

# Full Council – 16 July 2020

## Questions from Councillors

**1 Councillor Mike Garnett to Councillor Mike Danvers (Portfolio Holder for Resources):**

Members and social networks are inundated with complaints about the method and introduction of car parking charges. Payment has only been possible through a mobile phone and apps. Will you now reconsider that decision and either continue with free parking or bring back the ticket machines into use with immediate effect?

**Reply from Councillor Mike Danvers (Portfolio Holder for Resources):**

Charges in Harlow Council-owned car parks in the town centre, town park, River Way and neighbourhood shopping centres were reintroduced last week. The free hour's parking remained in place in all neighbourhood car parks. Having carried out risk assessments based on government guidance immediately prior to the recommencement of the charging and local Covid-19 case numbers the Council made the decision to limit payment options to the MiPermit App and payment telephone line only.

The Council always put health and safety first and the choice only to have cashless payments was aimed at minimising any risk of transmission of COVID 19 through touching the machines and tickets, and handling coins

As part of the Council's Covid-19 response and recovery activities it reviews its services regularly and reassesses the risk to service users in light of changes to government guidance and local transmission numbers. The British Parking and Local Government Associations issued new guidance within the past week after the Council's decision to reintroduced car park charges had been taken. This guidance has now been reviewed and assessed.

In light of the new guidance and in response to comments and feedback from the public and car park users the Council has amended payment methods in its pay and display car parks to accept cash payments with the new options for contactless methods introduced last week also continuing to be available to car park users.

For car park users choosing to make cash payments or use the free parking periods without using the app/payment line the machines are operating as normal and users should follow the instructions on the machines and car park signage and ensure that a valid ticket is displayed in their vehicle. Car

park users choosing to make cash payments are advised to wash their hands or use sanitizer very frequently.

The ability to use the MiPermit app and payment line remains, and residents who would prefer a contactless method of paying for their parking are encouraged to continue to use these. Where the app and payment line are used there is no need to display a paper ticket in your vehicle.

**2 Councillor Mike Garnett to Councillor Mike Danvers (Portfolio Holder for Resources):**

What consultation, if any, was undertaken prior to the introduction of cash free parking?

**Reply from Councillor Mike Danvers (Portfolio Holder for Resources):**

There was no consultation undertaken prior to the reintroduction of car park charging as the charges were covered by the existing Traffic Regulation Order and the payment method was based on guidance to limit the spread of Covid-19.

**3 Councillor Simon Carter to Councillor Mike Danvers (Portfolio Holder for Resources):**

The Council has made monthly returns to the Ministry of Communities, Housing and Local Government on its financial position. In a spirit of openness and cross-party working for dealing with the Coronavirus epidemic, will you share these with the Opposition tonight?

**Reply from Councillor Mike Danvers (Portfolio Holder for Resources):**

I can confirm that Councillor Carter is correct that monthly returns have been made to the Government and indeed a further data template is due to be released on 24 July with a return date of 31 July.

The situation is constantly changing as you will appreciate and will continue to be so for some time to come with ongoing government announcements, new guidance and changing local circumstances. Further central Government support is anticipated based upon announcements made on 2 July but to date no further information is available at a local level.

An update has been provided to Cabinet only last week and further updates are planned for future cabinet meetings as part of the normal financial reporting process. The Cabinet also agreed a process for the ongoing

management of the Covid Crisis and the Council's recovery planning at its meeting on 9 July and any financial details specifically related to the Covid crisis will be dealt with through those governance arrangements in the first instance.

**4 Councillor Simon Carter to Councillor Mark Ingall (Leader of the Council):**

At Cabinet last week we all expressed our thanks to our staff for the way they have been dealing with the Coronavirus pandemic, in particular those working from home. With nearly four months of working from home, what support has been provided to them with regard to their wellbeing?

**Reply from Councillor Mark Ingall (Leader of the Council):**

The health and wellbeing of our staff is important to the Council, never more so than through these unprecedented times. All of our staff whether working from home or coming into the workplace have been working in a national crisis, balancing work life with home life with all the challenges the pandemic backdrop has brought and we continue to recognise the brilliant response from staff and thank them for their continued efforts.

Over the pandemic it was important to set up and maintain regular communication with staff, both at the corporate and managerial levels, supported by Human Resources. This has taken a number of forms the most notable of which have been:

- Daily (at the start) and then weekly bulletins from the Chief Executive direct to staff.
  - Imparting information and ensuring staff are up to date with latest developments
  - Providing and communicating with staff regularly specifically on health and wellbeing signposting staff to websites, support lines, videos, and apps with some great tips to help them to look after their emotional health.
  - Supporting staff on the move (where operationally possible) to home working, coupled with continued ready access for advice and support from the ICT team.
- Briefings for managers and employees on a variety of issues such as annual leave, ensuring this is still booked and that breaks are built into

the working week, supporting vulnerable and shielding employees as well as those who have been redeployed.

- Virtual full staff briefings from the Chief Executive.
- Changing management processes to meet with staff and/or teams on-line and virtually rather than face to face.
- HR continuing to liaise with our occupational health and engaging in maintaining support from the start for staff, where identified with the provision of services including – individual assessments, medical referrals to discuss mental health.
- The Council in addition continues to provide staff with access to an Employee Assistance Programme, this includes Freephone access 24 hours-a-day, 365 days-a-year to access counsellors and advisors who can provide both practical and emotional support on a variety of issues.