



ASHFORD
BOROUGH COUNCIL



17
18

Annual
Parking
Report



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Foreword

from the Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Wellbeing

I am pleased to share with you Ashford Borough Council's annual parking report 2017/18. This report summarises the fantastic work of our highways, parking and transportation team over the last financial year.

Getting our parking offer right is crucial. We aim to ensure parking is fair, safe and easy for our residents and for visitors to our borough. Our civil enforcement officers (CEOs) deliver this aim out on the ground – it's not always easy, but I'm proud of the work they do. Not only do our CEOs deal with parking enforcement, they take on a wide range of educational activity, for example delivering road safety awareness to primary school children, with fantastic results.

Our residents' survey 2018 told us that 47% of our residents are very or fairly satisfied with council car parks. 27% of our residents are fairly or very dissatisfied. Analysis suggested that it is the cost of parking that most influences residents' satisfaction and that the public believed parking charges were too expensive, or should even be free. For many reasons free parking isn't possible, although we do ensure we offer discounted rates in key locations at key times. It's important to note the survey showed us there was no correlation between dissatisfaction and the ability to pay.

Our residents made many comments as part of the survey – people commented that there were not enough car parks and that the payment machines were too complicated to use.

We have taken action to address these issues, as I hope you will see when you read this report.

Providing excellent parking services is a fine balancing act – for example we consider community need, ensuring compliance before enforcement and how we use our service to drive economic success in our town centre. We also need to ensure we take steps to improve our air quality and improve the health and wellbeing of our communities. Key to that will be encouraging other methods of transport, including public transport, cycling and walking.

Our relationship with our partners is fundamental to all we achieve in Ashford. I'd like to thank our partners who work with us to ensure we provide the best parking service possible. Partners include those on our Joint Transport Board (JTB) – integral to ensuring we have the right responses to highways and transport related issues.

If you have any suggestions for how we can improve parking, or how we can balance the need for vehicles with our environmental improvement and health and wellbeing work, please email them to parkingcustomercare@ashford.gov.uk. We will include the summaries of suggestions received as part of future annual parking reports, as well as information on how we are addressing the suggestions.

Introduction

Ashford's parking service provides 3,077 on and off street parking spaces across the borough, catering for all road users and vehicle types. The service is responsible for providing, managing, maintaining and enforcing on and off street parking facilities and controls throughout Ashford – mainly within the town centres of Ashford and Tenterden.

Ashford Borough Council's parking service aims to be a trailblazer by taking advantage of all opportunities to continuously improve our service offer.

This annual report sets out to provide information on:

- Service improvements in 2017/18
- Our future plans
- Our CEOS
- Performance information
- Financial information



The borough of Ashford

Ashford is situated in the county of Kent and is the largest borough within it, covering 224 square miles and containing 39 parishes. The estimated population of the borough in 2015 was 122,000, having trebled in the last 40 years. The population is predicted to increase to 129,900 by 2021 and to 149,200 by 2031.

The borough has the largest rural area in Kent and has two main towns; urban Ashford and the rural town of Tenterden.

Ashford's road and rail connections make it ideal for commuting to London, to other parts of Kent and to continental Europe. The borough's location, connectivity and accessibility make it an ideal business location, with the number of jobs predicted to grow by at least 12,400 between 2010 and 2030.

Our journey of town centre regeneration and growth continues. This can be seen as you drive around the town – the new college has opened, as has a new Aldi. Our Elwick Place development includes a new 6 screen cinema and hotel complex which opened in December 2018. This new development includes a 282 space car park – we have anticipated the increased needs and responded. Four of these spaces provide charging points for electric vehicles.

More change continues to come – including building new, high quality homes for people to live in and investment in our town centre such as the Curious Brewery development and the expansion of the Ashford Designer Outlet. Following the expansion of the outlet, 500 jobs will be created

for Ashford's local community. As well as this, the owners will introduce a complimentary shuttle bus linking the Ashford Designer Outlet, the town centre and the international train station at peak weekends and during the school holidays, while also providing funds for the enhancement of pedestrian and cycle routes from the station.

We want people to be able to enjoy the very best Ashford has to offer, whether in town or in our rural areas.

Parking restrictions exist to facilitate this – ensuring access is fair, safe and easy. Illegal parking causes no ends of problems and impinges greatly upon residents and visitors, for example by restricting others ability to access, making the highway unsafe and making things difficult for others.

Demand for parking continues to grow, but that is not the only issue we have to bear in mind. We also want to encourage more people to use public transport, to cycle and to walk more. We are in the middle of developing our cycling and walking strategy. We want to improve the health of our communities and also take steps to preserve and improve our air quality standards.



Fair, safe and easy parking

Our vision is to make parking fair, safe and easy for all residents and visitors to our borough.

It is our ambition to provide a high quality, right first time parking enforcement service. We aim for our enforcement to be:

- Fair
- Consistent
- Intelligence led

Illegal parking causes numerous problems with the way that our roads operate, impacting on the safety of other road users and those walking and cycling, as well as causing an issue for public transport, emergency vehicles, businesses and residents. Illegal parking can have a very real impact on peoples' ability to enjoy public spaces.

As demand for parking grows, we strive to strike the right balance between the needs of all communities and the impacts of restrictions. We strive to maximise compliance and minimise our need for enforcement and the issuing of Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs).

Our parking service enforces against 37 different parking contraventions. For a full list of these, please see Appendix 1.

Our parking restrictions are advertised in various ways, including on our website, on signage at the relevant locations and through more direct channels when we are implementing new schemes. Where we have

introduced new restrictions, we work hard to ensure relevant service users are aware of the changes – either through the website, using warning notices for a time limited period or through our social media channels.

The main area of work for the parking service continues to be the patrolling and enforcement of on street parking – this includes:

- Parking near schools, especially at drop off and pick up times
- Resident parking schemes
- Town waiting time restrictions
- Overnight HGV parking





Service improvements in 2017/18

Fees and charges review 2017/18

Fees and charges for parking services cannot be increased purely as a way to increase revenue. Our fees and charges need to be considered in terms of costs of administration and our need to meet our statutory duties – including safe movement of traffic, provision of suitable facilities and traffic management.

In April 2017, parking charges increased for the first time in five years. The increase was set at 10 percent across the board.

Parking is a key part of a busy and thriving town, and we know we have a role to play in encouraging people into our town centre and supporting our retailers. We continue to offer free parking at the following times and places:

- Edinburgh Road multi-storey car park – free after 3pm every day, free all day on Sundays and bank holidays
- Flour Mills – free on Sundays and bank holidays
- Station Road – free after 3pm on Sundays and bank holidays
- Bridewell Lane – free on Sundays and bank holidays

These offers help us to address some of the issues raised in our residents' survey, as outlined earlier. They have also allowed us to boost our businesses – our town centre restaurants have reported to us that they have noticed the difference in evening trade.

Our business permit scheme also continues, which provides further support to our town centre economy.

Safer school environments

Compliance is our preferred way of managing parking – and the key to achieving compliance is education and understanding.

Our CEO team developed a road safety mascot – Moreline the Wizhog - in 2016. Since then we have been visiting primary schools with our mascot, promoting road safety and educating the children about the dangers of vehicles stopping outside of schools. The children respond really well to us and we receive nothing but positive fantastic from them! This work has also been really well received by our schools and they have told us it has made a positive difference. The children pass on this learning to their parents, and this makes a big difference when the parent is on the school run and looking for a space to park.

We also support the Kentish Express Walk to School Scheme – aiming to reduce the number of cars around the school gates at key times – making it a safer and healthier environment for our children.

Enforcement is still a priority around school gates and we regularly enforce outside of 25 schools in our borough, working with our police partners to do so.

Expansion of off street electrical charging points

Purchasing alternatively fuelled vehicles is a growing trend. The council has specified that high numbers of electric vehicle charging points within new developments are required. We also provide 14 charging points in our own car parks – including 4 at the new Elwick Place car park. We continue to offer free electric to electric vehicle owners at our charge points across the borough.

Our developing air quality strategy will also ensure a focus on promoting the switch to electric vehicles, or indeed other forms of transport entirely.

HGV clamping pilot

In October 2017 we launched a heavy goods vehicle (HGV) clamping pilot. We worked with Kent County Council (KCC) to issue an experimental traffic order (ETRO) and with the Department for Transport (DfT).

HGV overnight parking has been an issue in Ashford for many years – particularly along a section of the A20 and within four industrial estates. This caused many problems including restricting the free movement of traffic, making the roads unsafe to use, littering and noise pollution for nearby residents.



The pilot allows us to issue a PCN and clamp any HGV in contravention to the order. We have been allowed to increase the release fee from £40 to £150 – which allows us to cover the significant costs of enforcement.

During the first year of the pilot we clamped 1,964 HGVs – 929 of these were along the A20 and 1,035 within the industrial estates.

The number of vehicles parking overnight in the trial locations as a result has significantly reduced.

The improvement in overnight and over-weekend conditions along the A20 has been transformative for residents and road users. The pilot is due to end in 2019 and it will be reviewed in consultation with DfT and KCC.

We of course recognise the vital service that HGV drivers provide and to this end we are working to increase the lorry parking spaces at our truck stop in Sevington to 600 spaces - we have seen an increase in the number of HGVs using these facilities alongside the pilot.



CEOs on bikes

Our CEOs have traditionally undertaken their regular patrols on foot – the best way to get a real feel for what is going on in our towns and villages. Our borough is very large, and sometimes it can take longer than we would like to complete a patrol, or to get to some of our harder to reach patrol points. The CEOs make use of one of our two vans to get to Tenterden or one of our rural villages where possible. When we are going to places with known parking issues, the last thing we need to do is turn up with a van that needs to be parked!

We introduced electric bikes in August 2017 following on from a successful pilot. The team shares five pool electric bikes and the related specialist safety equipment. We have provided advanced bike training and offer annual refresher training too.

The electric bikes allow officers to cover their patrols more quickly and get to patrol locations without adding to existing parking pressures. They also provide us with a much greener way of getting about quickly.

Blue Badges

We have been working closely with our colleagues in Kent County Council to educate users of Blue Badges to ensure they were being used correctly and to advise holders on how to combat possible fraudulent use. Our CEOs had conversations with many people while they were out and about, and badge holders were given a copy of the scheme booklet if they didn't already have one.

Starting from the beginning of 2017/18, if a Blue Badge holder parked illegally, we issued a PCN and their details were passed onto the Blue Badge audit and fraud team.



If we identify that a Blue Badge is being misused, we retain it, give the user a receipt and return the badge to the issuing authority for further investigation. In the first year of enforcing Blue Badges in this way, we retained 29 badges and we have also noted a significant decrease in incorrect parking by Blue Badge holders.

Smart use of technology

We are always looking for ways to make parking services fairer, easier and safer. We want to ensure that our parking service is as easily accessible as possible and enabling card payments is an important part of this.

Card payments went live on our machines in December 2017. By the end of March 2018 a total of 18,261 tickets were purchased using cards, amounting to £46,137.78 in income terms.

We also had 106,401 phone transactions in 2017/18, amounting to £347,404.35 in income terms.

These new payment options mean we have addressed some of the concerns raised in the residents' survey – we have increased the number of ways you can pay, making it easier for all.

Our CEOs have also been issued with smart phone technology that they can use to issue PCNs. The devices also use updated software to make the whole process more efficient and also make recording evidence as simple as possible.

Our future plans



Investing in our parking facilities

Not only is Ashford a growing town, with increasing demand for parking facilities, but our Ashford Town Centre Masterplan identifies some of our current parking provision sites as suitable for development – key to promoting growth, achieving greater economic prosperity and transforming Ashford into a destination town. We also currently have a temporary car park in Elwick Road, which is helping us meet commuter needs as well as the parking demands of the new Ashford College.

In order to meet the increased needs and offset the loss of some of our parking locations, the council has agreed to explore options around the provision of a multi-storey car park in Ashford town centre. Plans have been drawn up and will be considered at the end of 2018/19. Our new car park will be innovative and exciting – we will have the highest quality design, signage, payment options and facilities.

This new car park will also provide a viable and sustainable replacement for the fall out of Formula Grant, ensuring we can continue to fund key council services our communities rely on.

Developing our parking strategy

Our parking strategy is currently under review. Key will be ensuring we hit the right balance between the needs of all – so those who live, work or visit our towns. We want to ensure good access for all, as well as ensure other forms of transport are encouraged and enabled.

We work with our partners across the council to ensure we provide the best parking service possible and we will continue to take advantage of new opportunities to improve the service.

We continue to explore the possibilities available to us in terms of pay on exit car parks and the use of Automatic Number Plate Recognition (ANPR) technology to make using our parking services even easier. We are also exploring further pieces of technology for our CEOs and the wider team, with the aim of making the service even more efficient and effective.

Green vehicles

We are working on an Air Quality Strategy. One of the key elements of our strategy will be ensuring we enable the switch to electric vehicles in the future. We will continue to review the need for off street electric car charging points and work with partners to explore options around possible on street facilities too.

CEOs +



Illustration drawn by Mike Cook, CEOs Team Leader.

Our civil enforcement team is made up of 13 officers. They routinely patrol in a number of key locations across the borough and will also go to other areas where intelligence suggests there are some parking problems we can help with. Our CEOs, however, do far more than simply issue tickets to those who have contravened traffic regulations. The below gives a few examples of other vitally important tasks undertaken by the CEOs.

Abandoned vehicles

Our CEOs provide the eyes and ears out in our communities. They might be the ones to spot an abandoned vehicle, or they might go to check out a possible abandoned vehicle following on from a complaint from a member of the public.

If the vehicle is dangerously parked, we will immediately notify our police partners. If not, the CEOs will monitor vehicles to ensure they are indeed abandoned, and will attach removal notices to the abandoned vehicles and report back on the results. It's not just cars that we deal with – recently we have dealt with an abandoned boat!

A recent audit by the DVLA on our abandoned vehicle process was highly positive and we will seek to maintain and improve upon the high standards we have set ourselves.

Removing fly posting

Whilst patrolling our CEOs always keep an eye out for any illegal fly posting on our street furniture. Fly posting can cause a significant distraction and can obscure vital information for road users. On behalf of the Highway Authority our CEOs remove illegal fly posting as soon as they see it.

We also then track down the business advertised on the fly posters (where possible) to ensure that those who have committed the flyposting do not do so again, whether through education on the illegal nature of fly posting or through enforcement action.

Motor vehicles for sale on the highway

Cars for sale on the kerb side can take up valuable space, cause a dangerous distraction and cause traffic problems. Our CEOs will attach notices to such vehicles requiring that the owner removes the vehicle or face prosecution.



Illustration drawn by Mike Cook, CEOs Team Leader.

Keeping our car parks in excellent condition

CEOs ensure that our facilities are in good working order when they are on their regular patrols, ensuring that any issues are quickly identified and dealt with. This might be more than you imagine – for example in 2017/18 we had trouble with gulls in one of our car parks. The birds were nesting in the parking bays and causing all sorts of problems. Gulls are protected birds and so we cannot remove them, their eggs or their nests during nesting season. Our CEOs always removed potential nesting material from the area prior to and during the nesting season. This action, and our regular presence, meant that this year we were successful in making the gulls relocate to another, more suitable location!

Ensuring excellent customer service

The work we do with children in schools and our other non-enforcement duties helps to redefine our roles with members of the public. The very nature of the enforcement element of the job, however, means there can be conflict with some road users.

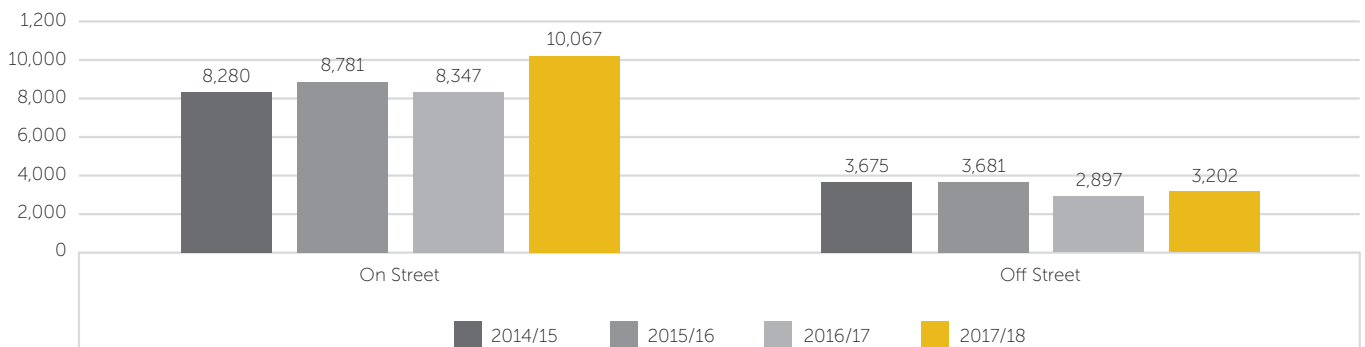
Ashford invests heavily in training for its CEOs, and conflict management training is a key part of that. In 2018 our CEOs had training to help them develop the awareness and skills they need to build more effective professional relationships and be better prepared when dealing with potential conflict situations. The aim of this is to help our CEOs understand triggers of conflict, increase mindfulness when working with members of the public and, where possible, prevent conflict from occurring. Our CEOs have found this training very useful – not only their jobs, but their personal lives too!



Performance information

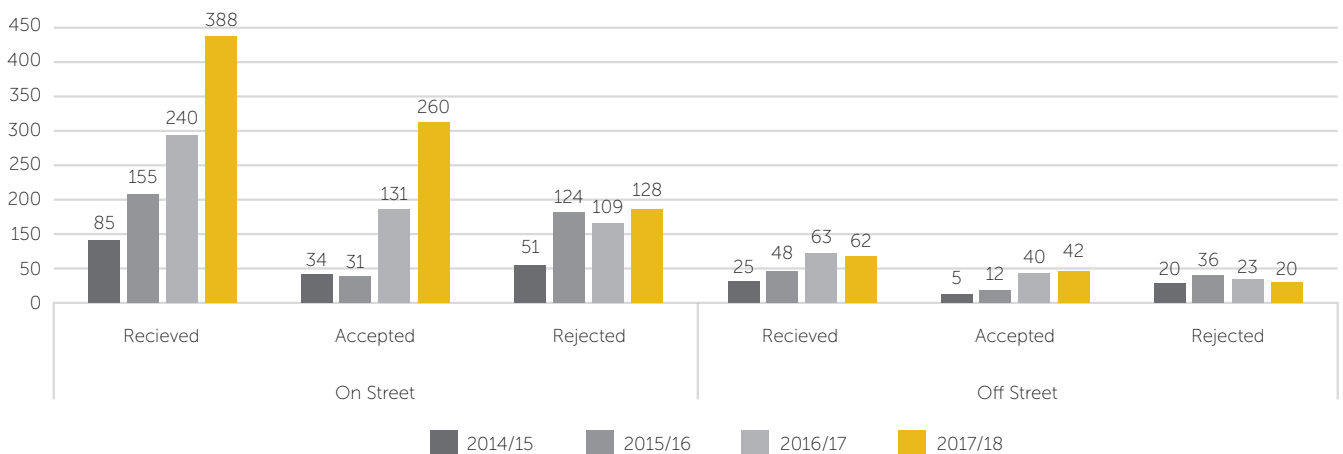
Our CEOs issue Penalty Charge Notices (PCNs) when they observe a contravention. In 2017/18, our CEOs issued 13,269 PCNs – an increase on previous years for a number of reasons, including our HGV pilot.

Total tickets issued

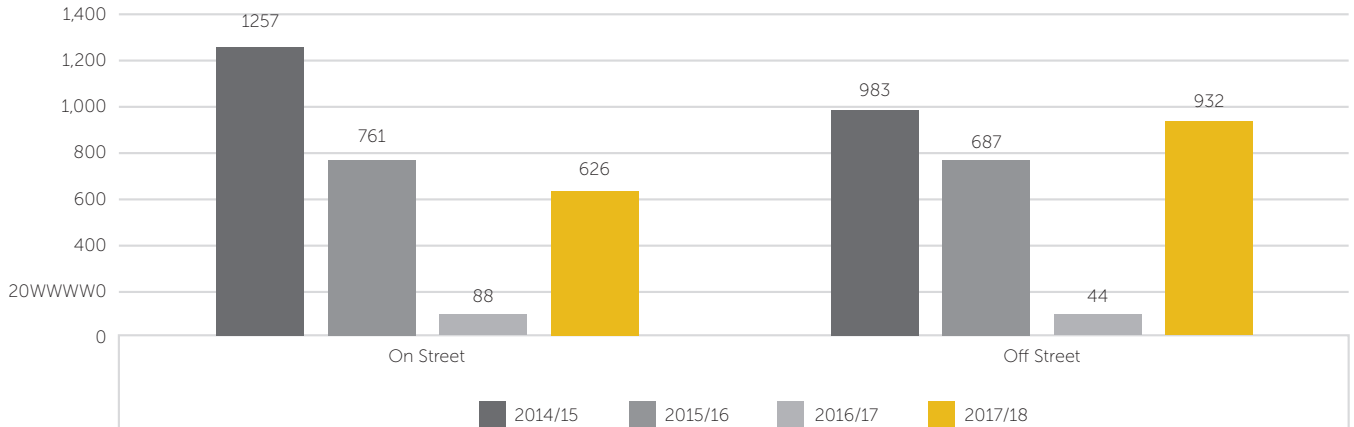


Of these PCNs issued, we get a number of appeals or representations. Officers then consider these appeals and make decisions whether to allow the appeal or otherwise on a case by case basis, using our enforcement policy to ensure fairness and consistency.

Number of representations

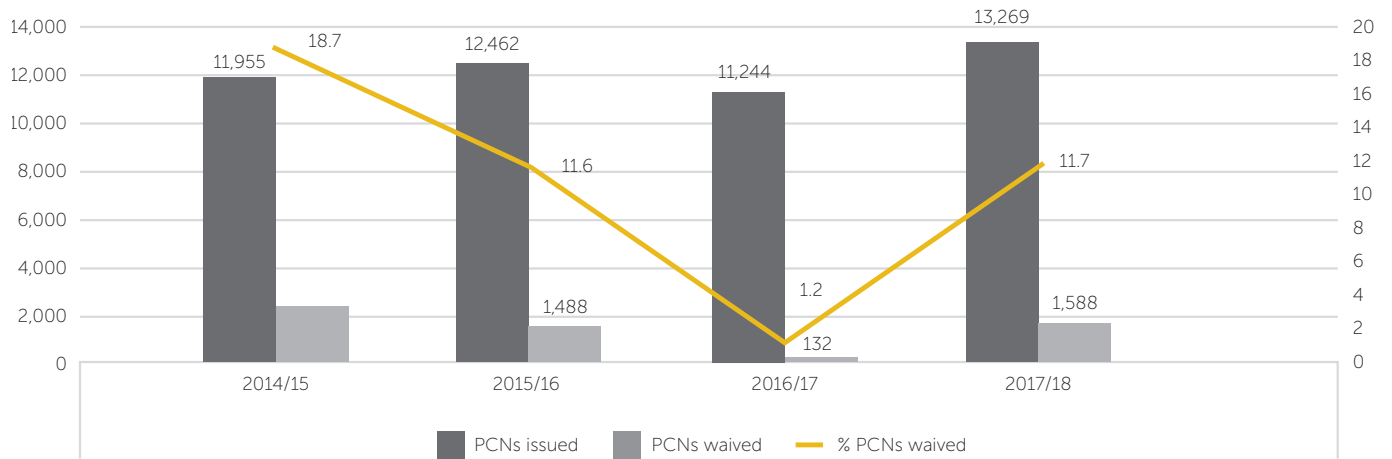


Total tickets waived or written off



2016/17 was an unusual year in terms of numbers of tickets waived or written off, and we are performing at usual levels again in 2017/18 – we waived or wrote off 1,558 PCNs, which is equivalent to 11.7% of the PCNs issued.

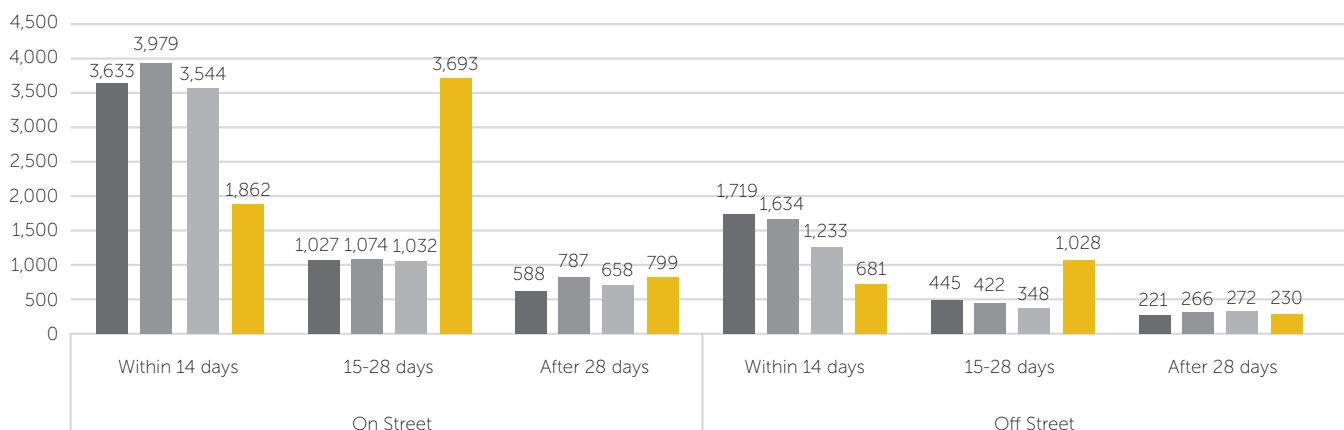
PCNs issued vs waived



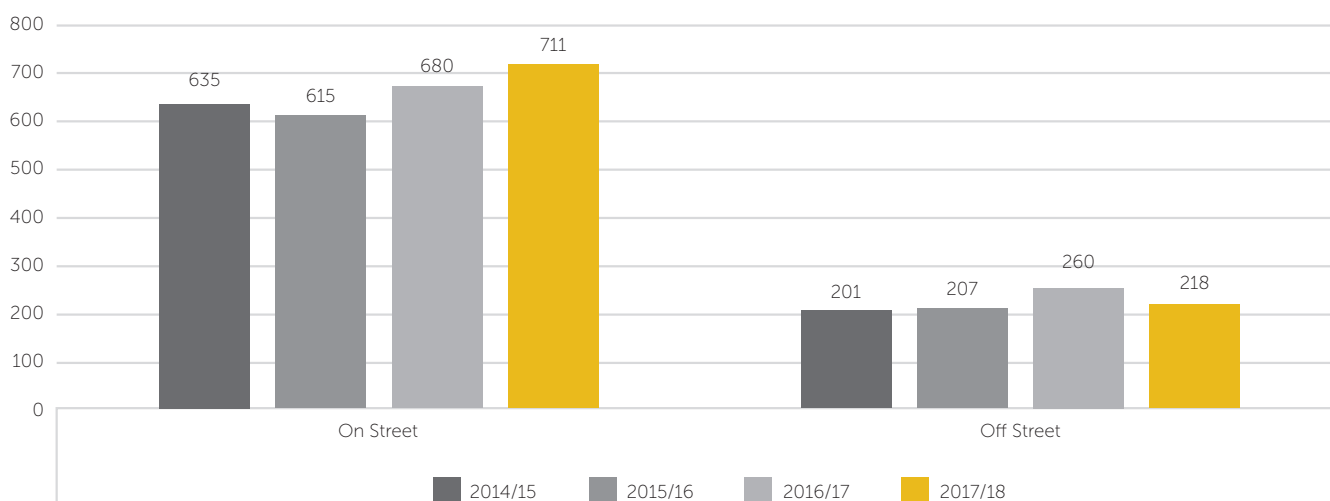
If a PCN is paid within 14 days of issue, it is halved. We have seen a shift in the pattern of payment for PCNS, from the majority paid within 14 days to the majority paid between 15-28 days. This is due to:

- Our HGV clamping trial – payments now come via the clamping company, so although being paid immediately they take longer to reach our systems
- Representations have gone up in 2017/18 - unsuccessful representations are given a further 14 days to pay

Number of PCNs paid

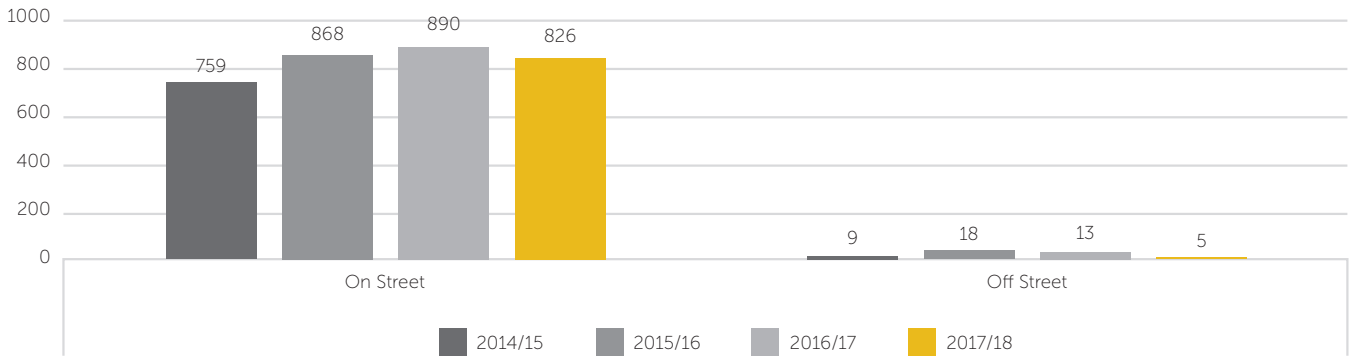


Cases referred to County Court

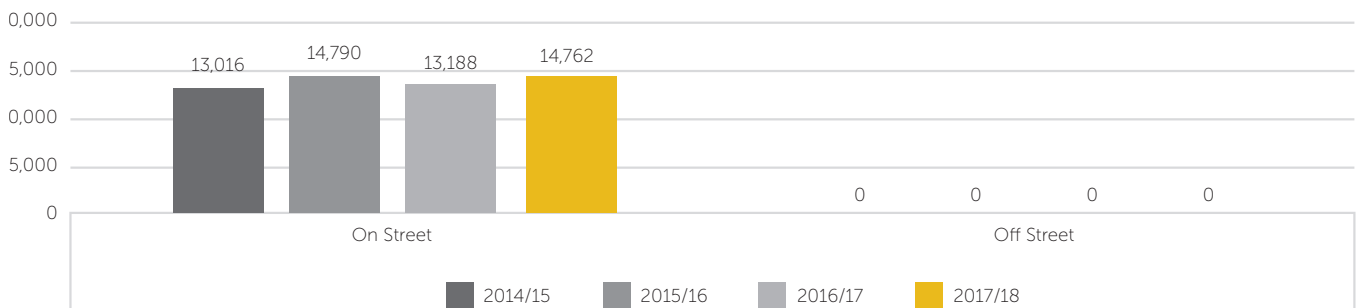


Only 11 appeals were taken to the Traffic Penalty Tribunal in 2017/18, a comparatively low number – four of these were dismissed and seven were allowed or not contested.

Number of resident permits issued



Number of visitor permits issued



The parking service offers a variety of permits and season tickets, many of which enable easier and cheaper parking for our residents and visitors.

Where parking is in short supply, particularly around town centres, parking zones have been created. The aim is to regulate parking where demand is high to ensure there is a safe and free flow of traffic, as well as the opportunity for those who live within the zone to park their car.

Residents must meet specific criteria to buy a residents parking permit. These permits allow the vehicle to be parked without time

restriction. We issued 1,820 resident permits and season tickets in 2017/18. Our town centre locations continue to be very much in demand.

Residents are able to buy daily permits for visitors from our customer service centre. In 2017/18 we issued 14,762 visitor permits.

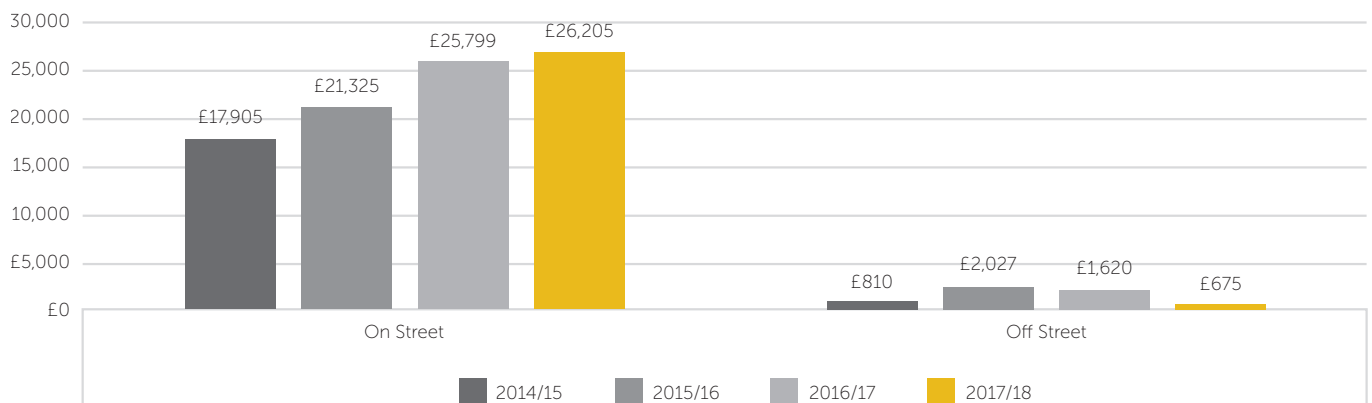
We do also issue one off permits and dispensations to assist partners, charities and community events.

The number of resident and visitor permits issued has stayed fairly static over the last four years, which should be expected.

Financial information

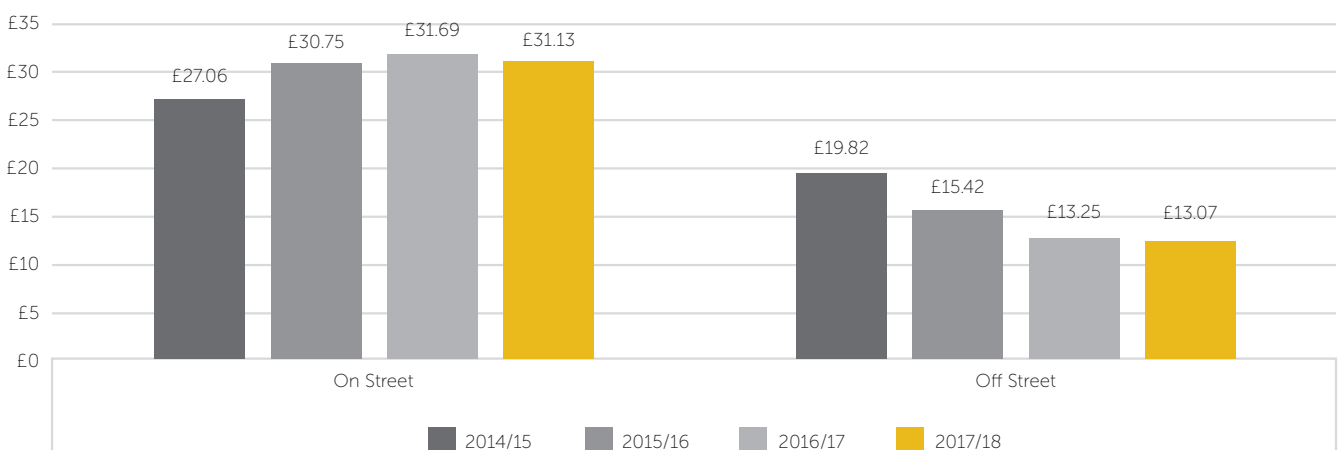
Resident parking permits cost between £30 and £120, depending on location. The costs of our residents permits are calculated based on administration costs of the scheme alone, we do not factor in any associated enforcement costs. The below chart shows our net income from resident permits over the last four financial years.

Net income from resident permits

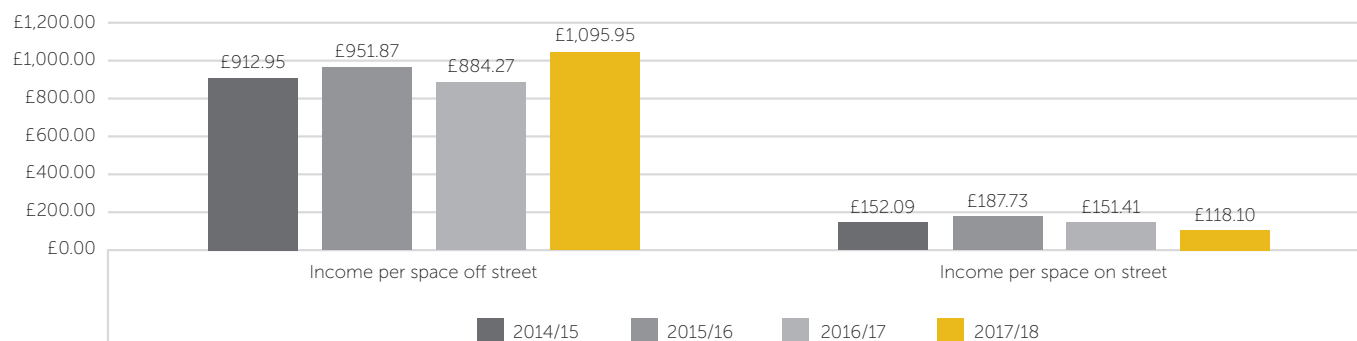


The below chart shows the amount of income to the council per valid PCN.

Income per valid PCN



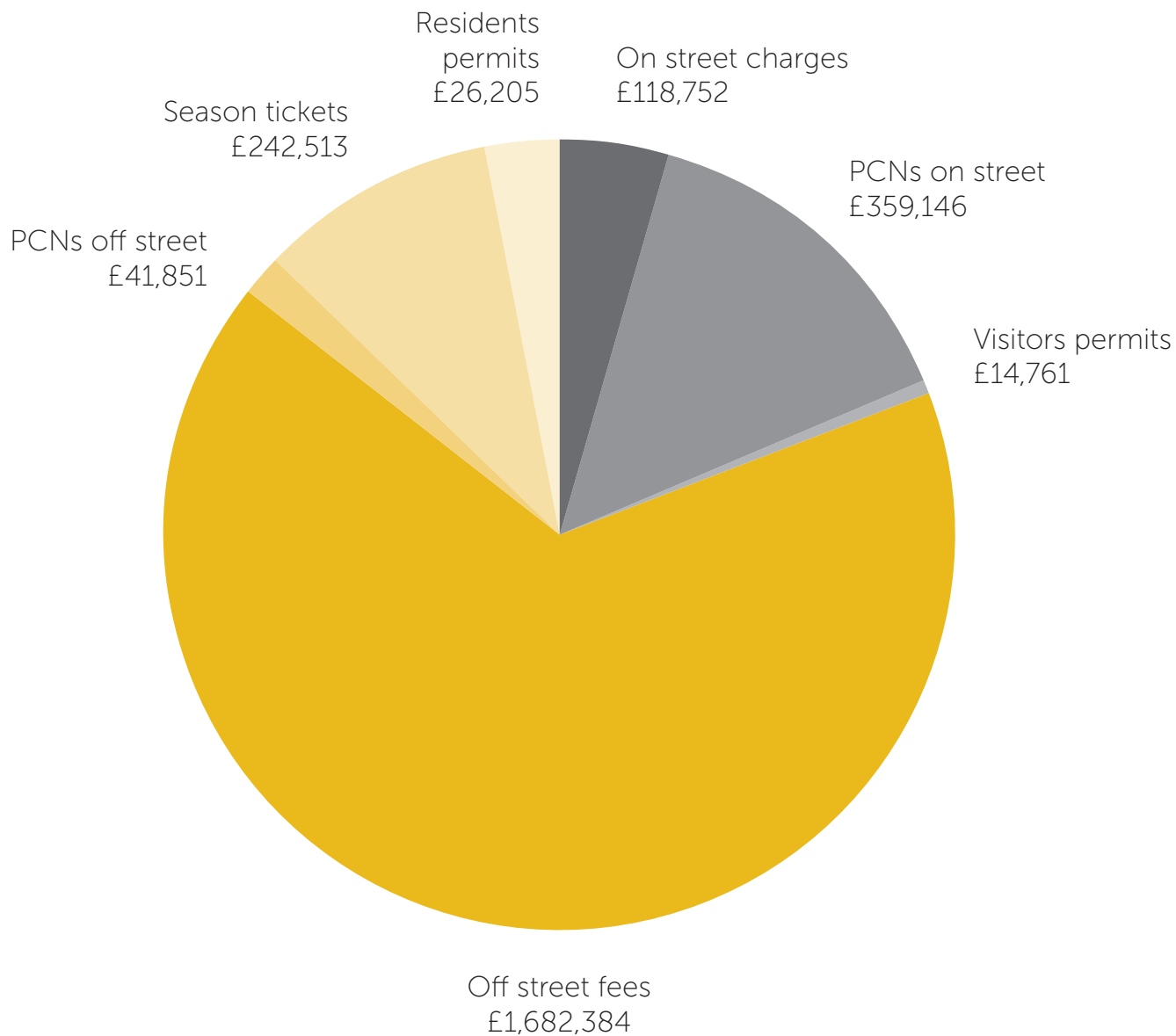
Income per space



Our income is split over our locations as follows:

Location	Number of tickets	Income generated
Ashford town car parks	627,853	£1,386,153.30
Ashford town on street parking	112,418	£117,395.10
Tenterden car parks	546,998	£913,157.72
Total	1,287,269	£2,416,706.12

Parking income 2017/18



In 2017/18 there was a total expenditure in the service of £586,513 for on street and £1,241,798 for off street parking – a total of £1,832,314. This left us with a surplus of £733,878.

Under Section 55 of the Road Traffic Regulations Act 1984 a local authority's surplus can be allocated to cover the costs as detailed below (but not limited to):

- Transport, highway or road improvements
- Environmental improvements (includes a reduction of environmental pollution)
- Provision of outdoor recreational facilities available to the general public without charge.

Income from off-street charges goes into the councils' general fund and is not ring-fenced for transport related schemes as other parking income is.

Appendix 1

Parking contravention codes – on street in 2017/18			
Code	Description	Penalty	Number issued
01	Parked in a restricted street during prescribed hours	£70	3,971
02	Parked or loading/unloading in a restricted street where waiting and loading/unloading restrictions are in force	£70	206
12	Parked in a residents or shared use parking place or zone without clearly displaying either a permit or voucher or pay-and-display ticket issued for that place	£70	782
16	Parked in a permit space without displaying a valid permit	£70	14
19	Parked in a residents or shared use parking place or zone displaying an invalid permit, an invalid voucher or an invalid pay and display ticket	£50	278
21	Parked in a suspended bay or space or part of bay or space	£70	14
22	Re-parked in the same parking place within one hour of leaving or other such limit, as advertised on signs at the location	£50	105
23	Parked in a parking place or area not designated for that class of vehicle	£70	31
24	Not parked correctly within the markings of a bay or space	£70	3
25	Parking in a loading place during restricted hours without loading	£70	125
26	Parked more than 50cm from the edge of the carriageway and not within a designated parking place	£70	74
27	Parked adjacent to a dropped footway	£70	129
28	Parked in a special enforcement area on part of the carriageway raised to meet the level of the footway	£70	14
30	Parked for longer than permitted	£50	1,525
40	Parked in a designated disabled person's parking place without clearly displaying a valid disabled person's badge	£70	413
42	Parked in a parking place designated for police vehicles	£70	25
45	Parked on a taxi rank	£70	71
46	Stopped where prohibited (on a clearway)	£70	0
47	Stopped on a restricted bus stop / stand	£70	147
48	Stopped in a restricted area outside a school when prohibited	£70	39
55	A commercial vehicle parked in a restricted street in contravention of the overnight waiting restriction	£70	2,004
56	Parked in contravention of a commercial vehicle waiting restriction	£70	30
61	A heavy commercial vehicle wholly or partly parked on a footway, verge or land between two carriageways	£70	147
62	Parked one or more wheels on any part of an urban road other than the carriageway (footway parking)	£70	9
99	Stopped on a pedestrian crossing and /or crossing area marked by zig-zags	£70	33

Parking contravention codes – off street in 2017/18

Code	Description	Penalty	Number issued
70	Parked in a loading place or bay during restricted hours without loading	£70	195
80	Parked for longer than the maximum period permitted	£50	7
81	Parked in a restricted area in a car park	£70	7
82	Parked after the expiry of time paid for time	£50	382
83	Parked in a car park without clearly displaying a valid pay and display ticket or voucher or parking clock.	£50	2,216
85	Parked in a permit bay without clearly displaying a valid permit.	£70	38
86	Parked beyond the bay markings	£50	167
87	Parked in a disabled person's parking space without clearly displaying a valid disabled person's badge.	£70	139
89	Vehicle parked exceeds maximum weight and/or height permitted in the area.	£70	0
91	Parked in an area not designated for that class of vehicle.	£70	52
92	Parked causing an obstruction.	£70	27
93	Parked in car park when closed.	£50	0
95	Parked in a parking place for a purpose other than the designated purpose for the parking place.	£50	17

N.B. These tables include spoiled PCNs issued.



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