



# Watching the wardens

York has used information passed from the street to manage its traffic wardens more effectively

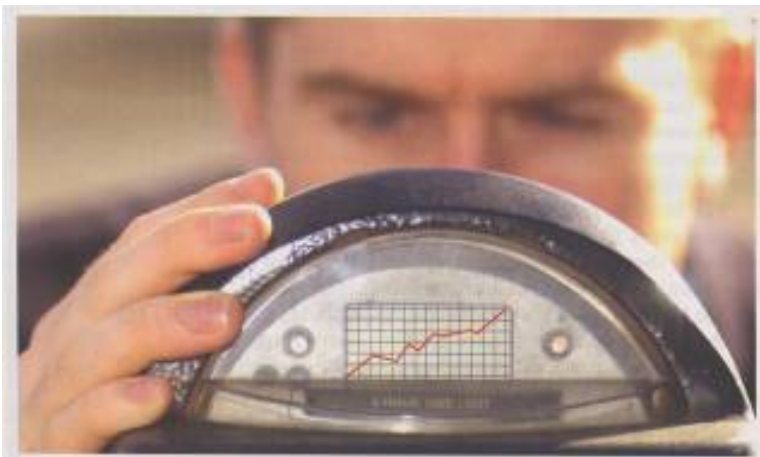
Traffic wardens probably rank just below estate agents in the popularity stakes. But if we are honest their pariah status is, in the vast majority of cases, undeserved. Without wardens, illegal parking would cause Britain's crowded city centre streets to grind to a halt.

Furthermore, the breakdown of resident parking schemes would cause a collective red mist to wreak havoc in the nation's suburbs. Traffic wardens perform a crucial public duty that is overwhelmingly for the greater good.

The profession has its flaws; the fact that thousands of tickets are contested each year attests to that. Problems can usually be traced back to over zealous wardens and poorly planned shift patterns, which mean the wrong streets are patrolled at the wrong times.

City of York Council recognised that there was room for improvement in its parking enforcement operation - both in terms of individual warden performance and overall resource allocation. But it also knew that parking enforcement does not come cheap.

The direct cost of issuing a penalty charge notice (excluding back office administration) is typically £6-10. Given that the average income from each ticket is around £30, just issuing a penalty can eat up to 30% of the money raised. These costs all too often escalate further as a result of processing errors and the costs of chasing up late payments.



**One result of the change has been that York has won more of the appeals against its parking penalties**

The traditional method of directing staff simply specified the frequency with which wardens patrolled each street, regardless of the number of vehicles or levels of compliance. The amount of time each warden patrolled any given street was either predetermined, or the warden was simply allowed to take as much time as necessary. Both approaches were flawed, as they either stood around doing nothing or got bogged down on one street.

York wanted a user-friendly system that allowed managers to measure financial and non-financial performance in great detail. The financial data consists of parking fee revenues, penalty and permit income and enforcement costs. The non-financial metrics included turnover per space, compliance levels and penalties issued.

It began to work with Langdale Systems, a subsidiary of NCP, which commissioned Imperial Business Systems, a partner of Cognos, to develop a system to improve enforcement and reduce operational costs.

In July 2002, Imperial Business Systems completed the deployment of Parking Power Cube, which complements Parking Office for Windows. Wardens were issued with handheld devices that enabled them to input all penalty notices into a system that gave the council a complete digital record of the history, progression and status of each notice.

Cognos' PowerPlay software, which adds a business intelligence capability to the system, enables the council to analyse the data. The system produces data on four key areas:

- The current state and progression history of penalty charges;
- Parking permit sales and management;
- Payments received for penalty charges and parking permits;
- Back office administration.

The system organises information into business dimensions such as time, penalty notice progression status, employees, and locations. It enables users to see changes in business metrics over time (such as fine amounts, notice numbers and deployed hours) and to uncover peaks and troughs in trends.

Bill Bird, parking services manager at York, said the implementation has made a difference to his department's performance.

"Official figures show that York wins a higher proportion of parking ticket appeals than any other council in the country," he says. "Furthermore, since implementing the PowerCube technology, complaints have fallen to record lows.

"There is no doubt that this success is a direct result of managers' ability to track individual wardens' performance and therefore address any potential issues as and when they arise. For example, the system now immediately alerts managers if a warden has issued a penalty notice in error."

"The fall in complaints has not only reduced the associated administration costs - but has also gone a long way towards improving public goodwill towards parking attendants in general."

"The ability to track performance levels has also helped improve management on a macro level. On the basis of historic data that decision makers now have at their fingertips, it is possible to develop intelligent shift patterns to improve traffic flows."

Later in the year the council plans to run a full analysis of the data collected to identify where further improvements can be made. **GC**