

Report to: Lead Member for Communities and Safety

Date of meeting: 18 December 2018

By: Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Title: Update on the Libraries and Parking Partnership

Purpose: To provide an update on the implementation of the Libraries and Parking Partnership, which started on 1 July 2018

RECOMMENDATIONS: The Lead Member is recommended to:

- (1) Note how the Libraries and Parking Partnership has been implemented;**
 - (2) Note the issues which have arisen which caused difficulties for some customers, and the measures implemented to improve the customer experience;**
 - (3) Agree that the NSL and ESCC websites are comprehensively reviewed to ensure that the online system is easy to use, and that user testing is carried out on the new webpages to make sure that they provide a clear and simple customer journey; and**
 - (4) Advise the petitioners of the changes that will be undertaken on the NSL system in order to provide a simpler and improved service for customers wishing to purchase visitor scratch card permits.**
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1 Background Information

1.1. The Libraries and Parking Partnership (The Partnership) involves East Sussex County Council's Library and Information Service and Parking Services and the parking contractor NSL. In The Partnership NSL have use of back office space as well as welfare facilities for office staff and Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) in Eastbourne, Lewes and Hastings libraries. Within the three libraries customers can access a number of parking services including collection of visitor and hotel permits, can register on and use the online NSL system from free customer computers, and can pay or challenge Penalty Charge Notices (PCN).

1.2. The Partnership was introduced to make better use of our libraries as visits by customers and loans of items have decreased significantly over the past ten years. By offering both parking and library services in one place we are able to make best use of our resources, and providing parking services in libraries enables parking customers to access library services during their visit. Similarly, library customers also benefit from easy access to our parking services.

1.3. At the same time as establishing The Partnership, existing online parking services for management of PCNs were expanded to include hotel and visitor permits, and introduce virtual trader permits. A key component of the new service is NSL Apply, the website where customers can now register and manage their permits online (from a smart phone, tablet or computer). Residents now only need to collect visitor and hotel scratch card permits in person. We recognise that this has been a significant change in the way that we issue parking permits. However, the expansion of the online self-service model to include virtual permits meets the expectation of customers and gives greater flexibility to fit in with busy life styles. Providing services in this way is consistent with our drive to provide modern, efficient and affordable public services, making best use of our diminishing resources.

1.4. We appreciate that some customers cannot use the online system, for example customers who do not have access to the internet or who have certain disabilities. We have put in place alternative ways of accessing parking services for these customers, including access to free computers in libraries to undertake registration and management of permits, with support from library and NSL staff. In the case of customers who have a disability preventing them from visiting the library and no access to the internet, we can provide a home visit.

1.5. A number of preparations were made for The Partnership at the three libraries. Changes were made to non-public space to create office and welfare facilities, while at Lewes Library two public toilets were converted to a changing room and in Hastings Library offices were installed on the third floor. As well as the appointment of an additional 2.3 full time equivalent Library Assistant posts across the three libraries, all staff were trained on the new systems and services. The project was an integral part of the Libraries Strategic Commissioning Strategy, approved by Cabinet, and Local Members were updated through membership at Parking Boards or via individual emails.

2 Supporting Information

2.1. We began serving customers on Monday 2 July 2018. Since then 5,095 customers have registered online, 89,377 permits have been issued and 80% of payments made have been online, which is in line with expectations.

2.2. There have been some transitional problems as we have introduced this fundamental change to modernise the delivery of our parking services to customers and we recognise that the change in systems has had a direct impact on some customers who have reported confusion and experienced longer queues both in person and on the phone. There has been negative customer feedback to the Parking Team and NSL, and to Local Members, and we have received three corporate complaints about these issues since the new contract began. We apologise for the difficulties and the less than satisfactory customer experience. Both ESCC and NSL staff have worked hard to resolve all of the issues which have arisen and we are grateful to Local Members for bringing to our attention specific problems which we have been able to address.

2.3. The issues which have been resolved are:

- NSL now provide a member of staff one day a week at each library to help customers get online. This is monitored closely and has been found to be sufficient. Most recently at Lewes Library there have been no bookings made. Additional scanners have been installed to speed up the transfer of identification documents.
- Responses to customer enquiries were delayed at the time of implementation. NSL provided additional phone cover and a separate number for staff queries. Now the calls received per day have dropped to between 50 and 100 and all voicemail messages are returned within 48 hours.
- This year approximately 750 customers in the Lewes Controlled Parking Zone needed to renew their permits in September, which created an additional service pressure at the inception of The Partnership. NSL provided additional support within the Library every day for nearly two weeks. They answered questions and provided one-to-one support to every visitor who requested it (28 customers over 9 days, an average of 3 per day). The permit renewal in Eastbourne in October has been monitored closely and managed with one day of support from NSL each week.
- The initial data transfer of addresses to NSL Apply was incomplete and has now been resolved. The Parking Team have reviewed enquires and complaints received from Lewes residents and met with NSL.

2.4. Additional work will be undertaken in order to improve customer experience further. The Parking Team are reviewing the online and printed customer information about how to register

and obtain permits, to improve the clarity of information to customers in order to make the process as smooth as possible. For example, making it clearer that customers need to bring ID with them to the library means they can complete the registration in one visit. We are also making it clearer that ID can easily be submitted as a photo from a smartphone or tablet and that obtaining virtual residential permits can be managed completely online at the convenience of the customer.

2.5. It is recommended that the NSL and ESCC websites are comprehensively reviewed to ensure that the online system is easy to use, and that user testing is carried out on the new webpages to make sure that they provide a clear and simple customer journey. This work could be undertaken during December and January, with new pages launched by February 2019.

2.6 At the County Council meeting on 4 December 2018, Councillor O’Keeffe presented a petition with approximately 162 signatories to the Chairman on behalf of residents of Lewes stating:

“I/We, the undersigned, call on East Sussex County Council to restore the ability of local residents to buy resident visitor scratch card permits over the counter where advice is given about parking permits, currently Lewes Library, rather than having to register online and not be able to collect them immediately.”

2.7 A copy of the petition is available in the Members’ Room. Standing Orders provide that where the Chairman considers it appropriate, petitions are considered by the relevant Committee or Lead Member and that a spokesperson for the petitioners is invited to address the Committee. The Chairman has referred this petition to the Lead Member for Communities and Safety.

2.8 In response to this petition and similar customer feedback we have looked at how we could reduce the need for multiple visits to libraries to apply for and then collect visitor permits, which would be of particular benefit to customers without access to the internet at home. When this development is completed and NSL Apply is updated after 4 January 2019, residents who are already registered will be able to make one online application on NSL Apply for their entire allocation of scratch card visitor permits for the year, which will be subject to a pre-approval process by the customer services team. Once approved, the customer can then apply online as and when they want a scratch card permit or permits, and these will be available to collect immediately, without the need to wait for approval of each application. Residents without online facilities will be able to go to Eastbourne, Hastings or Lewes libraries, log on to their NSL account, order, pay and then collect their permits in one visit. Assistance will also be available through the NSL customer service team if necessary. This new system will speed up the process for all residents and avoid the need for two visits to a library if the customer needs to apply in the library and then return a few days later to collect it.

3 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

3.1. The fundamental overhaul of the way in which we deliver our parking services to customers is part of our drive to provide modern, efficient and affordable public services, making best use of our diminishing resources, whilst at the same time providing greater flexibility and accessibility to the service for the vast majority of customers. Mitigations and support have been put in place for customers who cannot access online services.

3.2. The Partnership has also enabled the Council to better manage underutilised space at libraries and bring together parking and library services so that customers are able to access both at the same location. To implement The Partnership preparations were made within the buildings, new systems were developed and additional library staff were appointed and trained. To date nearly 90,000 permits have been issued and 80% of payments have been made online.

3.3 There have been some transitional problems in implementing the changes, including negative customer feedback, and we would like to apologise for the difficulties that some customers have experienced. The Partnership has identified and resolved the majority of the

issues which have arisen, taking steps to improve the customer experience significantly. We continue to monitor this while improvements to the Council and NSL Apply websites continue. It is recommended that the NSL and ESCC websites are comprehensively reviewed to ensure that the online system is easy to use, and that user testing is carried out on the new webpages to make sure that they provide a clear and simple customer journey. This work could be undertaken during December and January, with new pages launched by February 2019.

3.4 Following feedback from residents and councillors requesting a system that avoids the need for multiple visits to libraries to apply for and then collect visitor scratch card permits, we will make changes on the NSL system in order to provide a simpler and improved service for customers wishing to purchase visitor scratch card permits. These changes will come into effect in January 2019.

RUPERT CLUBB

Director of Communities, Economy and Transport

Contact Officer: Alice Henderson, Team Manager Library Operations

Tel. No. 01273 481804

Email: alice.henderson@eastsussex.gov.uk

LOCAL MEMBERS

Councillor Philip Daniel, Lewes

Councillor Godfrey Daniel, Hastings

Councillor Pat Rodohan, Eastbourne