

Agenda Item 4

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMISSION

14 DECEMBER 2016

(7.15 pm - 8.50 pm)

PRESENT: Councillors Peter Southgate (in the Chair), Peter McCabe, Mike Brunt, John Dehaney, Abigail Jones, Sally Kenny, Dennis Pearce, Michael Bull, John Bowcott and Najeeb Latif

Co-opted Members Helen Forbes and Geoffrey Newman

ALSO PRESENT: Councillor Ross Garrod (Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking)

Councillors Daniel Holden and David Simpson CBE

Venn Chesterton, ULEV and Energy Lead from TTR

Jason Andrews (Environmental Health Pollution Manager), Chris Lee (Director of Environment and Regeneration), Paul Walshe (Parking Services Manager), John Hill (Head of Public Protection and Development) and Julia Regan (Head of Democracy Services)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE (Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillor Oonagh Moulton (substituted by Councillor Najeeb Latif) and Councillor David Williams (substituted by Councillor Michael Bull).

2 DECLARATIONS OF PECUNIARY INTEREST (Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of pecuniary interest.

3 CALL-IN OF THE INTRODUCTION OF A DIESEL SURCHARGE FOR ALL TYPES OF RESIDENT AND BUSINESS PARKING PERMITS (Agenda Item 3)

The Chair drew the Commission's attention to a topic suggestion received from a resident this week asking it to scrutinise lowering the cost of resident parking permits for low energy cars. He said that this would be dealt with partly through this meeting and also by the work of the air quality task group.

The Chair invited Councillors David Simpson and Daniel Holden to explain why they had requested a call-in on the introduction of a diesel surcharge for parking permits.

Councillor David Simpson said that he was in favour of measures to improve air quality but that this should be done at a regional or national level. His view was that the surcharge is a piecemeal measure that has been used as an opportunity to raise revenue for the council. He said that the impact of the surcharge would be felt

predominantly in the west of the borough as that is where the majority of controlled parking zones are located and that this was therefore a punitive and tokenistic measure.

Councillor Daniel Holden added that the discussion at the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel had not reached a consensus on introducing the levy this year – he drew members’ attention to the letter submitted by Councillor John Sargeant (page 111 of the agenda). Panel members had advised a lead-in time for the levy to give residents a chance to prepare. He said that immediate implementation was unfair and that the charge was too high.

Councillor Daniel Holden asked Cabinet to reconsider its decisions and to introduce other measures in partnership with the GLA and in response to recommendations that would be made by the air quality task group. He also drew members’ attention to recommendations made by the RAC (document laid round at meeting and published with the minutes) and the Alliance of British Drivers (page 113 of the agenda) on other measures that could be taken such as clean air zones, anti-idling measures and action to improve traffic flow.

Councillors David Simpson and Daniel Holden made further points in response to questions:

- Vast majority of hotspots are caused by vehicles from outside the borough
- Although the level of pollutants from vehicle emissions is certainly higher than that indicated by manufacturers’ tests, modern cars have lower levels of emissions
- Air quality is affected by lots of factors across London and can’t be controlled by local measures taken in isolation
- A surcharge should be imposed at London or national level for all diesel vehicles

The Chair invited Venn Chesterton, ULEV and Energy Lead from TTR, to address the meeting. Venn Chesterton said that TTR had carried out extensive research on air quality across the country and has worked with TfL and the GLA on the introduction of the Ultra Low Emission Zone. He said that there were many measures that would have an impact on air quality and that the surcharge was an opportunity for Merton Council to have a positive impact. He said that research showed that people from lower income groups were less likely to own diesel vehicles and that the financial impact on diesel vehicle owners would be small.

Venn Chesterton made two further points in response to questions, that in future small engine petrol cars would be as efficient as diesel and that traffic that slows and then speeds up creates a higher level of emissions than smooth flowing traffic.

The Chair invited Councillor Ross Garrod, Cabinet Member for Street Cleanliness and Parking, to respond to points made by the signatories and by the expert witness, Venn Chesterton.

Councillor Ross Garrod said that the objective of the surcharge was to provide a nudge to residents to reduce ownership of diesel vehicles. He urged the Commission to consider public health factors rather than focussing on the impact on the polluters. He drew the Commission's attention to information (on page 52 onwards) showing the overlap between air quality hotspots and CPZs as well as mortality data for respiratory disease.

In response to questions, Councillor Ross Garrod said that he could only take measures that were within the council's power and that communication would take place with affected residents in CPZs. Chris Lee, Director of Environment and Regeneration, added that the intention to introduce a surcharge was signalled over a year ago, though this hadn't been widely publicised. He said that the phased implementation approach had been adopted in response to concerns raised at the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel about giving notice to residents.

The officers described other measures being taken to tackle air quality in addition to the diesel surcharge:

- new air quality action plan currently being drafted will include proposals on ultra low emission zones and clean air zones
- transport investment programme monies being used to smooth traffic and ease congestion, principally on main road junctions. Also being used to plant trees and promote the Freedom Pass
- an education programme for parents and pupils is being considered in regard to safe parking around schools and related issues.

John Hill, Head of Public Protection, advised that the GLA has made clear that all tiers of government are expected to play an active role in addressing matters of Air Quality and that it should not be seen as just a national issue. He further advised that the Mayor had written to all London Councils asking them to set out their proposals in respect of measures they are developing to address Air Quality issues at a local level.

Commission members discussed the issues raised and agreed that there is a need to reduce air pollution and accepted that diesel vehicles are a major cause of this but questioned whether the surcharge would change behaviour or whether it would instead lead to avoidance measures such as an increase in off road parking spaces. Members also expressed concern at the level of the surcharge, the short lead-in time and consequent lack of notice for residents.

In response Chris Lee said that there was no evidence that a longer lead-in time would make a difference to how motorists would respond. He said that the phased introduction of the higher charge over a two year period would enable officers to evaluate the impact of the surcharge, identify avoidance measures and to take account of other national and regional policies that might be introduced during that

period. This is a fast moving policy area, for example, Westminster Council is, he understood, considering the introduction of a supplementary charge for diesel cars at parking meters.

Chris Lee said that Merton CPZ charges are lower than most other London boroughs and that the surcharge should be set at a level that would make people think about their behaviour. He said that action taken by Merton Council could have a multiplier effect alongside similar actions taken by other boroughs to improve air quality.

In discussion members of the Commission expressed divergent views on whether the council should introduce the surcharge now or wait for national measures to be introduced.

Those in favour of immediate action expressed concern at the impact of air pollution on residents' health, especially for children and young people. They thought that the council should be a leader in introducing measures to tackle air pollution and to encourage residents to use sustainable methods of transport.

Those opposed to the surcharge said that it would be tokenistic, would have marginal impact and that it would be better to wait for regional and national policies that would target all diesel vehicles rather than just those in CPZs.

There were also differing views on whether there should be a parking permit charge for electric vehicles.

It was moved and seconded that the Commission should refer the decision back to Cabinet for reconsideration. Three members voted in favour and 6 against. The Commission therefore RESOLVED to decide not to refer the matter back to Cabinet, in which case the decision shall take effect immediately.

Councillor Abigail Jones, Chair of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel, said that the Panel would receive an update on the impact of the surcharge in 12-15 months time and would continue to monitor this and to address the matter of the parking permit charge for electric vehicles.