

Sunday Car Parking Charges

Equality Impact Assessment Update: Report to Woking Borough Council

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1. Introduction

1.1 **Context and background:** Woking Borough Council (WBC) has a statutory responsibility under the Equality Act, 2010, to consider the impact of its decisions in relation to age, disability, sex, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, marriage and civil partnership, race, religion or belief, and sexual orientation. In addition, WBC also has a statutory duty to foster good relations between different groups of people, coupled with a responsibility to promote equality of opportunity. In 2008, WBC introduced a policy of allowing worshippers at Coign Church, Christ Church, Trinity Methodist Church, and Woking United Reform Church to park free of charge on Sunday mornings in Victoria Way and Brewery Road public car parks. At the same time, concessionary Sunday charging arrangements also applied in respect of other users of Woking town centre car parks on a Sunday. The practice of allowing worshippers attending the Town Centre churches to park free on a Sunday was subject to a challenge under the terms of the Equality Act 2010.

1.2 In 2012, Skyers-Poorman Research and Consulting were commissioned by Woking Borough Council to undertake a full and independent Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) on its Sunday car park charging practice. An EqIA is a systematic and comprehensive assessment of a policy or practice through the prism of equality. The EqIA therefore assessed the positive, negative and/or differential impacts in relation to the following:

- a) The impact of free Sunday parking on churchgoers
- b) The cost of free Sunday parking to the Council
- c) The impact of free Sunday parking on the wider community

1.3 Following completion of the EqIA in 2012, the Council agreed that it would review its Sunday car park charging practice within a specified four-year timeframe. The Council has therefore appointed Dr Sophia Skyers (CIBS IQ Research) to review and update the 2012 EqIA, in line with this. This short report therefore reviews the findings of the 2012 EqIA, examines whether anything has changed since the EqIA was undertaken, specifically, the nature of the policy and the context within which the policy operates. This report also examines some of the key specific actions that were contained in the recommendations, and the associated action plan that accompanied the 2012 EqIA, as there were some issues highlighted in relation to the operation of the practice that required further examination. The 2012 EqIA should therefore be read in conjunction with this report as it sets out the relevant background, religion and non-belief groups in Woking, and provides a detailed assessment of the potential impact of the policy on protected groups that there is no need to repeat in this report.

2. Car parking charges

2.1 **The current position and issues arising from the 2012 EqIA:** The policy of WBC is to review its discretionary fees and charges at least once each year to maximise its income and its annual review of its discretionary fees provides detailed information on this. As part of WBC's

review of parking charges, Sunday parking charges were introduced in the Town Centre in 2003 and in 2008 as part of a two-staged process. The policy of rescinding Sunday parking charges for those attending church in Woking town centre was introduced as a reactive practice in response to representations made to the Council by church attendees. The Sunday parking charge is capped for non-churchgoers and is therefore concessionary in comparison with the other days of the week. Since the 2012 EqIA was undertaken, WBC has not made any changes to the policy, or to the practice, and there are none anticipated at this stage. As referred to briefly above, there were two specific issues highlighted in the 2012 EqIA, and the associated action plan. The first issue related to the operation of the on street disabled parking bays, and the second issue related to the impact of the policy on protected groups whose religious observance took place on days other than a Sunday.

2.2 Disabled on street parking bays: WBC has received no specific correspondence regarding the issue raised in the 2012 EqIA regarding the potential for adverse impact relating to the three hour parking limit in the Town Centre disabled bays. In practice, the three-hour period is more than sufficient to accommodate attendance at Church Services on a Sunday. Moreover, the turnover of motorists in the disabled bays effectively means that more disabled motorists have the opportunity to use the parking bays that are located in prime positions in and around the Town Centre. This enhances positive impacts for this group.

2.3 Days of religious observance: In relation to the issue raised in the 2012 EqIA concerning days of religious observance other than a Sunday, WBC parking services team provides assistance to faith groups as well as individuals outside of the Town Centre where it is appropriate and safe to do so. This assistance spans a very broad spectrum, and it ranges for example from local parking discretion following bereavement, to much wider parking discretions that have been agreed specifically to assist worshippers attending Friday prayers at local mosques.

3. Conclusion

3.1 Synthesis, recommendations and Action Plan: This updated EqIA has found that there have been no changes to the policy or practice of allowing Sunday worshippers to park for free in Woking Town Centre. Therefore, there is no requirement to undertake a full EqIA, as the detailed assessment of potential impact in the 2012 EqIA is current. It is therefore recommended that:

1. WBC continue with the practice in relation to Sunday parking charges of allowing worshippers to park for free as the Council has determined that it is a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim, and having had proper regard to all of the issues raised in the EqIA and this updated report.

3.2 The relevant part of the action plan that relates to continuing with the current practice, and that accompanied the 2012 EqIA, summarising the potential, positive and negative impact, and mitigation measures in relation to the disabled bays, and to other days of religious observance has been updated and appended to this report.

Appendix D – EqlA Action Plan

Equality Impact Assessment on Woking Sunday Car Parking Action Plan –Update November 2017

Sunday Charging Policy	Positive Impact	Potential Negative Impact	Mitigation Measures
<p>1. That WBC continue with the practice of allowing worshippers to park free as the Council has determined that it is a 'proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim' and having had proper regard to all of the issues raised in the EqlA and the update</p>	<p>The impact on the entire community has been considered in relation to all of the protected characteristics and protected groups within groups and has informed a more carefully nuanced practice in relation to free parking for worshippers.</p>	<p>Potential negative impact for religious groups whose religious day of observance is not on a Sunday</p> <p>The current Sunday charging practice does not encompass on street parking for disabled people. The three-hour restriction in the bay could potentially impact adversely on the ability of disabled people to attend church and related church activities on a Sunday.</p>	<p>Assistance is given to enable attendance at Friday prayers and Mosques in the borough</p> <p>The Council adopts a flexible approach in considering requests on a case-by-case basis, within the framework of its policy on parking charges.</p> <p>The three-hour parking limit is more than sufficient to accommodate attendance at church services on a Sunday of disabled people requiring use of the Town Centre disabled bays.</p> <p>The turnover of motorists who require use of parking in the disabled bays in the Town Centre, as a result of the three-hour limit means that more disabled motorists have the opportunity to use parking bays that are located in prime positions in Woking Town Centre.</p>