
DEALING WITH ABANDONED VEHICLES THE WAY FORWARD

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 Dealing with Abandoned Vehicles on Land is a Statutory Obligation for the Council. Disposal of the Waste is a Statutory Obligation of the County Council.
- 1.2 This report informs Members of the significant changes that have been occurring in the numbers of vehicles being abandoned particularly on the Public Highway, and to a lesser extent on other land.
- 1.3 This report also informs Members of the likely costs to be incurred in the future and the need to ensure that officers are empowered to seek full recompense from Essex County Council for the cost of collection and disposal of abandoned vehicles.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 There has always been a problem with unwanted vehicles being abandoned both on the Public Highway and on other land. Until the year 1999/2000, these were being dealt with by a local contractor, and at no cost to Rochford District Council on behalf of Essex County Council. Vehicle dismantlers were happy to collect vehicles and dispose of them with the cost being recouped through spares and the value of scrap metal. As there was no cost to this work no tenders were sought. The only cost to the Council was for staff cost for Administration of the system. The staffing resource is explained in more detail at paragraph 9.3 of the report.
- 2.2 In 1999/2000 there was a significant increase in the number of abandoned vehicles being reported. The numbers are as shown below

Year	No of vehicles reported as abandoned
1997	70
1998	147
1999	275
01/01/00 to 31/05/00	224 (projected 537 for full year)

- 2.3 This problem is being encountered over the whole of Essex, and the issues raised are common to all Districts Councils, Unitary Authorities and the County Council.

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- 2.4 Storage and disposal of abandoned vehicles is the responsibility of the County Council as the Waste Authority. This disposal was being dealt with on delegated authority by the Districts as this provided the most effective means of dealing with the problem

3 THE CURRENT PROBLEM

- 3.1 Due to the significant numbers of vehicles being abandoned the current network of vehicle dismantlers is reaching a point where the storage of so many vehicles prior to final disposal has reached a crisis.
- 3.2 Also partly due to the numbers of vehicles being abandoned there is a glut of scrap metal, and the value of this material has dropped to a current value of around £3.50 per ton from a peak value in excess of £20.00 per ton. Add to this the cost of tyre disposal of approximately £1.00 per tyre, and the cost of transporting the scrap, it can be seen that the process is no longer economic for these companies.
- 3.3 As a result of these changes dismantlers will no longer take cars away for free. The Council also now has to pay a charge for removal of abandoned vehicles. This is currently £20.00 per vehicle and is funded from the fly tipping budget. This has further impacted on the open market and has acted to increase the number of vehicles abandoned on the Highway and land as people are unwilling to pay for disposal of their unwanted vehicle when previously it was free.
- 3.4 The County Council Waste Authority has become aware of the scale of the problem and a report was presented to the County Council on 25 November 1999 by the Head of Transportation and Operational Services. This report suggested that the County was willing to pay the Districts 25% of the costs of dealing with vehicles i.e. the contractor cost. This initial report was deferred by the County Members.

4 DEVELOPING A COMMON APPROACH TO ESSEX COUNTY

- 4.1 To develop a common approach across Essex links have been established with other Districts in the County. A seminar was arranged and ten District Councils, the Police and some Parish Councils all sent representatives to the Seminar which was held earlier this year. This group looked at Best Practice in dealing with the problems that were common to all and compared the costs being experienced by each District which in some instances was up to £90 - £120 per vehicle.
- 4.2 A further meeting of this working group took place on 2 March 2000 to develop a common approach to the County. The main issues arising were;

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1. The 25% contribution that was proposed by the County for the cost of storage and disposal was not acceptable.
 2. The legality of Districts actually dealing with the Disposal of vehicles.
 3. A County wide system for speeding up the investigation process in terms of the involvement of the Police and DVLA (Driver and Vehicle Licensing Authority),
 4. District Member agreement to the approach to Essex County to seek full reimbursement for the costs of disposal to be sought from all District Councils.
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- 4.3 Agreement from Members will also be required for tenders to be sought for the Disposal of vehicles by Rochford District Council. These tenders are expected to be within the range of prices already experienced by other Districts

5 OUTCOME OF THE MEETING WITH ESSEX COUNTY 10 MARCH 2000

- 5.1 Representatives of the County Council, District Councils, Unitary Authorities, The Police, Local, and the Police from County Headquarters, and the DVLA Chelmsford Office attended the meeting. It was made clear to the County that the Districts were not prepared to accept partial payment for disposal of vehicles but expected full reimbursement of all costs incurred. Discussion about the Investigation process has created a working group with the Police and DVLA to develop a better and quicker process for identifying vehicle owners.

6 CURRENT INITIATIVES

- 6.1 The problem of abandoned vehicles is particularly difficult on Housing car parks. There is a shortage of parking generally and abandoned vehicles provide a sources of annoyance to neighbours and are a hazard to children in particular.
- 6.2 It has been decided following advice from other Authorities that an amnesty for abandoned vehicles be declared for tenants on estates. This would enable the large number of vehicles to be handed over to the Council for disposal without the need for the investigation that has to be carried out on the vehicles.

7 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 The abandonment of a vehicle is an offence under the Refuse Disposal Act 1978. The owner of a vehicle can be cautioned and if guilty can be liable to a fine of up to £2500, or three months in prison. Any fines collected revert to the treasury.

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- 7.2 As market forces have changed and the value of scrap is so low the problem of abandonment is unlikely to reduce in the short to medium term.
- 7.3 In dealing with this problem there has been a good working relationship with Rochford Police who provide positive support in dealing with this problem.
- 7.4 Abandoned vehicles are not only unsightly but are often dangerous and in particular a danger to children.
- 7.5 Failure to deal with the issue in a comprehensive manner across the County will lead to the less effective Authorities becoming the dumping ground for those irresponsible people who wish to avoid their social responsibilities.

8 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 Abandoned cars cause pollution of the environment. A car comprises approximately 40% special waste, tyres, batteries, oil, plastics, etc., that requires controlled disposal.
- 8.2 Currently as a result of the relatively small numbers of vehicles that have been dealt with historically disposal has been dealt with through local contractors without the need for a formal contract.
- 8.3 Disposal contractors are being required to comply with stricter environmental standards. This and Rochford District's Environmental Policy should be reflected in any contract made.

9 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 Currently the Council is paying the contractor £20.00 per vehicle for collection and disposal with nil cost for storage of vehicles as there is no other method of disposal. For 1999 the cost incurred by the Council amounted to approximately £3500 for vehicles actually disposed of by the contractor and vehicle checks. The contractor is seeking to increase this to £25 per vehicle at this time.
- 9.2 The experience of other District Councils when tendering for the storage and disposal of abandoned vehicles to contractors meeting all the legal and environmental requirements, is that the cost per vehicle rises to between £90.00 and £120.00 per vehicle. At the current rate of collection this would imply a total direct cost of £50,000 to £60,000 per year for Rochford District. Preparing a contract for disposal of vehicles will incur additional costs to the Council which will need to be reimbursed by Essex County who are responsible for Waste Disposal

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- 9.3 Previously the process has been dealt with by a 10% Full Time Equivalent member of office staff in 1997. This doubled in 1998 to 20%, and again in 1999 to 40%, with a potential increase to one full time equivalent member of staff. Inspections of vehicles reported are made by the Contract Inspectors in the depot. This resource has been met to date by more efficient working in the L&CS Technical Administration Office, although this is now becoming problematic for staff and a future report on staffing may be required.
- 9.4 In dealing with the problem on a County Wide approach in conjunction with the other Districts, County and other interested parties, officers are taking a Best Value approach to this problem. This will enable benchmarking of prices and processes, and establish a best practice approach to dealing with the problem.

10 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 The District Council has a Statutory Duty under the Refuse Disposal Act 1987 to remove Abandoned vehicles from the Public Highway and land and deliver them to the Waste Disposal Authority, in this case Essex County Council.
- 10.2 Land in this case means any land including private property, Council land and anywhere else a vehicle is abandoned in the open.
- 10.3 The County Council has a Statutory Duty to dispose of abandoned vehicles, which is currently delegated to the District Councils. The cost of Disposal is the responsibility of the Waste Authority, in this case Essex County Council.

11 PARISH IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no direct parish Implications, although representatives from some Parishes have attended the training Seminar in order to gain a better understanding of the problem and how it is dealt with by the District and County Council.

12 RECOMMENDATION

- 12.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**:
- (1) That Officers are instructed to seek full recompense for the County Council Responsibilities from Essex County Council.
 - (2) That the action of the Council Officers in dealing with this issue in a countywide approach that provides a Best Value solution is endorsed.

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- (3) That the seeking of tenders for vehicle disposal on behalf of the Waste Disposal Authority is endorsed.

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Background Papers:

Minutes of meetings with District Officers 2 March 2000

Minutes of meeting with Essex County Council 10 March 2000

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