

Payment Strategy 2017-2021

Staff Briefing Paper

Background

On 21 June 2017, Peterborough City Council's Corporate Management Team agreed to recommend to the council's Cabinet the instigation of a public consultation for the organisation's payments strategy for the next five years. The consultation will have a particular emphasis on moving the processes of administration and payments for Parking Permits and Taxi Licensing to online channels, and a proposal to close the council's cash office at Bayard Place, while offering the public alternative payment options.

On 10 July 2017, Peterborough City Council cabinet members considered the recommendation from Corporate Management Team and approved a public consultation on the above from 11 July 2017 to 20 September 2017.

Payment Strategy FAQs

1. Why is the council reviewing its payments strategy?

The last review of the council's payment strategy happened in 2008. Almost a decade later, there has been a huge shift in public behaviour, and massive developments in technology, with regards to online services and financial transactions. The majority of the public now access the internet through mobile devices, and more than 90% of British consumers have taken advantage of the convenience afforded them by online shopping. Online banking (including mobile banking) is growing in popularity, with the majority of UK adults now using those services according to the Office for National Statistics (ONS).

The public's behavioural changes strongly suggest there is significant appetite for the convenience of around-the-clock access and online self-service. It is important that Peterborough City Council explores the impact this global and national trend towards digital transactional behaviour has had on the way the users of our diverse range of services would like to interact with us in future. This consultation will provide us with insight into our residents' views towards accessing the council's services through digital channels and around-the-clock.

We also want to get the public's feedback about how we can make the process of paying for our services as easy as possible.

2. How many people currently use the council's cash office?

Approximately 1,100 people use the council's cash office every week.

The number of transactions handled by the council's cash office has fallen by 60% since 2008. Approximately 60% of residents already pay their council tax by Direct Debit.

3. What options are there for how people can pay the council the money that they owe?

There are numerous options for settling bills and making one-off payments. Council Tax payments can be paid by Direct Debit, which is the most convenient method as it requires no ongoing action by the taxpayer. Council Tax bills can already be paid online or by telephone using a credit or debit card.

NOTE: The closure of the cash office would not mean residents cannot pay for our services with cash. For example, our residents have the option of paying their Council Tax through their local bank, post office or payzone outlet, should they wish to make the payments by cash, cheque or debit card.

Applications and payments related to Taxi Licensing and Parking Permits are currently only available by following a heavily paper-based process, which involves visiting the council's cash office. This consultation will speak to the people using these services to assess whether moving to an entirely online, and paperless, application and payment process would be beneficial, and also welcomes feedback from the public about how the overall process can be improved.

4. What about vulnerable, elderly, or digitally excluded people who may not want to or be able to access online channels?

It is important to note that those who want to make payments to the council by cash or cheque have the option of using more than fifty places locally (including banks, Post Offices and Payzones) where their cash and cheque payments will be accepted. This will not change, regardless of the outcome of this consultation. For those residents unable to use online methods there will be processes in place allowing them to apply for and pay for parking permits.

In addition, **the council is already working, along with several partners in the community, to overcome digital exclusion** through the provision of training and facilities.

For example, the council will continue to provide, and hopes to grow, access to the internet and computer training at local libraries and community hubs.

Furthermore, the council has worked with Age UK, Citizens Advice Bureau, Job Centre Plus, as well as local Housing schemes (Cross Keys, Axiom, Nene Housing, etc.) to provide both structured and ad hoc digital training and advice sessions at their premises and at community events.

The council is also currently exploring the possibility of developing a team of volunteers, in addition to the "Community Connectors" with whom we work (for example, to reach the Asian, Polish and Lithuanian communities), to provide training and advice sessions in Peterborough's community hubs.

5. Is this a done deal? Is it even worth asking people for their views?

Based on the experiences of other local authorities, as well as the online services and payment options offered by central government, the council's Corporate Management Team believes that development of the payments strategy and offering a greater range of services and payment options through digital channels will be both beneficial to, and welcomed by, our residents. The consultation is a vital part of the process of ensuring that our payments strategy and the way we serve our residents is as efficient, fit for purpose and accessible as possible.

However, **no specific decisions have been made at this stage** about the issues being researched within this consultation. Our residents have more than two months to give us the feedback we need to ensure that the council can come to an informed decision about the future direction of our online services and payment channels. Having a diverse range of participants is, therefore, very important to us.

6. How long is the consultation?

The consultation started on the 11 July 2017 and ends on the 20 September 2017.

7. What happens next?

The strategy and the proposed parking and taxi systems will be revised in line with comments received throughout the consultation exercise. The results of the consultation will be presented to Cabinet on the 25 September who will make a decision whether to adopt the strategy and the parking and taxi systems as the only way to apply and pay for the service.

Parking Permit FAQs

1. How will residents access the system?

Residents will be able to access the system through the council's website via various devices (e.g. Smartphones (Apple and android), PCs, tablets, laptops, etc).

2. What if I do not have access to the internet?

Residents will be able to visit one of the developing community hubs across the city (e.g. the Community Radio Station at Herlington Centre, Cross Keys in Westwood and Gladstone Park Community Centre) to apply, activate and pay for their virtual permits. There is the potential for customers to access support from an Area Coordinator or Community Connector at these hubs and/or sign up to one of the digital inclusion sessions which are delivered at these and other locations across the city. The council

are also developing community hubs at its libraries where customers will be able to go online, scan and upload required documentation.

The council recognises that some residents will not be able to access the internet or pay online. In exceptional circumstances, the council will operate a postal permit service issuing physical permits. This system will be monitored and regularly reviewed to ensure that it is not abused and that it meets the needs and requirements of the customer.

3. Will residents need to provide supporting documentation?

Supporting documentation, such as, proof of residency and vehicle registration at address (i.e. V5C), will need to be uploaded to the online system to verify eligibility.

4. Will the price of the permits change as a result of the online system?

There will be no change to the permits costs, except for the replacement of the visitor scratch card. Currently, residents can purchase ten visitor scratch cards for £10. When a card is activated, by scratching off the date, the card can be placed in a vehicle (or more than one vehicle) during that day. Under the proposed system, a daily visitor permit (i.e. the visitor scratch card replacement) costing £1 can be used for one vehicle only on the activated date. Therefore, if a resident has two separate visitors, one visiting in the morning and another in the afternoon, two permits will need to be activated. Residents can still activate multiple daily permits at the same time.

Taxi Licensing FAQs

1. How will taxi drivers and operators access the system?

Taxi drivers and operators will be able to access the system through the council's website via various devices (e.g. Smartphones (Apple and android), PCs, tablets, laptops, etc).

2. What if I do not have access to the internet?

Taxi drivers and operators will be able to visit one of the developing community hubs across the city (e.g. the Community Radio Station at Herlington Centre, Cross Keys in Westwood and Gladstone Park Community Centre) to apply, activate and pay for their virtual permits. There is the potential for customers to access support from an Area Coordinator or Community Connector at these hubs and/or sign up to one of the digital inclusion sessions which are delivered at these and other locations across the city. The council are also developing community hubs at its libraries where customers will be able to go online, scan and upload required documentation.

3. Will taxi drivers and operators have to upload documentation to the system?

Taxi drivers and operators will need to upload supporting documents and proofs to the system as part of the online application process.

4. How will taxi drivers and operators know the full requirements before making an application?

A full checklist will be available on the council's website providing links and guidance on what documentation and proofs are required, and how these can be obtained.

5. Many taxi drivers pay for their licence in cash. Can they still do this and where?

The proposed system will only accept online payments transactions with no option for cash payments.