



Kirklees
METROPOLITAN COUNCIL

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Ad Hoc Scrutiny Review

Report on

Parking of Vehicles Near Places of Worship

January 2002

Kirklees Metropolitan Council

AD HOC SCRUTINY PANEL
PARKING OF VEHICLES NEAR PLACES OF WORSHIP

PANEL MEMBERS

Councillor Andrew Palfreeman (in the Chair).
Councillor Ann Denham
Councillor Mohan Sokhal

COMMITTEE SERVICES SUPPORT

Sue Parker.

DATES OF MEETINGS

18th September 2001.
1st October 2001
20th November
5th December

TERMS OF REFERENCE.

- 1. To consider in the light of the circumstances, customs and practices of major religious and faith groups in Kirklees, whether there is any justification for granting parking concessions in the immediate vicinity of the places of worship.**
- 2. To contrast the conclusions reached in (1) above with the Council's policy on the issuing of parking permits to other interest groups in Kirklees.**
- 3. To consider what form any concessions should take.**
- 4. To make recommendations on possible guidelines for future Council policy on the above and any other related matters as the Panel thinks fit.**

INTRODUCTION

The Cabinet asked the Scrutiny Committee to consider the creation of an Ad Hoc Panel to review the Council's current policy on the issue of parking concessions to those wishing to use places of worship throughout the Borough. The Scrutiny Committee agreed to the creation of the Panel and its Terms of Reference.

The Panel met on a number of occasions to interview witnesses and conducted an extensive consultation exercise amongst faith groups throughout Kirklees.

BACKGROUND

At its first meeting Chris Platts (Chief Traffic Engineer) told the Panel that the Council did not have a formal policy relating to the granting of parking permits for those wishing to attend places of worship. It would be impossible to apply one policy to all instances as each situation is different and had to be judged on its own merits, taking into account the needs of other road users in the area. This was repeated at the Panel's final meeting by Terry Brown (Highways & Transportation Manager). Both Officers explained the need to balance road safety with the needs of other users e.g.: businesses, shops, schools etc. The Panel agreed that it was impossible to define a policy that could apply to all instances and that there was no justification for granting permits to those wishing to worship in preference to any other group.

Recommendation 1.

That in future any request for the issue or renewal of parking permits be judged on its merits taking into account the balance between the reasons for applying for the permits, the needs of other users in the area and road safety.

The Panel noted that many of the problems experienced by those responsible for places of worship arose out of the adaptation of existing buildings for purposes of worship. The Panel further noted that the planning process should ensure that problem is not so acute outside newly built places of worship.

The Panel noted that the original referral came to Scrutiny as a result of an application submitted by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Association, Fitzwilliam Street, Huddersfield. The Panel interviewed representatives from the Association and also received representations in support of them from Councillor Mehboob Khan.

It was made clear, both to the Association's representatives and Councillor Khan, first, that the Panel's Terms of Reference extended to all places of worship in Kirklees and not specifically to the Ahmadiyya Mosque and second, that the Panel would not be making any recommendations specifically relating to their application.

However, the Panel was interested to hear the history of events leading up to the Association's application and, when coupled with evidence supplied by Highways Officers, thought that lessons could be learnt for the future, especially in the consultation process.

Recommendation 2.

That when consulting on the possible introduction of, or changes to, parking restrictions, the Council acts in a more proactive manner, taking into account literacy and language barriers. Particularly it should identify and specifically consult on possible problems and ensure that all those who could be affected, including those running and attending places of worship, are actively consulted. Ward Members and Area Committees should be involved at all stages.

The Panel engaged in a wide consultation process inviting submissions from as many faiths as possible. It wishes to thank the Civic Office and SACRE for help in contacting faith representatives and, in particular, Canon Ian Gaskill through whose office many of the invitations were circulated.

From the written responses received by the Panel (which form an annex to this Report and can be viewed in the Scrutiny Office) it became apparent that those places that did highlight a problem illustrated that it was peculiar to them and that no one policy can be appropriate to the whole of the Borough. See Recommendation 1.

However it also became apparent to the Panel that many of those responsible for places of worship did not fully appreciate current Road Traffic legislation. The Panel had been told that parking restrictions will be relaxed for the main vehicles in either a wedding or a funeral, for a reasonable period, so long as they were not causing an obstruction. As one major concern is access for funerals, especially in the town centres, the Panel was assured that arrangements could be made to ensure that adequate parking was available as necessary.

Recommendation 3.

That Highways ensure that the relaxation on parking for weddings and funerals is explained and publicised as widely as possible.

Another issue affecting places of worship in the town centres was the increase in Sunday shopping. The Panel were particularly concerned at the possible effects on Huddersfield town centre parking with the opening of the Kingsgate Shopping Centre.

Recommendation 4.

That the Council fully consider the effects on current users of town centre parking of the opening of the Kingsgate Centre, and that in doing so it is mindful of other recommendations in this Report.

Much of the justification for seeking parking permits was to assist the elderly and disabled as they attended worship. Although the Panel believed that there was no justification for making a special case for any other attendees, it did agree that where possible, arrangements could be made to assist the elderly and disabled. One solution considered by the Panel was a marked bay on the road side, which could be reserved (by sign) as a “drop-off/collection” point.

Recommendation 5.

That where it is not possible to issue permits for users of places of worship, the Council considers the dedication of a disabled/elderly “drop-off/collection” point to be reserved for the purposes of attending worship only.

Throughout its work the Panel was conscious of the delicate nature of the issues it was considering. It had to ask whether those attending places of worship should be treated more favorably than anyone else seeking to park their car in a particular area. It had to consider the significance of different days of the week to different faiths and the wide use to which places were put outside the times of actual worship.

The Panel concluded that those using places of worship should be treated no differently from anyone else. It was argued on behalf of SACRE that those attending worship on a Sunday usually benefited from free parking whilst those faiths who worshipped throughout the week had to pay. On that basis, it argued anyone attending worship should be able to park for free. The Panel could not agree with that view. However it was sympathetic to the problems caused by the differing days on which main worship took place and makes recommendation 6 accordingly.

Recommendation 6.

That when considering the issuing of parking permits to users of places of worship the Council ensures that they are available only for the purposes of that worship and associated fellowship.

The Panel wishes to thank all those who took part in its deliberations.

COUNCILLOR ANDREW PALFREEMAN.
COUNCILLOR ANN DENHAM.
COUNCILLOR MOHAN SOKHAL.
January 2002