

<b>Item No.</b>	<b>Classification:</b> Open	<b>Date:</b> 11.03.03	<b>MEETING NAME</b> Executive
<b>Report title:</b>		Abandoned Vehicles: The Way Forward	
<b>Ward(s) or groups affected:</b>		Borough Wide	
<b>From:</b>		Strategic Director of Environmental & Leisure	

### RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1 That the Executive approves the way forward operations and the new approach to Abandoned Vehicles contained within paragraphs 19 of this report.
- 2 The Executive approves the policy in relation to Abandoned Vehicles, set out in paragraph 24 of this report.
- 3 That Members consider whether they wish to pursue and fund an “immediate removal and storage” operation in future, as set out in paragraph 20 of this report.

### SUMMARY

- 4 The Executive and Councillors in general have expressed a great deal of interest in how the abandoned vehicles removal service operates and how it can be improved. The Executive has approved an additional 190k within the General Fund Budget and £200k within the HRA budget for the service in the 2003/04-year. This report sets out proposals about how the service can be improved following a mini review in conjunction with the Housing Directorate. It also sets out the cost of a store all approach as currently operated by Liverpool Council.

### BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 5 The Abandoned Vehicle Service is part of the Parking and CCTV business unit and currently only removes vehicles that are deemed to be abandoned on the Highway. Legislation requires an authorised Council officer to determine those vehicles to be removed and destroyed. At present the inspection service is outsourced to an external provider. The service is re-active and relies upon information from members of the public and other Council officers to initially identify the abandoned vehicle.
- 6 The service on estates is provided as part of the Housing Estate Parking Contract, and operates on the basis of customer complaints and estate inspections, coupled by weekly visits by the parking contractor.
- 7 During the year 2001/02 the Parking section received 8,595 complaints of abandoned vehicles, of which 2,848 were considered abandoned and removed for destruction. The remaining 5,747 vehicles were not considered abandoned,

most were untaxed and clearly had owners, others were not at the location upon inspection.

- 8 90% of reports are investigated within 2 working days, and where appropriate, a 7-day notice issued. This advises the owner to contact the Council or remove the vehicle. If the Council has received no response, a second inspection is carried out, and if appropriate, the vehicle is then authorised for destruction.
- 9 The Housing contractor removes between 2000 and 2500 abandoned vehicles per year. The pre destruction process also includes a 7 day notice, but the vehicles are then removed to a pound and stored for a period of up to 21 days pending tracing of the owner. There is no information on the numbers of reported vehicles at present.
- 10 While most abandoned vehicles do not represent an immediate physical danger, research indicates that their presence encourages crime and sets a detrimental tone to the area. The longer such vehicles are left, the more likely they are to be vandalised and, frequently subject to arson attack.
- 11 A recent Department Environment Transport Regions (DETR) report states that:

“Between 1997 and 1999 the total number of malicious fires recorded by the fire service increased by 25% from 82,600 to 102,900. By far the biggest factor behind the increase was a substantial rise in malicious vehicle fires by 50% from 42,200 in 1997 to 63,200 in 1999”.
- 12 The vast majority of these fires occurred in cars (Southwark is seen as the arson capital of London). Car theft and other associated vehicle crime are seen as contributing factors, with arson often used to conceal evidence of some criminal activity. However, evidence suggests that the huge rise in vehicle fires is closely related to the increase in the number of abandoned vehicles.
- 13 **Performance**

Previous performance:

2000/01: 2563 Abandoned vehicles were destroyed within an average of 17/18 days on the highway, and 2000 vehicles within 6 weeks on Housing land

2001/02: 2848 Abandoned vehicles were destroyed within an average of 15/16 days, and 2200 vehicles within 4 weeks on Housing land

2002/03: 2498 Abandoned vehicles have been destroyed up to Jan 03, on the Highway, and 2000 from housing land; time to remove an Abandoned Vehicle 2-3 weeks

2003/04: With the combined operation of Environment and Leisure and Housing it is envisaged that 6000 vehicles of which 95% will be removed within an average of 6 days.

## KEY ISSUES FOR CONSIDERATION

- 14 The Executive and Councillors in general have expressed a great deal of interest in how the abandoned vehicle removal service operates and how it can be improved, as part of the Councils cleaner, greener strategies, but bearing in mind the council's commitment to customer focus issues.
- 15 The abandoned vehicle problem is increasing. A downturn in the resale value of scrap metal due to the reduced demand means that "end of life" vehicles have little value. Stricter environmental legislation has meant that the cost of dismantling them has increased and local authorities can no longer offset the cost of removal by sale for scrap.
- 16 The increasing difficulty of older vehicles not passing MOT tests coupled, with the fact that cars can be purchased at auction for as little as £50 with no necessity to provide proof of identity has made cars a disposable commodity likely to be abandoned. Southwark Council's current policy is to seek prosecution of the person who abandons the vehicle or pass on the cost of removal to the last known owner. To date this has not happened. The problem is proving ownership, as the incentive not to register increases with the proliferation of restrictions placed upon motorists. This is exacerbated by the lack of enforcement by the Drivers Vehicle Licence Authority (DVLA) what's more there is no effective deterrent for drivers who do not register their vehicles to avoid prosecution for motoring offences.
- 17 Part 1 "End of Life" (ELV) legislation comes into force in September 2003, this requires that all pollutant fluids, including fuel, brake fluid, coolants etc, will need to be removed and recycled before disposal of the vehicle. This will obviously increase the price for disposing of a vehicle. Discussions with neighbouring boroughs indicated that costs of scrapping vehicles would double. However, the true cost can not be determined until a complete tendering exercise has taken place. An extra 390k in total has been approved as growth to help fund these additional costs.
- 18 It is essential that the Council service is consistent across both highway and housing estates, not only in efficiency but also communication with the public. Steps have been taken with the Housing department to develop proposals for "a one call fixes all approach". It is proposed to jointly fund a combined operation, managed by the Environmental and Leisure directorate. This will result in the complete removal of all abandoned vehicles within the borough be it from the public highway or housing estates.

### **The Way Forward Consideration:**

- 19 Set out below is a proposal to improve the abandoned vehicle service for member's consideration. It is suggested that the operation be divided into three main functions.

#### **1.Environmental Call Centre (ECC):**

Officers feel that following an appropriate training programme, access can then be provided through the ECC as a primary contact point. A reporting format would be devised which would ensure that all calls would be recorded and

screened before being passed to the abandoned vehicles section. An information technology system will allow central access to the server that will enable the public to be kept informed (via ECC) of the status of the vehicle whether it is at inspection or disposal stage.

## **2. Inspection & Prosecution**

It is proposed to bring all the service with the exception of destruction in-house. The service will include a vehicle removal manager, who will be responsible for the removal of all abandoned vehicles, an abandoned vehicle officer, two vehicle inspectors, and an administration officer. It is also intended that the existing two officers dealing with estate parking be seconded from housing management for a period of up to 12 months to the parking section. The housing staff will remain responsible for the operation of the operation of the housing parking service, including customer contact. A management reporting line to the parking manager will be supplemented with a dotted line to a senior manager in housing.

In addition, it is proposed to train other council officers to give them empowerment to identify and ticket abandoned vehicles. These will initially include, Highways DSO operatives, Street Wardens, PCSO's, Waste Enforcement Officers, Park Rangers, Contract officers and assistant contract officers in Housing neighbourhood offices.

Members should note that this proposal represents a significant step improvement in service for both residents and vehicles owners by changing the service from being reactive to proactive, whilst improving customer information and feedback.

All cost are set out in paragraph 25(a).

## **3. Removal & Disposal**

As stated in point 17 it is proposed to go out to tender for the removal and destruction of vehicles. The contract duration will be 3 years. Operations that will be required of the successful tenderer will be as follows:

- Collection of vehicles from the street within 48 hours of authorisation
- Capability to have a compatible IT system for tracking status of vehicles
- Sufficient space to receive and process vehicles
- De-pollution of vehicles in accordance with European Directive 2000/53/EC - End of Life Vehicles Parts 1&2
- Final destruction of vehicles
- Issue of destruction notice
- Notification to DVLA of destruction

The process in flow chart form is shown in appendix 1 on page 10 and 11

### **The Fast Track System (Liverpool Scheme)**

- 20 Another option that may be considered is removal of all suspected abandoned vehicles. In this option vehicles are removed within 48 hours and stored off street in a secure vehicle pound. Where after a "period of time" if no contact is made and the vehicle is considered to have no value it will then be destroyed. This is the current scheme being operated in Liverpool and is referred to as a "fast track" system. A liaison police officer is based in the Council call centre and deals with all stolen vehicles, which are then removed to the Police vehicle pound by their own contractor. Another feature of the Liverpool operation is close working relationships with other interested bodies. This has resulted in joint actions namely operation cubit (whereby the vehicle once identified as being abandoned is actually turned into a cube). This type of service is obviously a more expensive option, as it would involve double handling and storage facilities outside the borough. Currently Liverpool Council has removed a combined total of 4159 abandoned and stolen vehicles. Since the introduction of the new initiative the amount of vehicles disposed of has increased by approximately 10%. These vehicles were removed from the highway only. Southwark Councils vehicle pound at Mandela way would not have the capacity to accommodate this type of service. However, this type of service could still be included in the tender if members so wished. An approximate cost for this service is set out in paragraph 25. Part b.

#### **Advantages of this scheme are:**

1. The vehicle is removed quickly, which can have a positive effect on the environment.
2. There is a less risk of Arson attack the quicker the vehicle is removed.
3. Some sections of society would find Southwark less attractive to leave a vehicle that is untaxed but being used frequently, through fear of the vehicle being removed.

#### **Disadvantages of the scheme are:**

1. Cost per vehicle as shown in paragraph 25 (b) are more than double that of the option recommended and costed in paragraph 25 (a).
2. There is a risk that due to the speed of the process there will inevitably be vehicles destroyed that actually belong to people. i.e. the owner may be on holiday or incapacitated and has therefore left his / her vehicle untaxed. This could result in adverse press coverage.
3. Some sections of society would find Southwark an attractive place to abandon vehicles, as they would be removed and destroyed within 48 hours. This could result in a great deal of increased costs.
4. Southwark would not have the capacity to store abandoned vehicles off street and would need to locate space, which would be outside the borough, which could increase costs.
5. Vehicles, which are taxed, that appear abandoned will be removed. However,

destruction will not take place until 14 days after tax expiry. This will create extra costs and take up valuable space.

### **Publicity**

- 21 It will be proposed that the parking section develop an advertising campaign to ensure that members of the public are aware of the new operation and its service standards. This will also include the intention of the Council to pursue offenders through the courts.

### **Area Initiatives**

- 22 While service improvements such as those outlined above will improve the situation, they will not be the ultimate cure. We have recently carried out a joint operation with the Police, DVLA, Fire brigade, Street Wardens, and the Housing directorate. This involved identifying and removing over 80 abandoned vehicles within a week. It is vital that these relationships are maintained. This will be one of duties of the vehicle removal manager to forge links and share intelligence, which will enable frequent joint operations to take place. This type of action has been a key factor in the successful performance of Medway Council who were the pioneers in the type of joint up working.
- 23 In 2004/05 the "End of Life" phase 2 is likely to be introduced this will increase the cost of removing vehicles by up to 6 times the cost of "End of Life" part 1. This will entail a greater need to store vehicles while the stripping of all parts takes place. This burden will eventually be taken away from local authorities when the cost of disposal will be a responsibility of the vehicle manufacturer. The expectation is that manufacturers will be required by European legislation to allow for this cost. At present a date has yet to be identified.

### **24 Policy for the Removal of Abandoned Vehicles**

Set out below is a summary of the key strands of the suggested new approach.

- The vehicle removal manager and parking manager have delegated authority to remove and dispose of abandoned vehicles.
- A vehicle will be deemed as abandoned if untaxed, in poor condition and has remained at a location for a period of time unless claimed by its owner.
- The "period of time" required to reasonably determine that a vehicle is abandoned shall be defined as 7 days from first inspection.
- The decision will be made in each case as to whether the vehicle is in such a condition that it ought to be destroyed. Book value will be a relevant consideration.
- All abandoned vehicles will be removed within 48 hours, after a "period of time".
- Where a vehicle that may be abandoned is left in a dangerous manner, it will be removed to a secure place for a "period of time" before disposal.
- A "thing on the highway" will be removed for immediate destruction within 24 hours of inspection.
- A vehicle with no value will be destroyed after 24 hours storage (either on street

or in a vehicle pound), where it has value it will be stored for 7 days.

- All reported vehicles would be inspected within 48 hours of the first report and a warning notice affixed where appropriate.
- Trailers, caravans and boats will be considered to be vehicles.
- Where the owner of an abandoned vehicle is traced, the abandoned vehicle section will attempt to recover costs and prosecute.
- Stolen vehicles will be removed to a secure place and stored for a "period of time" while attempts is made to recover costs from insurers.
- All reports of abandoned vehicles must be made through the agreed process.

### Resource Implications

25 (a)

The cost of the new service will be:

Contribution to the ECC	£ 22,000
Vehicle Removal Manager (10)	£ 32,000
Abandoned Vehicles Officer (sc6)	£ 26,000
2 x Inspectors Sc. 5 (with vehicles)	£ 56,000
1 x Admin Officer (sc4/5)	£ 20,000
Extras (holiday cover, mileage etc)	£ 15,000
Contract Removal costs (estimated)	<u>£ 400,000</u>
Total costs	<u><b>£ 571,000</b></u>
Cost per vehicle disposed of	
Based on and assumption of 6000 vehicles:	<b>£95</b>

The total costs are funded by: Environment and Leisure **311.5k** and the remaining **259.5k** by the Housing Directorate.

The above costs and General Fund resources have been reflected in the proposed budget of the Environment and Leisure Directorate 2003/04. The Housing Revenue Account includes growth of £200,000. The remaining £59,500 will be met by seconding two staff funded from the HRA base budget.

### (b)Liverpool City Council Operation.

Having a directly employed Abandoned Vehicle Manager, plus Administration support, and 2 no Inspectors sets up the operation. The service operates as a re-active service and relies very much on members of the Public for information on abandoned vehicles. The service only deals with abandoned vehicles on the highway, housing estates have local agreements. Liverpool has outsourced all other operations, which include the removal, storage and destruction of vehicles, the management of the pound, which includes all correspondence to possible owners. They also fund a full time police officer whose main duty is to tackle the issue of stolen vehicles, which are then removed by a police removal contractor.

Costs associated with this service are high in comparison to the option described in paragraph 19.

4159 vehicles up to Feb 03 were destroyed of which 1500 can be considered to be "Thing on the Highway" (TOH) and would not need to be stored. These would go straight to destruction.

1. Staff Costs	£108,000
2. Removal of 2659 vehicles	£106,000
3. Immediate destruction of 1500 (TOH)	£ 45,000
4. Storage charges 100 spaces £4 per day	£ 218,000
5. Destruction of 2659 vehicles	£ 80,000
6. Pound management charges EST.	£ 200,000
<b>Total costs</b>	<b>£757,000</b>
Cost per vehicles based on 4159 vehicles	<b>£182</b>

These charges reflect the current cost as opposed to the new costs that will be incurred by ELV. To give an estimated figure of the new revised costs £52,500 (1500 @ £35) needs to be added to activity 3 and £93,000 (2659 @ £35) to activity 5. This would bring the total equivalent service **£902,500**. This would increase the unit cost to **£217**.

For the estimated equivalent number of vehicles under this scheme (6000) a total budget of **£1,302,000** would therefore be required. Should members wish to consider this option and additional £912,000 in total would need to be identified in the base budget for 2004/05 for this purpose.

## 26 Performance Levels

2002/03 target was to remove 80% of abandoned vehicles within 12 days. However, given this growth in budget agreed in principal by members in 2003/04 this target will be halved so that 95% of abandoned vehicles will be removed within an average of 6 days.

There has not been a target for Housing estates in the past; therefore this would represent a significant and visible improvement for residents.

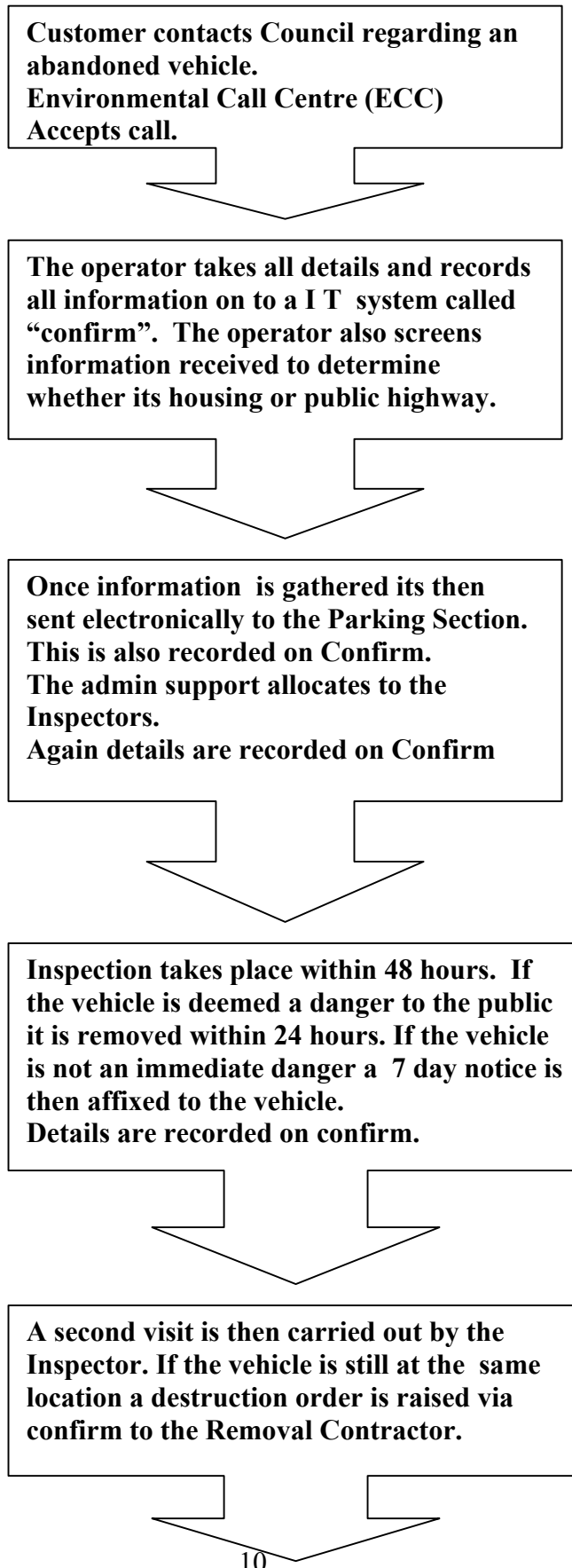
## SUPPLEMENTARY ADVICE FROM OTHER OFFICERS

### Concurrent report from the Director of Housing

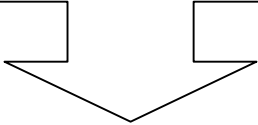
- 27 This report proposes an integrated abandoned vehicles service, which will be more efficient and effective than that provided at present. The additional facilities for reporting inspection and feedback will represent a significant improvement in this service for housing residents.
- 28 Growth of £200,000 has been included in the HRA base budget as part of the 2003/04 budget setting process, and the increased costs for this new service can be contained within this budget provision.
- 29 It is proposed that the two officers currently managing the estate parking service be seconded to the Environment and Leisure Directorate to add expertise and knowledge of housing matters, and ensure the service becomes truly integrated, while ensuring that housing issues are dealt with. A service level agreement will be developed to that effect, together with a dotted line reporting relationship to senior management in the housing management service, and through them to residents.



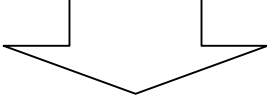
- 30 The Housing clamp and removal contract currently includes abandoned vehicles. It is a joint contract with Environment and Leisure. This proposal would therefore join all parking contracts and ensure that contract management is also carried out at one location.
- 31 Preliminary discussions with the contractors, APCOA, indicate that the additional capacity created by taking the abandoned vehicles element out of the Housing part of the contract can be used to generate more clamping and removal activities, which should also deliver further service improvements.
- 32 Officers and tenants are currently working together to amend the tenancy agreement and Housing policy guide to enable the removal of untaxed vehicles, as well as for the improvements to service relating to abandoned vehicles.

**Appendix 1** Process of an abandoned vehicle from initial report to destruction.

**The Removal contractor on a daily basis up-dates confirm to record the details of the vehicles that have been destroyed.**



**Payment is made through the confirm system**



Background Papers	Held At	Contact
Abandoned vehicle Way Forward document. Housing SMT report	<u>151 Walworth Rd</u>	Nicky Costin 0207 525-2156

<b>Lead Officer</b>	<i>Des Waters</i>	
<b>Report Author</b>	<i>Nicky Costin</i>	
<b>Version</b>	<i>Draft</i>	
<b>Dated</b>		
<b>Key Decision?</b>		
<b>CONSULTATION WITH OTHER OFFICERS / DIRECTORATES / EXECUTIVE MEMBER</b>		
<b>Officer Title</b>	<b>Comments Sought</b>	<b>Comments included</b>
<b>Executive Member</b>		
<b>Date final report sent to Constitutional Support Services</b>		