Parking strategies and innovation

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Foreword

LGIU exists to champion best practice, horizon-scan for emerging issues, undertake research and support our members with the analysis and insights they need to deliver for their communities. Our work aims to reduce friction where top-down policy meets a council's individual circumstances.

As we enter our fifth decade, LGIU is very much focused on the future of local government. We will continue to develop the new ideas and generate the resources that help local authorities in their vital role of place shaping and community leadership.

We are pleased to continue our support for the sector with this report on parking and innovation. We understand that parking is a complex issue that cuts across social, economic, environmental and development policies. As driving has become a divisive topic, councils tread a fine line in prioritising the needs of residents, businesses, visitors and different user groups, while meeting other strategic goals, such as net zero targets.

There are also new developments in the pipeline that councils need to be aware of and incorporate into their strategies. One such innovation is the new National Parking Platform (NPP), which has the potential to transform procurement of parking by opening up the market and giving choice to the individual motorist for the first time. In doing so it has the potential to bring benefits to local authorities, including cost savings from lowered procurement costs.

We wanted to explore this topic and understand how councils are preparing for these new parking innovations. Over the last few months, we have been gathering data and interviewing parking decision makers across the UK to get a sense of council views and level of readiness.

We found that a significant number of local authorities in the UK have a strategy gap, which could prevent them from realising the benefits of some of these innovations. This report is intended as an informative tool to aid discussions around future planning.

Background

Does parking matter?

A place to park is often seen as a universal right by many drivers. And whether we drive or not, all of us benefit from the convenience of deliveries or visits by friends, family or service providers at our homes. Increasingly, however, that 'right' is being questioned, and it is councils that have the difficult task of adjudicating between competing voices to determine where parking is provided and how it is enforced.

Within the microcosm of the parking space is a world of competing priorities: spatial, social, economic and environmental.

> **Parking takes up a huge amount of land – one London study[1] found that parking in the capital accounted for an area of $14km^2$, the size of ten Hyde Parks.**

But the driver of policy is people, not vehicles; the cost and convenience of parking is a factor in health, wellbeing, sustainability, development and inclusion plans – as such, it relies on open and far-sighted collaboration between different council teams. Parking issues can also impact a local authority's relationship with residents. The payment machine can too often be a contentious interface with the council, and antisocial parking can generate a significant number of complaints.

How are different councils addressing the issue?

In February 2023, LGIU conducted a survey on parking policies and operations, receiving responses from 108 local authorities. The 94 identifiable respondents represented a breadth of opinion across London, metropolitan boroughs, county and district councils, covering England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Of those respondents who specified their role, more than half were parking managers, with the remainder split between directors or assistant directors of transport, and the responsible cabinet members.

Our survey provided a snapshot of approaches to parking across respondent councils, detailing the extent to which these local authorities have a parking strategy, their views of procurement, payment arrangements and levels of awareness of future parking innovations such as the National Parking Platform. We followed this up with a series of interviews, which expand on the data and bring home the realities and complexities of parking provision, as well as regional challenges, such as balancing the need to attract people back to declining retail centres with a reduction in car use.

[1] Centre for London | Reclaim the kerb: The future of parking and kerbside management | Chapter 1: Car ownership, use and parking in London

Who's in charge of parking?

The role of local authorities

Traditionally, the Department for Transport (DfT) has the primary responsibility for parking policy in England, although off-street parking policy now rests with the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities. Since 1995, local authorities have been able to assume parking enforcement for on-street parking, and all but seven councils have chosen to exercise this function.

Councils' powers and responsibilities are set out by the Traffic Management Act 2004. There are fairly strict regulations about parking, enforcement, fines and income reporting, and how income from parking charges and fines may be spent. There are detailed steps that local authorities must complete before establishing a parking control scheme and a series of statutory guidance documents outline the way that civil enforcement of parking can be carried out.

Income from parking, whether through permits, on-street parking charges or any fines, must be first used to pay for any parking enforcement or parking schemes. Any surplus can only then be used to pay for transport-related expenditure (including public transport or road repairs), so parking cannot be used as a 'cash cow' for the general fund. However, local authorities can generate surplus revenue from off-street car parks.

Parking as a policy tool

As use of income from fines has to be spent first on parking enforcement or provision, the main policy objectives of enforcement has long been compliance with existing parking rules and demand management.

Increasingly though, local authorities are broadening their objectives, using restrictive parking policies to support net zero air quality through lowered emissions or active travel. Councils can also use 'permissive' parking approaches to support economic vitality in town centres and high streets, EV charging points, the mobility of disabled persons or other objectives such as suspended on-street parking fees for health workers during the pandemic.

Through our survey, we found that the objectives of parking strategies, where they existed, varied widely:

> **Just over a quarter (25-30%) focused on traditional objectives, like providing more parking and reducing congestion, while others embraced integrated and digital approaches to manage traffic and promote lower-emissions vehicles.**

> **We're doing quite a lot of work at the moment around emissions-based charging, for example. We'll be driving down that route and making sure that we further restrict the prevalence of private cars within the city. It will set very clear targets for reductions in spaces, and it will start to set out our approach for things like workplace parking levies.**

Director at a unitary in the South West

Longer term aspirations for some councils include dynamic pricing and occupancy charges. **"The idea is that if you live on a main bus route, and if you want to drive into the city, your price is higher compared to somebody who has got no bus route." Director at a unitary in the South West**

Council approaches often combine carrot and stick, such as restricting parking and vehicle access while moving cars to the peripheries of built-up areas and providing alternative means of transportation. The ability to fine-tune parking and other vehicle or transport charges will also need to be carefully monitored for equity issues across gender and disability and other domains.

Parking is often used as a policy lever to shift behaviour, particularly on the route to net zero. One council told us in the longer term, their aspiration is that future strategy will encompass dynamic pricing and occupancy charges.

But as experience in one area shows, it isn't always possible to design-out behaviour through planning. **"Where we have quite a lot of car-free developments, they can't park. People have cars anyway. They find somewhere to park, which causes its own concerns." Cabinet member at an outer London borough**

Then there are other issues related to behaviour that can vary in weight in different areas, such as discarded hire cycles, fly-tipping in car parks and parking on pavements. One person told us that **"[poor parking] is probably one of the things which comes back quite strongly now in terms of public concern." Senior transport officer at a metropolitan council in Greater Manchester**

> **We are using the Park Active scheme from the British Parking Association as a way to put those unused long-stay spaces to good use. Park Active makes use of what were formerly long-stay car park spaces that are a short walk, scoot or cycle from the town or city centre, adding Mobility Hub infrastructure and making use of Active Travel cycle lanes to travel the last mile. We offer discounted rates to encourage parking in these areas that are just a little further away, reducing congestion and encouraging physical activity.**

Head of parking in the East of England

The sector doesn't stop moving

The parking sector is evolving, as technology becomes more advanced and ubiquitous, and councils can take advantage of a broader choice of operating models.

The provision of electric vehicle (EV) charging stations as part of the parking fee, the option for onward travel through public transport or bike or scooter hire, incentives to carshare or even the replacement of parking spaces with bicycle hangers to provide storage to urban residents are all ways that councils have sought to iterate parking provision.

New technology developments, such as the DfT-funded National Parking Platform, are also likely to impact the way that local authorities procure and deliver parking services in the future.

Looking into the future, the DfT's vision for parking management is much broader. Further developments could include the service providing a more comprehensive information source, the ability to implement dynamic pricing, enabling convenient payments for multiple services (including EV charging), integrating with MaaS (Mobility as a Service) platforms, aligning with kerbside strategies and optimising data analysis for a deeper understanding of the market. This multi-pronged approach, supported by readily available data, was appealing to a number of our interview respondents who could see the potential for parking as 'multi-use spaces' with areas becoming 'mobility hubs' rather than simply a place to leave a car.

The National Parking Platform explained

The National Parking Platform (NPP) is a publicly-owned parking hub funded by the Department for Transport (DfT), currently being trialled across a number of local authorities which – if adopted nationwide – will revolutionise the way that parking services are managed and delivered in the UK.

During the trial phase, the NPP has two major stakeholders – local authorities who provide parking within their geographical area and phone parking providers who offer cashless parking solutions.

According to the DfT, the NPP has four primary functions, which are:

- To provide a simplified and improved customer journey from start to finish for motorists
- Data exchange to enable multi-supplier payments in a geographic location, creating an open market
- A way of sharing parking location information, price and space availability
- To provide a way of standardising technical and commercial relations

In delivering these functions, the NPP is expected to significantly alter the parking market as well as impact the way local authorities offer and administer parking services.

Under the current parking model, local authorities rely on a tender-based procurement process to choose a single phone parking provider to exclusively manage all parking inventory in that geographical area. This exclusive fixed-term contract limits residents and visitors to one parking app provider. Once the fixed-term contract is nearing its due date, the local authority may extend or launch a new procurement process. If the incumbent is not awarded the tender, this requires local motorists to switch to another phone parking provider.

> While the NPP is still in a trial phase in several local authorities, including Manchester, Oxford and Cheshire West and Chester, a full-scale rollout is expected by the end of 2024. This initiative will change the current parking model completely.

As a publicly-owned, not-for-profit national facility, it is expected to be set up as a non-commercial body. This will enable councils to onboard approved phone parking providers without the need for costly and protracted procurement processes, something that was flagged as an issue in our survey (more below). Instead, these digital solution providers will be able to contract directly with the NPP. The platform will allow approved parking app providers to seamlessly integrate their services and access all available parking inventory within a specific geographical area. Thus offering a transformative new approach to delivering parking and mobility services.

Local authorities are expected to see a significant transfer of costs away from them and onto motorists via the phone parking providers. For example, payment processing is expected to be outsourced to phone parking providers. The 'convenience fee' paid by some local councils as part of their contract would now be charged to motorists and not the council.

Hosting multiple phone parking providers in the same area means that if one experiences an outage, alternative phone app providers will be available on the hub. A council can continue to enforce and not experience any loss of income, which can happen under the current model when a single phone parking provider experiences a technical failure.

An increase in digital parking payments also means a reduced need, in the medium and long term, for the installation and maintenance of pay and display machines. A centralised hub for managing digital parking payments and parking inventory also gives councils a secure, cost-efficient and legally compliant data environment that can inform present and future strategic decision-making to reach sustainability goals, improve traffic management, reporting and more.

> While the NPP is not consumer facing, motorists and parking users will also benefit from it.
>
> **The most important benefit for motorists is the ability to choose their preferred parking solution.**

The current patchwork of phone parking coverage means drivers must download multiple apps depending on where they are, or where they are parking, which causes frustration and confusion. A wide adoption of the NPP across a large number of councils will create a nationwide infrastructure, enabling phone parking providers to compete, giving the choice to motorists to use a single app for most, or all, of their parking.

> **There are, however, more benefits than just choice. Motorists will be able to locate suitable parking for their journey, check tariffs and availability, pre-book parking spaces and make payments ahead of time, or even modify their parking choices should their journey change.**

Competition in the parking industry, as in any other, creates innovation, bringing new and exciting developments that will further improve motorists' experience. Innovation is currently disincentivised since the existing tender model often rewards the lowest cost proposition. Additionally, a short tender cycle means companies must focus on short-term decision-making, instead of long-term strategy and innovation.

In a competitive open market, phone parking providers will need to continuously develop new features to earn and maintain customer loyalty. It is expected that the rollout of the NPP will therefore see service improvements, such as tie-ins with connected vehicles and other transport services, for instance, combined parking and EV charging for consumers, as well as raising the visibility of alternative on- and off-street parking areas.

The initiative aligns with the trend seen in many European markets over the last decade. The model is already popular in the Nordics, the Netherlands and Germany where it has driven greater choice for consumers, increased digital adoption, generated significant savings for municipalities, simplified procurement, offered sustainable and predictable revenue streams for parking app providers, and provided a wealth of data points to evidence mobility trends and inform policy decisions. In turn this has supported innovation, including the introduction of toll-style charging, combining payments for parking and EV charging and traffic management, often in combination.

There are some interesting early findings from the trials. Before forming a single unitary authority, Bournemouth, Christchurch and Poole each had a different phone parking provider, but in May 2021 they unified their parking operations. In the beginning, cash accounted for over 80% of all parking payments. Two years on, machines collect less than 50% of total parking revenues, saving the council expenditure on machine cash collections, banking and machine repairs.

Findings

Do most councils have a parking strategy?

It is imperative for a council to have a coherent strategy which encompasses strategies focused on public transport, economic development, environment and parking.

64%
of authorities have a parking strategy

21%
of authorities are planning to develop a parking strategy

15%
of authorities have no parking strategy and no intention of creating one

Generally, the respondents' policies fall into three categories:

'traditional'

(following long-established parking policy)

'integrated'

(incorporating parking policies into broader transport and planning strategies)

'digital'

(embracing both integrated and digital approaches, potentially engaging in partnerships with other authorities)

Common objectives include reducing congestion, improving road safety, promoting electric vehicles, and prioritising choice. Revenue generation is also a factor. A majority include parking policy and strategy in their development plan, with 88% of strategies mandating parking standards for new developments. Some councils embrace most or all of the above at once, even though some may be contradictory.

Several other objectives are adopted less frequently. These include promoting freedom of choice, facilitating social housing development by freeing up sites, addressing environmental concerns, integrating with the needs of development sites, balancing competing demands for kerb space, promoting active travel, providing free parking for up to one hour in town centre car parks, and setting fees to cover the running costs of car parks.

Given the overlap between the different areas involved in parking, these strategies require extensive collaboration and take time to develop. This can mean anywhere from two to three years, to nearly six years, to develop a comprehensive approved draft from scratch, according to surveyed council representatives.

Our interviews gave further context. One person told us about when they first arrived at their current organisation and found that the council did not have a parking strategy or strategic drivers, other than income.

"We broke it down and set out some very clear principles on how we would manage parking that weren't just about income drivers. It set out a number of clear principles that still ring true… about the hierarchy of uses of space, that it should be pedestrians, cyclists, public transport and disabled people above private cars, particularly long-stay private cars within the area. That allowed us to change our charging regime and focus more on short-stay parking, and remove long-stay parking within the city, driving the behaviour change to our park-and-ride facilities; to give back space to residents and rebalance the impacts of tourism." Director at a unitary in the South West

This perspective gives valuable insights into the reality of developing a strategy which addresses the needs of people and stakeholders. It involves extensive collaboration and planning for colleagues to develop principles for parking supplementary planning documents (SPDs), minimum-maximum standards for parking provision in new developments, and liaison with strategy, heritage and economic specialists.

Another council described how they are trying to balance competing priorities: **"We have a town centre, which we want people to come back to. There's a lot of work going on to regenerate that. Obviously, we want people to come by public transport, but we want parking to be in the appropriate places as well, and suitable and accessible for everybody." Senior transport officer at a metropolitan council in Greater Manchester**

One London borough told us that improving air quality and working toward net zero were the primary aims of their strategy:

> It tackles a number of areas in terms of air quality, which is probably the number one driver in a city like London. Also, modes of transport and how we can move away from being concentrated on motor vehicles to other modes, such as walking, cycling and other new technologies that come onto the market.

Senior parking officer at a London borough

[2] SPDs provide additional information and context for local plans and can be material to planning decisions. However they are non-statutory and cannot immediately alter planning policies.

How are councils charging for parking?

Our survey breaks down analysis of on- and off-street parking management

73%

The majority of respondents **manage on-street parking**, while for the remaining local authorities this responsibility falls to county councils. Nearly all councils use yellow lines, time-limited parking and permits for parking management.

86%

Almost all of those councils **charge for parking**.

45%

Almost half **set charging levels based on managing parking demand** or **comparing with rates** set by neighbouring authorities.

35%

Some councils **consider environmental and economic factors**, while a few base charges on vehicle emissions.

90-95%

Almost all authorities **have an app- or phone-based payment system**.

75%

Three-quarters **support card payments at a street-based machine**, with a further 10% planning to do so.

28%

Just over a quarter **still provide scratch cards** as a means of payment.

14%

A minority **no longer provide a cash option**, though in some places this has been controversial.

The payment systems topic gave further insights, with one council reinforcing the importance of a simple, user-friendly system which allows for payment with coins, though this carries high costs to the parking authority. While perhaps extreme, one council we spoke to saw payment methods as a part of the 'culture wars', with some users preferring to pay by cash because **"You know, it's woke to use a phone to pay for your parking." Cabinet member at an outer London borough**

Technology has also transformed the experience of paying for parking, making it much easier to choose an accessible option for motorists. **"We've got access channels through an app, text, phone and phone where you pick and speak to people… so it's really easy for people to use." Parking manager at a unitary in the South West**

One director of place management with responsibility for highways and parking explained that parking payment was now so accessible, that complaints had nearly disappeared, removing the need to display them on their performance reporting dashboard.

> We are doing somewhere over a million transactions a year. [we're no longer monitoring] complaints … we've completely turned that around.

Director at a unitary in the South West

However, as parking policies drive behavioural change, new types of complaints can arise from policy enforcement, such as emissions-based charges which are often contested by drivers.

In most cases, phone and app payments have removed much of the burden of everyday maintenance, such as having to collect and carry cash. Phone parking providers also offer their own customer service, which resolves the vast majority of customer contacts. For instance, apps allow for individual users to take account of Blue Badge mobility status in their app settings, minimising hassle for individuals with disabilities.

Although most of the people we spoke to were satisfied that digital methods have improved the experience for users, one person said that complaints and issues still have an impact: **"We spend an inordinate amount of time on those journeys that fail. For digital transactions, it is a small number, but still concerning in terms of the amount of resource that we have to spend." Senior parking officer at a London borough**

Current procurement approaches

We asked our survey respondents how satisfied they were with current procurement methods for phone-based parking, in terms of choice, time and cost effectiveness.

Of those with phone parking providers, 86% contract them through a tendering process. When asked about the approximate cost of the tender process, most councils reported costs below £25,000, although a few cited costs exceeding £50,000. Most councils accept the necessity of following the procurement process, but opinions are divided regarding its cost efficiency and the level of choice and competition among phone parking providers.

More than half of respondents neither agreed nor disagreed on whether the current tendering model was cost or time effective.

Approximately one-third **consider the process to be efficient** in terms of time and cost, while 20% disagree

Feedback from our interviews gave a sense of significant challenges. As one officer said: **"procurement rules ... are far too restrictive and load far too many costs onto local authorities." Senior parking officer at a London borough**

> When choosing a phone parking provider, the survey revealed that **cost to the user, cost to the local authority and reliability of service were seen as the most important factors**. Quality of service and user convenience were also valued, but to a slightly lesser extent.

However, some councils do put user experience at the centre of their procurement process. One council told us how they did that during their most recent procurement process – when interviewing shortlisted parking providers they asked them to demo, on the spot, how to download and use their own app.

"And those who struggled to do it quickly were put to the bottom of the pile. They didn't know what they were going to have to do. Speaking to them afterwards, they thought we were a bit mean. And I said, 'Well, sorry, that's what you're expecting the customers to do. You've told us in your words how easy this thing is to use, we're actually now going to get you to prove that it is easy to use.'" Parking manager at a unitary in the South West

We also asked our survey respondents if there had been an issue or incident that had prevented either the purchase or enforcement of phone-based parking in the last five years. Approximately one quarter (27%) reported issues or incidents that had hindered the purchase or enforcement of parking payments via an app, these were identified in their majority, as service outages. The impact of these technical problems was often difficult to quantify, with estimates of lost revenue ranging from zero to £250,000.

"[Procurement] takes a lot of capacity, and officers don't have expertise in that area. You're having to try and see what's around in the market, but you're not the specialist, and writing tenders from that side takes a lot of time." Senior transport officer at a metropolitan council in Greater Manchester

Competition and choice

Less than half (45%) of our survey respondents are satisfied with the choice of phone parking providers and the competition among them. And as councils are increasingly seeking to use parking as a way to support other policies such as active travel, the need for ever more sophisticated, yet easy-to-use, payment methods may drive satisfaction down further.

Within a single-supplier system, longer contractual periods are often cheaper, and changing phone parking providers often incurs rebranding or signage costs as well as consumer confusion. During a long contractual period, a parking app provider that delivers 'cutting-edge' technology today could be quickly outpaced by other solutions, leaving the council stuck with a phone parking provider with less innovative products and technology.

"In the last ten years, the markets have consolidated. We've got far fewer high-quality providers, and the rest are either not big enough to take on a contract of our size, or the quality of the product that they're pushing is just something we wouldn't touch. In terms of the quality, it's all about how easy and quickly your customer can use the app or the IVR (interactive voice response)." Senior parking officer at a London borough

Existing single-supplier procurement approaches rarely take account of boundary issues. This means where people may be driving and parking in multiple local authorities and be required to use a number of different apps or pay-by-phone accounts. Councils may be selecting a phone parking provider through a procurement exercise, but councils may not always be prioritising the user experience when doing so and users are unable to exercise any consumer power at all – because each chosen phone parking provider operates within a geographical monopoly.

The NPP has been set up to address these issues and make it easier for motorists to choose the phone parking provider they would prefer to use, based on factors such as ease-of-use and integration with other services. This was recognised by one of our interviewees who said: **"It's great for customer choice, we would see that as a great thing." Senior parking officer at a London borough**

Another council agreed and could see the advantages: **"[In] the model of an open market, a multi-vendor platform, you have your terms and conditions upfront – whoever meets them can get on board. You present the terms and conditions financially to them, and off you go. If they fail to meet them, you can have penalties in there, such as removing them from your market. And there's none of the costs of procurement." Senior parking officer at a London borough**

"The reality is, the customer just wants to park, they don't give a monkey's what system you use, they don't care. They're agnostic to that, aren't they? I'm agnostic to it when I go around the country, to different places. They just want to make sure their vehicle is not going to get a PCN at the end of the day. And that's what we're trying to help them do."

Director at a unitary in the South West

Awareness and perception of the NPP

33% of respondents are familiar with the National Parking Platform and have a good understanding of its operation

30% have heard of the NPP but have limited knowledge about it

36% have not heard of it at all

All respondents express interest in obtaining better access to parking data to inform policy-making, with those familiar with the platform recognising its potential for improved data. Respondents overwhelmingly prefer the idea of the government-created hub (42%) rather than a private-sector hub (4%).

Overall, respondents are cautiously optimistic about the development of the open market for parking. The majority express a desire to understand how this model has worked in other European countries, or prefer to see successful implementation in the UK before adopting it locally. Most welcome government efforts to provide more information about its implementation in practice.

Most respondents (61%) are yet to form an opinion about the open market model, but those who have are overwhelmingly positive (38% positive vs. 2% negative). While interviews highlighted many positives, especially in terms of operator choice and avoiding the need for operator procurement, concerns were raised as well. Councils are wary of shortcuts, and are concerned about passing on costs to consumers, ensuring clarity in the financial arrangement between companies and customers, and maintaining a focus on service.

Some respondents are concerned that prices might rise. Others worry that the emphasis on delivering an open market platform for more efficient procurement might detract from a potential focus on customer experience. A perception that the NPP is not ready for their needs was also repeatedly expressed. One respondent, coming to the end of their current contract, **"had hoped the NPP would be at a stage where we could just jump"**, but concluded that for them it was not. Another felt it was ready to go for rural boroughs that could not use pay and display machines, but lacked the sophistication required for their particular needs. Another said: **"For me, the idea is really, really good. The technicalities of it need exploring further." Director at a unitary in the South West**

> **Perhaps because of these concerns, only 13% think there is a possibility that their authority will move to the NPP model in the next 12 months.**

Perceived advantages

Interview respondents could see benefits to the NPP...

Reducing procurement cost and complexity

"The [NPP] is absolutely the way to go... the procurement rules at the minute are far too restrictive, and load far too many costs onto local authorities."

Senior parking officer at a London borough

Consumer choice

"It's great for customer choice, we would see that as a great thing."

Senior parking officer at a London borough

Increased system resilience due to multiple suppliers

Eliminating boundary issues for people who live, shop, study, recreate or work across more than one local authority area

"We've had instances of where the customer has received a penalty but they have insisted they've paid. They've used the wrong app with the right location number and paid for a day's parking somewhere else."

Parking manager in the South West

National oversight of the market through the NPP, ensuring viability and minimum standards and reducing due diligence burden at the local level

Areas for further clarification

...but adoption will require more communication and explanation from central government.

Greater involvement by local authority stakeholders

"When I hear of a national solution, I'm a bit suspicious of it because it doesn't necessarily work. But on the other hand, it will be more efficient if it does."

Cabinet member at an outer London borough

Providing more transparency around pricing and revenue models

"“[Our] app provider doesn't charge customers at the moment. We pay a small fee. I can see it would have to change that arrangement, so the customers are clear that they're paying extra to use the app. But then, how would that work out between the companies?"

Senior transportation officer at a metropolitan council in Greater Manchester

More explanation around complaint handling arrangements across multiple parking app providers

Conclusion
Strategy and awareness gap

In our introduction, we highlighted that the parking space is a world of competing priorities. Each council with responsibility for parking needs a strong strategic foundation with clear and non-conflicting objectives. But our report has found two important gaps: councils who either lack a strategy or whose strategy is out of date, and lack of awareness or understanding of the NPP and open market.

The NPP has the potential to radically change how parking services are contracted and managed in the UK. However, it's clear from our survey that local authorities currently lack knowledge and understanding about the NPP, and the competition in parking that it enables, to make informed decisions about whether or not to adopt this model. Until parking managers, directors and cabinet members are properly informed about the NPP, produced strategies will fail to acknowledge how the market is likely to change.

However, the appetite for the benefits of the NPP was high among survey respondents who were informed about it. The sentiment was overwhelmingly positive as a principle, however, questions about how the NPP would work, and its readiness remain. Councils wished to see successful examples of the NPP in practice before committing to its implementation.

Overall, there is a clear and urgent need for awareness-raising from the government in order to bridge that gap between appetite and readiness. It's likely that the government will look to progress the current status of the NPP in the near future, which is currently in an advanced pilot stage, and make the NPP available to all local authorities.

It is therefore vital that the DfT leads an information campaign to ensure key local decision-makers have the insights and tools to make informed, future-proofed decisions in their mobility and parking strategy.

Central government must

Increase the pace of NPP development and clarify timelines.

Demonstrate clear examples of where NPP approaches are already working, delivering greater efficiency, supporting innovation and providing consumer choice.

Develop an inclusive and stakeholder-driven information campaign around the NPP and its benefits.

Local government should

Develop or refresh parking strategies to take advantage of a crucial tool to support wider local policy objectives.

Further information
– More on NPP: **https://npp-uk.org**
– LGIU resources: **https://lgiu.org/publication/the-council-and-the-car/**

The LGIU - Local Government Information Unit - is a not-for-profit, non-partisan membership organisation. We are for local government and anyone with an interest in local democracy and finding local solutions to the challenges that we all face. Our resources, innovative research and connections are relied on by colleagues across the globe.

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