

PATROL ADJUDICATION JOINT COMMITTEE

REPORT FOR INFORMATION

DATE: 7th October 2008
AGENDA ITEM Number 9
SUBJECT: Provision of public information
JOINT REPORT OF: The Lead Officer on behalf of the Advisory Board

PURPOSE OF REPORT

To update the Joint Committee on developments in relation to the provision of public information.

RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Committee:

[i] Note the progress in the provision of public information

CONTACT OFFICER

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 The Traffic Management Act 2004 (TMA) came into force on 31 March 2008. The new regulations are complex and highlight the importance of accessible public information. This complexity underlined the need for a single, easily accessible source of information about parking and traffic issues generally. In particular, it was recognised that there needed to be a way of explaining the enforcement scheme and each stage in that process.
- 1.2 Whilst it is not appropriate for the Adjudicators to provide this information, the Joint Committee was ideally placed to provide this on behalf of all its member authorities.
- 1.3 The benefit for motorists is one simple to use web site and leaflet explaining the enforcement process and ensuring that they are dealing with the appropriate body regarding their representations.
- 1.4 The benefit for councils is a central resource of general information on enforcement.
- 1.5 The Joint Committee's Executive Sub Committee at its meeting in January 2008 ratified the decision to provide public information and the following was delivered for 31st March 2008:
 - a) Launch of PATROL web site providing general information on the enforcement process.
 - b) Links to local authority parking web sites
 - c) Links to relevant documentation and organisations.
 - d) The specimen penalty charge notice issued by the Independent Review Committee made reference to this web site.
 - e) Downloadable leaflet
 - f) Hard copies of leaflets issued to local authorities
 - g) Dedicated member of PATROL staff coordinates the web site and the provision of general information to enquirers who are not at the stage of appealing to the tribunal. The aim is to provide objective information and advice to help members of the public to understand their options within the Civil Enforcement of Parking Process so that they can make informed decisions and follow the correct process.

2. Website

- 2.1 The site has attracted hits of over 700 per week with an average time of 4 minutes 10 seconds being spent on the site. The most popular pages being visited on the site are 'pay or challenge' and 'Council Contact details'. This demonstrated the need for clear explanation of the enforcement process and a point whereby members of the public can quickly and easily find out their councils contact details.
- 2.2 In terms of accessing the site 31% of people have arrived directly at the site (not via search engine), testament to the success of the PATROL leaflet (which carries the address, external links (often on council sites) and PCNs on which councils include PATROL's website address.

- 2.3 A further 25% of visitors to the site have been referred from the Traffic Penalty Tribunal website, demonstrating success in directing people from the Tribunal when they are not at the correct stage.
- 2.4 Finally 19% of visitors are referred from the search engine 'Google'. This points to a significant area for improvement and search engine optimisation. Work is commencing on this.
- 2.5 Despite attracting on average over 700 hits per week, internal and external reviews have identified several areas for improvement particularly surrounding navigation difficulties and a structure that is far more complex than necessary.
- 2.6 The essential concept for providing this type of information through a web site was that it would offer a simple yet comprehensive description of the Civil Enforcement process. So, in order to achieve this more effectively and thus provide a better service to the public, PATROL conducted a comprehensive review of the site which has resulted in a re-design and re-launch set for the start of October 2008.
- 2.7 The key objectives for the improved site are as follows are as follows: -
- To provide a systematic and clear approach to the enforcement process
 - Provide information on how to pay or challenge your PCN
 - To provide details of the councils in the Civil enforcement scheme (contact details, websites and email addresses)
 - To link to relevant legislation or documentation which may enable the public to make an informed decision
 - To provide useful links to external organisations which may provide advice
 - To provide impartial information
- 2.8 Improvements to the web site will be undertaken using a phased approach:
- Phase 1 Improve the presentation and navigation of the site (October 2008).
- Phase 2 Provide the public with more detailed information on matters such as contravention codes, parking documentation etc (April 2009).
- Phase 3 Build on the current web links to council parking departments by introducing an email link whether councils offer the option for on line representations (April 2009).

3. Leaflet

- 3.1 Initial feedback on the leaflet has been extremely positive with councils finding them particularly useful in simplifying the enforcement process at the rejection of informal representation stage. Councils have utilised these leaflets in their parking offices making them available to members of this public. To date, PATROL has distributed over 400,000 leaflets with some larger councils placing extensive orders.
- 3.2 The following feedback has been received from Council officers: -

"The public have found these leaflets extremely helpful"

“Good, informative leaflet”

“I think these leaflets are an excellent idea”

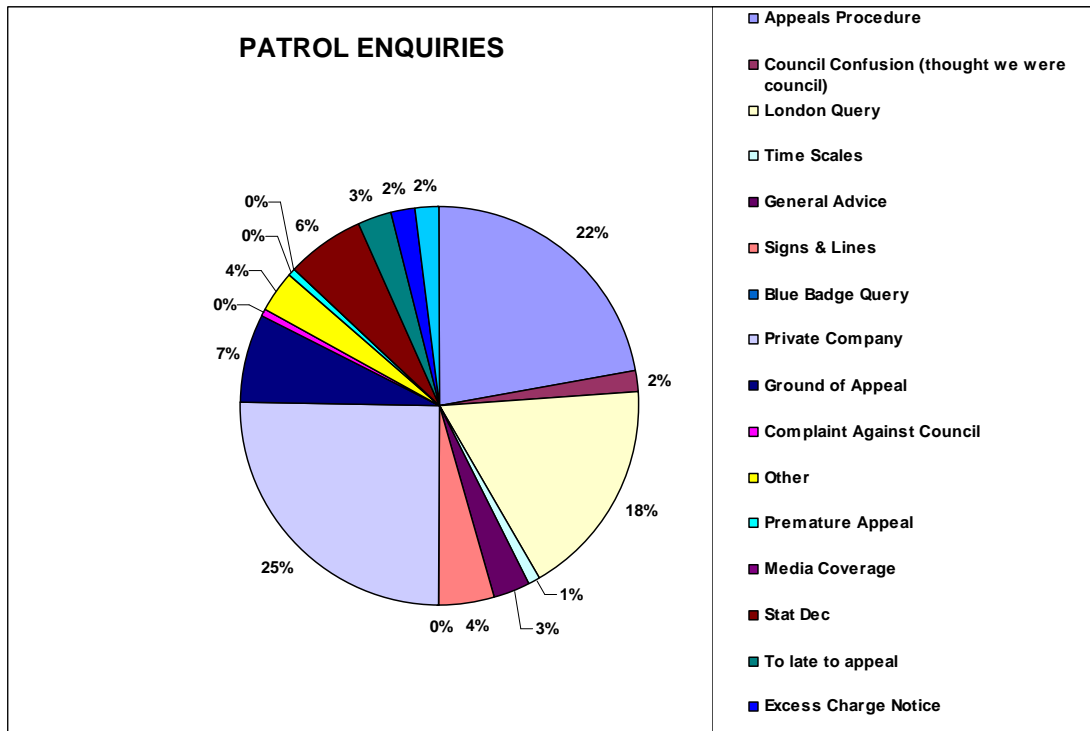
Some councils have however commented that it would be useful to have a more detailed leaflet. A more detailed leaflet could ensure that every individual step in the process is comprehensively covered and planning for this is underway.

3.3 The Joint Committee agreed to meet the costs of 1000 leaflets per council in 2008/09 and further copies of the leaflet can be ordered by all councils at cost price from PATROL.

3.4 A downloadable version of the leaflet has been included on the PATROL website because the flowchart may help the public understand the staged enforcement process. PATROL also distributes leaflets to those members of the public who may make enquiries but have no internet access.

4. Telephone Enquiries

PATROL provides an information service whereby, any calls regarding the enforcement process, before the stage of appeal is reached, are handled by a single officer. This has been successful not only in terms of providing information to the public, but also in terms of research to improve the provision of information through the web site and publications. In addition, this service has ensured that tribunal staff can rightly focus on appeals to the tribunal. PATROL receives on average 15 Calls per day surrounding a range of issues as identified in the graph below.



From this graph we can see three areas which are dominated by queries from the public.

- a) I have received a ticket from a private company, what can I do?
- b) How can I challenge my ticket?
- c) How can I challenge a ticket issued in London?

The difficulty in answering the first question is that there is no right of appeal for these motorists nor a specific organisation that can assist. Many motorists are unable to distinguish between a private parking ticket and one issued by a local authority but every explanation is offered to clarify this.

Answering the second question, the public need to be guided through quite a complex process. The provision of the web site and leaflet has been instrumental in assisting this explanation.

A key part of this information provision is signposting enquirers to the correct organisation including other appeals tribunals.