

Report to Members of the Transport SPC on the administration of Parking Permits in the context of Galway City Council Parking Control Bye-Laws

Overview

- ✓ The Parking Control Byelaws 2009 were formally adopted by the City Council at its meeting on Monday the 14th December 2009 and remain in force.
- ✓ The bye-laws make provision for the issuing of up to four parking permits per dwelling house and one or two permits for apartments (depending on their location) in specific residential zones within the city core and its suburbs, for bona fide residents and carers. These permits which are issued at the discretion of the Council, must be renewed annually. A copy of the relevant sections within the Bye-laws is attached for information.
- ✓ For the purposes of clarity, a holder of a valid parking permit can park his/her vehicle in an **on-street** Pay & Display spaces (**excluding car parks**) in the immediate vicinity of their property without having to purchase a Pay & Display disc.
- ✓ Whilst the elected members make the Bye-Laws that provide for parking permits, the day to day administration of parking permits is an executive function managed by the City Council's Traffic Department, as is the setting of the annual application/administration fee which is currently €30. Such administration fees are reviewed across the organisation each year at budget time and are implemented by way of Chief Executive Order.

Overview of procedures involved in assessing applications for Parking Permits

- ✓ The key steps involved in applying for and being granted a permit include:
- ✓ Completing and submitting annually the standard Parking Permit Application form together with the relevant administration fee (copy of application form attached for information)
- ✓ Providing the following information with the application
 - *A copy of current proof of Residency.*
 - *A copy of the current Insurance Certificate for the vehicle in question.*
 - *Students who are named drivers on their parent's insurance policy and applying for a permit must provide proof that they are attending college in Galway.*
- ✓ Traffic department assess applications through a combination of desk top and visual checks to ascertain if residents have suitable, adequate off-street parking available at their residence as this is an important factor in deciding whether or not to grant a permit(s)
- ✓ Traffic Department issues/refuses a permit
- ✓ If a permit is refused, there is an appeals system in place whereby an independent person outside the Traffic Unit is assigned to consider and determine appeals.

Contextual Background

- ✓ Galway City Council currently has c.2,000 **on street** parking spaces
- ✓ The City is divided into 23 zones for the purpose of issuing parking permits.
- ✓ Numbers of parking permits approved each year since 2016 are as follows:

2016 - 925

2017 - 848

2018 - 833

Why are Parking Permit Applications refused?

As can be seen from the figures above there has been a slight reduction in the number of permits granted over the past three years, some of which relates to residents that had held a permit but who were refused when it came up for renewal and customers are understandably confused as to why they are no longer eligible. There are two main reason for this:

- ✓ When the permitting system under the 2009 Bye-Laws were introduced, the City Council like all local authorities suffered from a significant reduction in staff resources and applications and renewals were processed predominantly on a desk top basis in the Traffic Department as there were insufficient staff available to carry out a physical check on the ground to ascertain what off-street options were available to the householders in questions
- ✓ Application for new Parking Permits continue to be dealt with by the Traffic Department. In 2016 as part of a corporate restructuring the issuing of renewal of permits was transferred to the general customer services unit who again carried out a desk top processing exercise. In mid-2018 the administration of the renewal of parking permits was re-assigned to Traffic Department as it was acknowledged that on the ground visual inspections were essential to determine eligibility. As applications came up for renewal it was discovered that some householders had adequate off-street parking available to them and their permits were not renewed. A decision was made that permits would not be cancelled mid-year even when it came to light that there was not an entitlement to same and that it would be dealt with at renewal stage. This gave rise to anomalies in the intervening period in a number of cases whereby one neighbor could have lost their permit and the other still had theirs. This will be phased out in time once all existing permits have been rigorously assessed at renewal stage.

In essence, the permit scheme has not changed per se but it is fair to say it is more vigorously assessed than heretofore following on from the assignment of additional resources to the unit.

Next Steps

It is accepted that the more detailed assessment of permit applications has led to some confusion amongst customers. It is essential that that all City Council schemes are administered in an open, transparent, fair and consistent manner. It is also important that customers who are refused permits understand the reasons why. It is therefore timely to review the way in which the scheme is administered to ensure openness and consistency and in this regard I have requested the Administrative Officer in Transport, who is also the Line Manager for the Traffic Unit, to undertake the following:

1. Review and simplify the application form
2. Draw up a list of the criteria used by staff in assessing permit applications and attach this to the application form to assist customers in understanding how and why decisions are made
3. Review the current appeals system and consider the introduction of a second level of appeal. Currently there is only one appeal following the issuing of the decisions by the Head of the Traffic Unit