



Report subject	<b>Increased Penalty Charge Notice and Associated Charges Trial</b>
Meeting date	4 March 2026
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>BCP Council conducted a Department for Transport (DfT) authorised trial in August 2025 to test whether increasing Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) levels and associated charges to London-equivalent rates would improve compliance and reduce illegal parking in the coastal area from Sandbanks to Hengistbury Head. The trial showed a reversal of the expected rise in contraventions, with overall PCNs decreasing against forecast models, alongside reductions in serious on-street breaches and improvements in bus punctuality. No negative impact on visitor numbers was identified, and parking capacity remained consistently available, suggesting most illegal parking had been by choice rather than necessity. Some behavioural displacement occurred into lower-level car park contraventions, and peak-pressure days still presented challenges. Overall, the trial demonstrated that higher PCN levels can effectively improve compliance, with BCP Council recommending either a national review of PCN rates outside London or a wider, longer-term follow-up trial.</p>
Recommendations	<p><b>It is RECOMMENDED that:</b></p> <p><b>The content of this report and its appendix are noted by Cabinet</b></p>
Reason for recommendations	This report is for information only and so no recommendations are required.

Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Richard Herrett – Destination, Leisure and Commercial Operations
Corporate Director	Glynn Barton – Chief Operations Officer
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Wards	Council-wide
Classification	For Information

## Background

1. In July 2025 the Department for Transport (DfT) authorised a trial allowing BCP Council to issue Penalty Charge Notices (PCN's), and associated additional charges, at a higher rate in the area of BCP Council shown below between 1 August 2025 and 31 August 2025 (inclusive).

*Diagram 1 – PCN Increased Rate Trial Area*



*Table 1 - PCN Amounts During the Trial Period*

Item	Lower		Higher	
	Current	Trial	Current	Trial
PCN Amount	£50	£110	£70	£160
Discounted Amount	£25	£55	£35	£80
Charge Certificate	£75	£165	£105	£240
Debt Registered Stage	£85	£175	£115	£250

Additional Parking Charge	Current	Trial
Release from Wheel Clamp *	N/A	£100
Release from Car Pound	£105	£280
Storage Fee (per day)	£12	£55
Disposal Fee	£50	£100

- To satisfy internal BCP Council governance, an Officer Decision Record was prepared and approved in advance of the trial commencing
- The final report submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT) is attached at Appendix 1; a summary is set out below:

### **Purpose of the Trial**

- Illegal parking has become increasingly problematic across the BCP area, particularly during summer months and hot weather. Existing PCN levels - unchanged since 2008 outside London - have lost deterrent value as incomes and parking charges have risen. The discounted PCN rate often approximates the cost of all-day legal parking, incentivising risk-taking by motorists. In July 2025, the Department for Transport authorised BCP Council to trial increased PCN levels aligned with London rates.
- BCP Council conducted a trial in August 2025 to increase Penalty Charge Notice (PCN) levels in the coastal area of Bournemouth, Christchurch, and Poole. The objective was to determine whether higher financial penalties would act as a stronger deterrent to illegal parking, improve compliance, and reduce disruption during peak visitor periods.

### **Trial Design**

- Period: 1–31 August 2025
- Area: Coastal zone from Sandbanks to Hengistbury Head (29 car parks, 543 roads)
- Objectives: Reduce illegal parking, increase legal parking and vends, improve road safety and emergency access, and assess behavioural change.
- Publicity: Multi-channel campaign including signage, radio, and payment system updates.
- Evaluation: Counterfactual analysis comparing trial area with comparison zone and historical data (2022–2024).

### **Headline Results**

- Overall PCN Reduction: Total PCNs in the trial area fell compared to August 2024, reversing the previous year's sharp increase. Forecast models predicted a rise without the trial, meaning the actual outcome represents a headline 16% reversal from expected growth. There are limitations with this outcome, given the short duration of the trial, very constrained preparation time and other variable factors discussed in the report, but it represents a positive indication of the impact of increasing financial penalties as a deterrent to illegal parking.
- Behavioural Change: On-street contraventions decreased suggesting motorists were less willing to risk fines at increased rates.

13. Comparison Area Contrast: Christchurch saw an increase in serious contraventions during the same period, reinforcing that standard PCN levels remain ineffective as a deterrent.
14. Weather Influence: August 2025 had similar temperatures and sunshine hours to 2024, yet PCN counts were lower, confirming the trial, and not external factors, drove behavioural change.
15. Parking Capacity: Legal spaces were available throughout the trial meaning illegal parking was a choice rather than necessity.
16. Vends Analysis: Vend trends continued a gradual decline consistent with previous years and mirrored in the comparison area, indicating no negative impact on visitor numbers. Declines are more likely linked to broader behavioural shifts rather than the trial.
17. Public Transport: Bus punctuality and speeds improved compared to August 2024, suggesting reduced obstruction from illegal parking.

### **Key Conclusions**

18. Higher PCN levels act as an effective deterrent, reversing upward trends in illegal parking and improving compliance.
19. Behavioural displacement occurred: some motorists shifted from high-risk on-street contraventions to lower-level breaches in car parks, highlighting the need for complementary measures such as clearer signage and enforcement in designated bays.
20. Persistent issues during peak demand (e.g., Bank Holidays) suggest that financial deterrents alone cannot fully mitigate extreme visitor pressure; capacity management and dynamic pricing may be required.
21. No evidence of reduced visitor numbers or negative economic impact was found, supporting the feasibility of adopting higher PCN levels permanently.

### **Recommendations to the DfT**

22. Based on the positive results seen from the trial, BCP Council proposes that there are two feasible recommendations for moving forward with a review of Penalty Charge Notice policy;
  - a. Review and update PCN fees and charges outside of London. The level of financial penalty has not changed since 2008, has not kept pace with inflation and rising incomes, or with the relative increase in parking charges and is no longer an effective deterrent. Fees and charges should be matched to London rates or be subject to a review to determine an appropriate rate of increase. Or;
  - b. Carry out a further trial for an extended period of time and across a wider geography. An extended trial, with a longer preparation period could be carried out to test whether the results of the BCP Council trial could be replicated, or improved, using a selection of Local Authorities with differing characteristics.

### **Options Appraisal**

23. Not Applicable – this report is for information only.

### **Summary of financial implications**

24. Not Applicable – this report is for information only.

### **Summary of legal implications**

25. Not Applicable – this report is for information only.

### **Summary of human resources implications**

26. Not Applicable – this report is for information only.

### **Summary of sustainability impact**

27. Not Applicable – this report is for information only.

### **Summary of public health implications**

28. Not Applicable – this report is for information only.

### **Summary of equality implications**

29. Not Applicable – this report is for information only.

### **Summary of risk assessment**

30. Not Applicable – this report is for information only.

### **Background papers**

- a. Appendix A – SoS Letter to the Leader of BCP Council Offering August Trial

### **Appendices**

#### **Appendix 1 - PCN Increased Trial Final Report to the DfT**