register at the Swansea address Provide their Council Tax Reference Number or Tenancy Agreement The terms and conditions of a residents permit are as below link:
<https://www.swansea.gov.uk/parkingpermittermsandconditions> The system will only allow two successful applications per property irrespective of the number of people living there. The system cannot prevent a person making another application even though the original has been revoked, as the duplicate could be a genuine request if they are then able to provide the evidence required. If it was found as part of the manual cross checks that we undertake that this was not the case and we could see a pattern, then we would immediately contact the resident to discuss further.*

Answer 1b - As mentioned above, the applicant will be written to and advised that their permit has been cancelled. They could make another application any time after this as the system does not allow an application to be blocked, the only alternative available to us as a last resort would be to remove the address from the system.

6th March 2018 (2nd Question)

The council website specifically states that if a tenant of an HMO cannot produce a council tax reference number then they can upload a tenancy agreement. The website also states that "A number of cross checks will have to be made before the decision is given" for this method of application.

a. What exactly are the cross checks.

b. Why does the website solely extend the invitation to upload a tenancy agreement to HMOs rather than all forms of tenanted accommodation such as flats or rented properties housing families.

Response of the Cabinet Member for Environment Services

Answer a - We receive a report of all new applications and write out to each applicant for the evidence as above, along with a 10% check of renewal applications. We also undertake other checks such as: · No planning conditions excluding eligibility of address · If HMO e.g. on Oystermouth Road, and request is for an alternate street, capacity at that street is checked to prevent overcrowding

Answer b - All other forms of tenanted accommodation would be liable to pay Council Tax once they have moved in, therefore the council tax reference number would suffice/be expected to be provided.

26th April 2018

On answering our written question to Council of 6th March, the cabinet member made the following statement about the issue of resident parking permits. He said: *"The council no longer issues temporary permits"*

This is untrue. On the section of the council website where permits can be applied for, there is a special section designed for tenants of HMOs.

They are firstly asked: *"Does your V5 log book show the Swansea address where you live?"*.

If they answer "No" they are then asked: *"If your V5 log book shows a different address, do you intend to change the address on your V5 log book and driving licence with the DVLA to the address you have declared as your residence on this form?"*

If they answer yes to this question then the following statement appears; *"If your log book does not show your current Swansea address then we will not be able to give you a full resident's parking permit at this time. One, temporary 2 month permit will be issued in order to give you time to update the log book with the DVLA. Only one temporary permit can be issued for a maximum period of 2 months. Once your log book has been updated, you will need to re-apply for a full permit to be issued covering the rest of the 12 month period and supply all the required evidence."*

This special facility is still available on the council website for HMO tenants at the time of writing this question today, the 28th March.

a. Can the cabinet member now confirm that the statement that: "The council no longer issues temporary permits", is in fact an incorrect statement?

b. Can the cabinet member now fully re-submit his answer to our question of the 6th March as his statement adversely affected the rest of the original answer he gave?

c. Could the cabinet member also clarify whether or not the current system is discriminating in favour of HMO tenants who cannot obtain a council tax reference by enabling them and not others to receive a temporary permit through guided steps on the council's website?

The continued issue of temporary permits is oversubscribing permit bays in the Uplands ward. We have documented instances where residents of over thirty years cannot renew their permits and have as a result been forced out of the bay. When they apply the computer says that the maximum allocation for the bay has been met. We have taken screenshots and showed these.

d. Can the cabinet member explain when he is in fact going to actually remove the temporary permit as he thought that was the case already?

Response of the Cabinet Member for Environment Services

The suggestion that tenants living in HMOs are given favourable treatment when applying for parking permits is simply not the case. Clearly residents living in HMOs may not have in their possession the documentation that other residents may have - such as a council tax bill.

Therefore they need to provide other documentation, such as a driving licence or a utility bill. Everyone applying for a parking permit (and not just residents in HMOs) is given a two month fixed period to provide these details.

If they are not provided in that time then the permit is revoked. In terms of the online process and how the form is set out – we have consulted with our web team to update it and make the process clearer.

We are also in discussions with our IT partners in relation to limits on the number of permits issued per bay and share concerns of instances where residents have been unable to renew a permit. This matter will be looked at immediately.