

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

County Council
23rd February 2017

REPORT AUTHOR: County Councillor Wynne Jones, Portfolio Holder for Finance

SUBJECT: Question from County Councillor Matthew Dorrance

A fund to enable local authorities to provide free parking in town centres has been agreed by Welsh Labour Government. Will the Cabinet detail how it plans to deliver free parking to Powys?

Answer from County Councillor Wynne Jones, Portfolio Holder for Finance.

It is not correct to state that a fund has been established by Welsh Government to provide free car parking and there is obviously some confusion relating to the Welsh Local Government funding settlement for 2017/18 year. Within the overall Welsh Local Government settlement there was £3m of funding included (and here I quote from the statement made by the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Local Government Mark Drakeford) 'to support town centre parking'. However the funding, like all the funding included in the settlements for Councils in Wales, was NOT hypothecated.

Moving therefore to the Powys County Council situation, the amount in the settlement was £138k (not hypothecated) in a funding award that represented a 0.5% cut in overall funding. In addition there were cuts to other specific grants including a 6.7% cut to the Single Environment Grant (SEG) which goes to support our recycling service.

Like all Councils in Wales, Powys County Council does not spend its funding allocation in accordance with the Standard Spending Assessment(SSA) and it is a matter of local priorities that determine the spend in each area. In Powys we currently spend in excess of the SSA in several key priority areas such as Education and Adult Social Care.

The Cabinet made a decision, previously supported by Council, to develop an income stream, to bring in additional funding which would be important to safeguard front line and much valued services in this period of on-going austerity (an approach that is also supported by a recent Welsh Audit Office report). Car parking charges play a significant part in supporting the Council's overall funding. As a result Cabinet felt that it made very little sense to allocate £138k towards making a very small reduction in car parking charges at a time when there were much greater priorities, such as Education and Adult Social Care. In addition Cabinet felt that there were also other matters should be given a much higher priority; these include trying to save Household Waste Recycling Centres and alleviating the cut to the SEG, where the £240k cut in

grant would otherwise have almost certainly led to forcing the consideration of moving to a 4 weekly residual collection from the current 3 weekly.

With regards to Car Parking charges, they were last raised in 2015, and on the agreed 3 year cycle are due to be reviewed again in 2018. As part of the consideration outlined above, Cabinet have not brought forward any proposals to increase car parking charges for 2018 in this budget (not withstanding and previous decisions currently in the process of being implemented).