

1.0 Executive Summary

The report outlines the methodology and evidence used by the Group to reach the conclusions and recommendations to help formulate an updated parking policy. It is worth noting that throughout this process the Group indicated they felt that at the implementation of the 2017 Secondary Units Policy, and the introduction of charging, consultation was non-existent, or poor, and it was important that as this was the first Scrutiny Group formed under Origin's new 'Together Strategy' that the process was open and transparent to establish more confidence in Origin's intentions to work in partnership with and listen to residents.

2.0 Introduction/Background

In 2017, a new secondary units policy was introduced which, at the implementation stage, introduced charging for parking. Previously to this there had been parking enforcement on some estates at the request of residents who were experiencing problems with parking and also residents who did not make a request e.g Amber Wharf, which was widened under the policy with new areas having charging and parking enforcement introduced. Prior to this, where parking enforcement was in place, Origin only recharged for permits with a small administration cost.

Following the outcome of a Stage 3 complaint by residents of Whitehead and Plowman Close, which was upheld by the Complaints Review Panel, it was agreed that parking should be one of the first areas to be reviewed under the new scrutiny process. The issues raised in the complaint were shared in detail with the Group by a resident member from Plowman Close.

The current Secondary Units Policy was due for review in August 2019, so the Group were tasked with making recommendations to inform the revised policy. Due to the particular issues around parking, it was decided that parking should have a separate policy specific to parking.

In line with the Terms of Reference for Scrutiny Panels a group consists of between 8-10 residents. An initial 9 people were recruited, with two members dropping out during the process. The initial mix included a shared owner, leaseholder and NHS tenure alongside social, affordable and market rent tenures with a mix of residents from Hertfordshire and London. The Group was chaired by an independent Tpas facilitator, supported by an Origin member of staff responsible for providing and gathering information, with the Community Development Team recruiting, facilitating the set-up of meetings, communications, organising a resident survey and taking minutes at the meetings.

3.0 Methodology

The Group was constituted as a Task and Finish Group aiming to report recommendations to the Customer Services Committee. Having been postponed in March, due to Covid19, the Group met four times virtually on 10th September, 19th November, 16th December 2020 and on the 6th January 2021.

The residents on the Group also formed a WhatsApp Group which allowed them to review evidence, ask questions of Origin and discuss issues in between meetings.

The Group undertook a range of lines of enquiry requesting specific information and reviewing evidence provided to them. This included:

- The current Origin Secondary Units Policy
- Parking policies of other housing providers
- Background information including financial information and a database of sites currently patrolled and charged and those that were potentially in the pipeline to be patrolled and charged
- The results of a survey sent to over 1,800 residents (1128 by email and 408 by text linked to survey monkey, 279 by post) identified as having parking bays on their estate or block which elicited 246 responses (approximately 14%)
- Information asked for by the Group on specific issues relating to parking at the properties they manage which was collated by Neighbourhood and Home Ownership managers.
- Whether parking control was outsourced
- Information on current utilisation of charged for spaces taken from Orchard

This information was discussed and analysed during meetings and in the WhatsApp Group.

4.0 Findings & Recommendations

Perhaps the two key questions from the broadbased survey were:

1. Do you feel that parking control is needed on your estate or block?
2. If yes (pay for parking), do you feel that the amount you pay is reasonable?

In relation to Question 1 - 51.63% answered yes and 48.37% answered no. In relation to Question 2 – 39.04% answered yes and 60.96% answered no.

However, it was considered by the Group that there were inconsistencies in the results as some people who answered yes to question 2 were not paying for parking and in addition some of the comments on the survey generally did not appear to tie in with the answers given.

In examining the other evidence, it was very clear that when parking control and charges were introduced at Whitehead and Plowman Close the take up of permits was only 29% and 4% respectively. By comparison, at Birch Court all the spaces are being used and there is a waiting list for a space and for Diploma Court, Deanery

Close and Chalice Court the proximity of East Finchley Station caused problems of commuters parking in resident's bays when there was no parking control in place. Some leaseholders have a parking bay included in their purchase and just pay for an annual permit.

The conclusion the Group drew is 'that one size does not fit all' and that the wider survey was inconclusive and a response rate of approximately 13.5% was not adequate to draw firm conclusions. They felt a localised approach, taking into account the views and issues in each area would be a better approach and to aim for a much higher rate of response.

Based on the experience of some residents on the Group, at the initial implementation, residents were told that the policy was coming into force and were given reasons such as helping with abandoned vehicles that actually are not dealt with by parking companies. In the final consultations (when parking control was already going to be implemented) they were told that Origin needed to look at ways to raise revenue given the rent decrease. The conclusion was that paying for parking did not improve the service and the current policy is written very much in the framework of generating income rather than service provision. Whilst some of the other housing providers do have outsourced parking control on some of their estates, they are only charging for permits and not additional charges for renting a bay.

The Group was unclear why there was a need to make these charges when previously there was no charge other than for those people who bought a permit. The cost of permits was a negligible cost compared to the annual rental on a bay.

The Parking Scrutiny Task and Finish Group have discussed and produced the following Recommendations to be presented to the Customer Services Committee for review and the Executive Board for a final decision. We would like to thank Origin Housing for this opportunity to have a voice in the production of the Parking Policy.

We would like to suggest and ask about keeping this Scrutiny Task and Finish Group together for at least a further set of quarterly meetings over a 12 month period. The reasons for this are:

(a) because we feel it is important that we are informed directly about the decision made by the Executive Board in order that there is a proper completion to our purpose, and

(b) that we would like to be involved with the process of the implementation and/or to oversee and continue to assess the policy in at least its first year.

We would also hope that the Board and the final decision would be flexible enough to review the final Policy if problems arise from it for the residents.

We felt it was important to put forward recommendations that would produce a mutually beneficial system/policy for managing any locations with parking issues, and with as little cost as possible to both the residents and Origin Housing. It has become evident

that surveys and consultations can be open to misunderstanding and misinterpretation as well as incurring costs, time and effort. Therefore, we do not recommend conducting any more consultations or believe they would provide any clearer an understanding of what residents need. If Origin does carry out any consultations / surveys, we recommend that there must be a 50% return rate for the survey to be valid.

Instead. it would be far more preferable for sites to identify themselves if they have issues with parking, rather than sites approached and being told they require parking enforcement, as was the case with the previous Policy, evidenced by the Survey and the Complaint which brought these failings to light. Further to this, Origin should be open to hearing directly from those residents, and put in place any reasonable solutions those residents feel suit their needs and requirements; thereby having location based decisions to solve location based issues.

It would be far more helpful for Origin to facilitate and/or encourage local meetings to discuss any such matters, residents prefer this as they can air their concerns and have open discussions, seeing issues from others perspectives and hearing for themselves what others views are, rather than being told what others are saying via a survey; decisions would then be made in line with what residents actually want and in turn this would encourage future engagement and foster more trust, thereby aiding the repair of any damage done when enforcing the previous Policy. It has also become apparent through the survey and the original complaint that this is crucial for Origin to be in line with and according to its professed and publicised ethos and values.

1. An immediate roll back to the pre-2017 parking situation.

Due to there being no available evidence of any previous, transparent consultation (i.e. conducted according to regulations governing consultations) ever having taken place prior to the implementation of this hugely “tenancy changing” Policy, this would be the only fair and honest way to move forward.

This would be a great starting point and a critical means to repairing or beginning to build a potentially stronger relationship based on trust and mutual respect between Origin Housing and their residents.

We are recommending that all charges related parking, direct debits towards permits and any other parking related charges are immediately stopped. The signage related to the previous Policy is not a part of this roll back recommendation, therefore any physical signs etc. should remain in place given that they have been already been paid for arguably, to all intents and purposes by the residents. It would be deemed a waste of money to have them removed.

2. Origin Housing should no longer view parking as a “source of revenue”.

Assisting residents with any issues arising from parking should be a genuine effort to provide support, by actually listening to the issues as they arise and the remedies proposed by residents to alleviate the said issues.

In fact, it appears from the comments in the Survey that this would be the most desirable way of addressing all issues not only to the parking areas but also concerning the wider communal areas (covered by Service Charges) of sites owned/managed by Origin Housing.

- 3. If any sites self-identify as needing support regarding parking, (a) Residents should be thoroughly consulted, (b) Various methods/options that would provide free or cheap solutions should be considered, tried and exhausted prior to resorting to the introduction of parking controls managed by a third party management company, involving permits and ticketing which invariably only targets and adversely affects residents.**

The current Policy was introduced, despite sometimes decades of previous desperate attempts by residents to have other methods introduced to remedy all manner of issues involving car parks/parking areas, but not necessarily always about parking issues, e.g. Lighting for the provision of security and safety as well as to deter anti-social loitering and overnight under the cover of darkness dumping/fly tipping. These attempts were simply ignored and seen as insignificant, leaving residents' exasperated, devalued and often resorting to self-management of their communal areas.

Furthermore, the current Policy was introduced with the most austere, and to quote a comment from a resident in the Survey, "overzealous... parking systems" possible. The harsh restrictions of the previous Policy, that is, the requirement to have rent accounts in credit for eligibility, restrictions enforced for 24 hours a day for the entire year, do not exist in the many areas managed by Local Authorities in our busy capital city, in addition it also appears little thought had gone into how difficult parking would become given the economic circumstances of most of the residents, disabled drivers, carers, family and support networks. If we then factor in that 'no parking issues exist on most of the sites "picked" for enforcement of the Policy' there is no justification for them whatsoever. In fact, we would go further and say the previous Policy has no place at all anywhere, not least in Social Housing areas.

- 4. If residents of any sites want parking controls parking should be free to them and their visitors. If a third party Management Company is to be involved it should only be one which has met with thorough approval with the following companies (BPA, AOS, ATA) and allows for recourse to appeals via POPLA**

If residents request permits, they should be entitled to a number of (possibly up to 3) free permits per household, and a similar number of free visitors permits; if this isn't possible there should only be a small one-off annual fee, which should be reviewed regularly at least every 2 years.

5. Locations whose parking isn't under Origin control, e.g. those managed by PCM, Octavia, or Local Authorities as in the case of some Camden residents, should be assisted by Origin to achieve optimum arrangements

It would be desirable if Origin could act on behalf of residents in these locations according to their specific issues or needs, in order that they are not left vulnerable to unfair charges, ticketing, or a lack of appeal procedures.

Residents living on those sites not under Origin control require a point of contact at Origin to assist with any parking charges. It would be useful if Origin came to an arrangement with these sites' management teams whereby residents whose vehicles are issued tickets have the ability to have them cancelled.

This would demonstrate that Origin is truly concerned and interested in the difficulties their residents are facing in aspects of their tenancy that are being managed outside of Origin.

6. The Parking Scrutiny group would like to have the ability to inform all residents about the outcome of the review, once agreed

A newsletter sent out specifically from our group, and/or additional information on the next rent statements and/or within Origin's next newsletter at the end of the year; all of the above would be most preferred for maximum reach. We could also use these forums and this opportunity to give encouragement to residents on the benefits of engaging with Origin on this and other important matters, as well as with residents from other sites. Hopefully the outcome will be positive and the residents will be happier, thereby having a more positive and hopeful attitude towards 'engaging' more with Origin.

Thank you again for the opportunity to take part in this incredibly and mutually important matter. We hope you agree that we have attempted to bring together recommendations for a Policy that is both economically viable and mutually beneficial. It our deepest hope that the Board will consider the above points and areas of concern for the residents and implement these changes to their Parking Policy.

Thank you on behalf of the Parking Scrutiny Task and Finish Group.

May you, and we all, have a very good 2021, with good works and outcomes to our collaborative efforts.

Lessons Learnt

- It has been both rewarding and enlightening to be part of a process that aims to consider the relationship between Origin and residents from both sides of the challenge. We look forward to seeing more issues dealt with in this way, as they arise.

- Origin to continue to work alongside residents, placing their needs and best interests at the core of decisions. Especially where plans involve a significant change to tenancies. Residents should have a central position in the decisions behind any such change of operation.
- Topics up for scrutiny are extremely important subjects and their outcomes will affect all of Origin's residents' daily lives. Therefore, recruitment to the scrutiny groups should be open for all. Residents should be involved in the recruitment process, e.g. through Spotlight, as the role, its function and importance can be more clearly expressed to residents by residents. Full capacity should be an absolute must. The numbers and locations involved should be more in line with the numbers they are representing.
- Availability of sharing details for discussions outside of scrutiny meetings should be a necessary aspect of involvement, and if an individual is not willing or able to fully take part in this, they really will not be a productive participant. It is unfair for the weight of the scrutiny to be carried by two or three members, and this is a failure of the recruitment process.
- Establish what is expected of members as well as what their expectations of the group are, how scrutiny is meant to work, resources and staff available to the group, and if group has anything it specifically needs/wants.
- Don't rush into putting a survey together, it makes for a poor quality survey holding very little value.
- Be realistic about the time and number of meetings that may be required. Rushing through scrutiny doesn't ensure a thorough outcome, which should be unacceptable for everyone.
- The scrutiny group should be involved in the decision making process in relation to how it functions, i.e. whether it needs a longer, more informed review process in line with traditional scrutiny or whether a more condensed review as in a task and finish group is preferable.