

Joint Scrutiny Committee



Report of Head of Development and Corporate Landlord

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Performance review of Saba (Car Park Operators) 2023 - 2024

Recommendation

That scrutiny committee considers the performance of Saba in delivering the car park operations contract for the period between 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024 and makes any comments before a final assessment on performance is made.

Purpose of Report

1. To ask scrutiny committee for its views on the performance of Saba in providing the car park operations services to the Vale of White Horse and South Oxfordshire District Councils for the period 1 April 2023 to 31 March 2024.

Strategic Objectives

2. The service contributes to both councils' Corporate Plan 2020-2024. In the Vale's corporate plan, it assists in delivering strategic objective four - Building stable finances. The car park management contract assists in managing the council's resources responsibly and make effective use of the council's assets.
3. In South's corporate plan, the service supports strategic objective six -

Investment and innovation that rebuilds our financial viability, the contract assists the council in meeting this objective.

Background

4. Managing contractor performance is essential for delivering the councils' objectives and targets. Since some of the councils' services are outsourced, the councils cannot deliver high quality services to their residents unless their contractors are performing well. Working jointly with contractors to review performance regularly is therefore essential.
5. The councils' process for managing contractor performance focuses on continuous improvement and action planning. The councils realise that the success of the framework depends on contractors and the councils working together to set and review realistic, jointly agreed, and measurable targets.
6. The overall framework is designed to be:
 - a way for the councils to consistently measure contractor performance, to help highlight and resolve operational issues
 - flexible enough to suit each contract, including smaller contracts which may not require all elements of the framework
 - a step towards managing risk more effectively and improving performance through action planning.
7. For reasons of consistency and for fairness between contractors, the following guide to the assessment of performance criteria against all key performance indicators (KPIs) is included within the councils' monitoring criteria.

Percentage Score	0 – 69.9%	70% – 79.9%	80% – 84.9%	85% – 94.9%	95% – 100%
Monitoring Score	1	2	3	4	5
Classification	Poor	Weak	Fair	Good	Excellent

Overview of the review framework

8. Evaluating contractor performance has four dimensions:
 - a) performance measured against KPIs
 - b) customer satisfaction with the total service experience
 - c) council satisfaction as client
 - d) summary of strengths and areas for improvement, plus feedback from the contractor on the overall assessment and the contractor's suggestions of ways in which the council might improve performance.
9. The first three dimensions are assessed, and the Head of Service makes a judgement of classification. The fourth element is a summary of strengths and areas for improvement and includes contractor feedback.
10. The report includes a summary of officers' assessment for 2023-24 for each

dimension. This is the fifth year of the current contract directly with Saba (previously the councils were part of the Vinci 5 Councils Contract). Results from previous years are included to allow comparisons to be made.

11. The cost of the contract as of the end of 2023-24, as a fixed annual charge was £571,702 per annum, of which the Vale proportion was £292,864 per annum and the South Oxfordshire proportion was £278,838 per annum. The reason for the difference in values is because of the car park ownership and the number of parking spaces in each authority.
12. In addition to these contract costs there are also variable costs which each council must pay. These cover the banking and transaction costs of customers using different methods of payments to park, such as over the phone, web payments. These variable costs were Vale £30,405 per annum and South £59,758 per annum which reflects the differences in income received for the parking service.
13. This contract includes delivery of the following services for the councils:
 - maximise income from parking, keeping accounts of spends, income and reconciliations in line with council policy
 - relevant administration of permits and notice processing and administration of penalty charge notices (PCNs)
 - assisting with internal and external audit reviews and attending committee meetings as required by the councils
 - dealing with out of hours emergencies in car parks
 - maintain excellent customer relations by dealing with emails, challenges against PCNs, telephone calls in line with relevant legislation
 - deal with challenges submitted against the issuing of PCNs (Representations made by offenders are now dealt with by the nominated council officer)
 - taking and checking all payments by all methods, balance income from the pay and display machines and record the data, deal with queries make any relevant transfers, checking VAT calculations in line with proper accountancy practices and to ensure all car park accounts are accurate and up to date.
14. The main duties and responsibilities of enforcement officers are to:
 - be responsible for the day to day running of the car parks, issuing PCNs and ensuring the smooth and safe operation of the car parks
 - provide excellent customer service by ensuring that the ticket machines are maintained in good working order which includes replenishing supply of tickets in machine, carry out regular checks and scheduled inspection surveys to identify any potential health and safety issues and signs are clear and graffiti free
 - carry out the enforcement role effectively and efficiently by inspecting all vehicles to check that a current parking ticket, season ticket or disabled badge is displayed and issue appropriate PCNs in accordance with legislation

- act as an ambassador for the councils, offering information and assistance to members of the public on a variety of issues (not only car parking)
 - ensure excellent customer service by dealing with confrontational and emergency situations in a polite and efficient manner.
15. In November 2022 the councils adopted new Civil Parking Enforcement, (CPE) legislation to manage and enforce the car parks. 2023/24 was the first whole year we have operated CPE and Saba has operated in an efficient and professional manner while bedding in the new processes. Officers wish to extend their thanks to all of Saba’s staff for the work that they undertook ensuring that the new CPE processes worked smoothly.
16. Table 1 below shows the number of PCNs that were issued between 1 April 2023 and 31 March 2024 for each council and how the enforcement process has been implemented.

Table 1 Status of PCNs issued per council in 2023/24

Council	PCNs issued	PCNs closed	PCNs still open at year end	PCNs with enforcement agents	Number of challenges dealt with by Saba	Number of representations dealt with by council officers	Number of representations accepted
Vale	1,349	1,282	67	45	226	28	9
South	2,590	2,503	87	62	314	76	24

17. Of the tickets issued in the year, two cases were taken to the Traffic Enforcement Centre (TEC) by the vehicle owner, which is their right to make a final appeal, in both cases the applicants lost their appeals.

Dimension 1- Key Performance Indicators (KPI)

18. KPIs are recognised as an important element of monitoring the contractor’s performance. The KPIs cover those aspects of the service which are most important as a means of benchmarking against which performance can be measured. KPIs are reported monthly to the councils using a traffic light system Green – Achieved, Amber - Area for concern and Red – Failure and are discussed at the monthly Client/Contractor meeting. A full breakdown of all KPIs is included in **Appendix A**.
19. KPIs are split into several sub-areas which combine to make up the KPI ‘top line’ score. The table showing the results of all sub-areas with a detailed breakdown of the scores is included within **Appendix A**.
20. Table 2 below shows the annual results for the ‘top line’ KPIs for 2023/24 compared with previous years. There are two areas that are slightly below the others this year: KPI 3 ‘Reporting, and KPI 8 ‘Asset condition’.

Table 2 KPI results for Saba over the past five years

	Area	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	Monitoring Score
KPI 1	Administration	89%	100%	100%	100%	100%	5
KPI 2	Notice Processing	99%	91%	86%	94%	100%	5
KPI 3	Reporting	100%	99%	93%	95%	98%	5
KPI 4	Financial Management	100%	100%	97%	100%	100%	5
KPI 5	Disputes Management	100%	71%	94%	100%	100%	5
KPI 6	Authorised Use	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	5
KPI 7	Customer Satisfaction	0%	100%	100%	92%	100%	5
KPI 8	Asset Condition	99%	97%	99%	98%	97%	5
Average KPI Score		86%	98%	96%	97%	99%	5

Table 1 History of top line KPIs for Saba over the last five years

- KPI 3 Reporting** This KPI includes patrolling of the car parks which was a minor issue in 2023/24 and in the previous years also. This is because the patrols are not always in line with the deployment plan. The issue is related to the number of staff employed on the contract. While the back-office staff have been a settled team throughout the year, Saba has continued to struggle to appoint Civil Enforcement Officers (CEOs) who carry out the patrols and enforcement of the car parks.
- Recruitment of CEOs was a challenge through the year, with staff starting and then leaving as they did not achieve the standard required or simply did not wish to continue to do the role. However, through persistence of the contract manager, it appears a settled team was appointed at the end of 2023/24 and the KPI for patrols has been improving since then.
- KPI 8 Asset Condition** This KPI is slightly lower due to the car park machine faults not being responded to in time. The issue is related to the age of the ticket machines which are coming to the end of their life. This is causing problems and a delay in the supply of spare parts, which causes the machines to be out of order for longer periods, while the parts are sourced.

Officers are considering a capital growth bid to renew all the machines in both South and Vale car parks as part of the budget setting process for 2025-6.

Overall KPI performance

- A detailed analysis of performance against the KPI's and sub KPI's can be found in **Appendix A** Key performance indicators. Saba's overall performance has given an average KPI performance rating of 99 percent

(Green). Based on the councils' monitoring criteria, 99 percent equates to a classification of 'Excellent'.

22. The Head of Development and Corporate Landlord has made a judgement on KPI performance as follows:

KPI judgement	Excellent
Previous KPI judgement for comparison –	Excellent

Dimension 2-Customer Satisfaction

23. In the year 2019-20 there was no data relating to customer satisfaction collected by Saba. During all the following years, Saba has worked with council officers to develop a questionnaire for customers to complete, but with limited success. Officers agreed that the link should be included in general communications only, and not be included in any communication directly regarding the issuing of a ticket or the dispute of a ticket. It was felt that customer feedback from people issued with a parking ticket is likely to provide a negative or biased view of the process, which would not be a true reflection of customer satisfaction.
24. While 331 invites were sent out to customers to complete a satisfaction questionnaire by Saba, only 12 responses to those invites were received. The response from customers has again been very low and it is difficult to get customers to engage with the service directly once their issue has been resolved.
25. Respondents to the questionnaire were able to select from several different statements ranging from strongly agreeing (excellent) to strongly disagreeing (poor) to the eight different questions. **Appendix B** provides graphs which identify how customers answered each question. Given the low numbers of responses recorded, it is difficult to provide an accurate rating for customer service based on the performance review criteria.
26. 83 percent of respondents rated Saba at average or above, in at least one question, while only one customer rated them poor or below in all eight questions.
27. The other measure officers investigated as part of the performance review, is the number of formal complaints received through the councils' complaints procedure. During the year April 23 to March 24 there were no formal complaints regarding Saba's performance. (The complaints process does not investigate issues regarding PCNs, these are all handled under the CPE regulations).
28. The Head of Service has made a judgement based on this limited evidence on customer satisfaction as follows:

Customer satisfaction judgement	Excellent
Previous customer satisfaction judgement for comparison	Fair

Dimension 3 -Council Satisfaction

29. As part of the performance review, officers with direct experience of working with Saba and who interact with them were asked to complete a short questionnaire. While many teams were involved in the process under the enforcement of Excess Charge Notice (ECN), this has changed under CPE and is more straight forward. Saba issues the tickets as before. If they are not paid within 28 days, they then get the vehicle owner's name and address from the DVLA and issue a Notice to Owner directly to the vehicle's owner (rather than a notice asking who was the driver). Saba will also deal with any challenges that are made against the issue of a PCN and either accept or reject the challenge from the vehicle owner.
30. Under CPE, officers from the councils (and not a contractor) must deal with the second stage of the challenge process, called 'representation', and submit any cases that have not been settled to the Traffic Enforcement Centre (TEC). This work is undertaken by the Technical Projects Team Leader, who also provides any evidence available to TEC if requested.
31. The new CPE process means that other teams within the council such as legal or property now have less contact with Saba, as the car park service team (Saba and councils' car park officers) are able to take cases to TEC for a decision, without legal representation. For this reason only the staff within Technical Services responded to the request to complete a survey on Saba's performance.
32. Council officers are very satisfied with the performance of Saba over the last year. Saba has worked in a very co-opertive manner on all issues and has gone the extra mile when required to ensure that the car parks operation is efficient and the service is delivered to a high quality at all times.
33. Officers within the technical services team and the facilities team all marked Saba's performance as "satisfied" or 'very satisfied' within their questionnaires. The following comments regarding Saba's performance were also made:-
 - Saba staff are reliable, professional, and have a good working relationship with council officers
 - Communication with Saba employees is easy and friendly, and they are very helpful
 - Saba is quick to identify and raise issues with the councils so that they could be dealt with before they became a major problem.
34. From the questionnaires that were completed a score of 4.8 was achieved.

Score	<3.0	3.0 – 3.399	3.4 – 3.899	3.9 – 4.299	4.3 – 5.0
Classification	Poor	Weak	Fair	Good	Excellent

- Based on this performance, the Head of Service has made a judgement on council satisfaction as follows:

Council satisfaction judgement

Excellent

Previous council satisfaction judgement for comparison

Excellent

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

35. Considering the performance of the contractor against KPI, customer satisfaction and council satisfaction, the Head of Service has made an overall judgement as follows.

Overall assessment

Excellent

Previous overall assessment for comparison

Good

Strengths and Areas for Improvement

36. During 2023-24 Saba has delivered the contract in a reliable and professional manner, and the working relationship with the councils has continued to develop positively.
37. The communication between the Saba staff and the councils' officers has continued to be open and honest, allowing any issues to be discussed in detail and resolved quickly at an early stage.
38. Saba has worked to reduce the travel undertaken by the CEOs, by reviewing where and when patrols are programmed, but due to the area that the councils cover it is difficult to reduce their impact on the climate.
39. Saba has continued to increase its KPI score throughout the year, but as is shown in this report has struggled to receive customer feedback.

Climate and Ecological Impact Implications

40. There are no specific climate and ecological implications to this report.

Equalities implications

41. The issuing of PCNs and how Saba deal with any disputes are dealt with in a fair and considerate manner in line with the South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse district council joint car park management policy.

PCN

Risks

42. There are no risk implications with this report.

Financial Implications

43. The table 3 below shows the comparisons in the fixed contract price over the last five years (increasing each April by consumer price index published in January).

Table 3 Contract costs for car park service delivery over past five years

	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24
	£	£	£	£	£	£
South	224,088	228,122	232,228	234,318	250,193	278,838
Vale	238,320	242,610	246,977	249,200	262,424	292,864
Total	462,408	470,731	479,204	483,517	512,617	571,702

44. During 2023-24 Saba's performance against the KPIs was excellent so the level of performance was above the level when service credits were required to be applied.
45. **Appendix C** contains the comments from the Saba area director on the report.

Conclusion

46. The recommended performance rating of "Excellent" from the Head of Service for 2023- 24 identifies the continued improvement that Saba has achieved during the year, when compared with its award of "Good" for performance in 2022-2023.
47. Saba has worked well with council officers in the first whole year of CPE which has allow the maximum benefit to be gained by the councils.
48. The Head of Service has assessed Saba's overall performance as **Excellent** for its delivery of the car park management and enforcement services for 2023-2024.
49. The committee is asked to make any comments to the Cabinet Member with responsibility for car parks to enable them to make a final assessment on performance by way of an Individual Cabinet Member Decision.
50. If the committee does not agree with the Head of Service assessment, then this report will be referred to Cabinet for further discussion and a final assessment of Saba's performance.

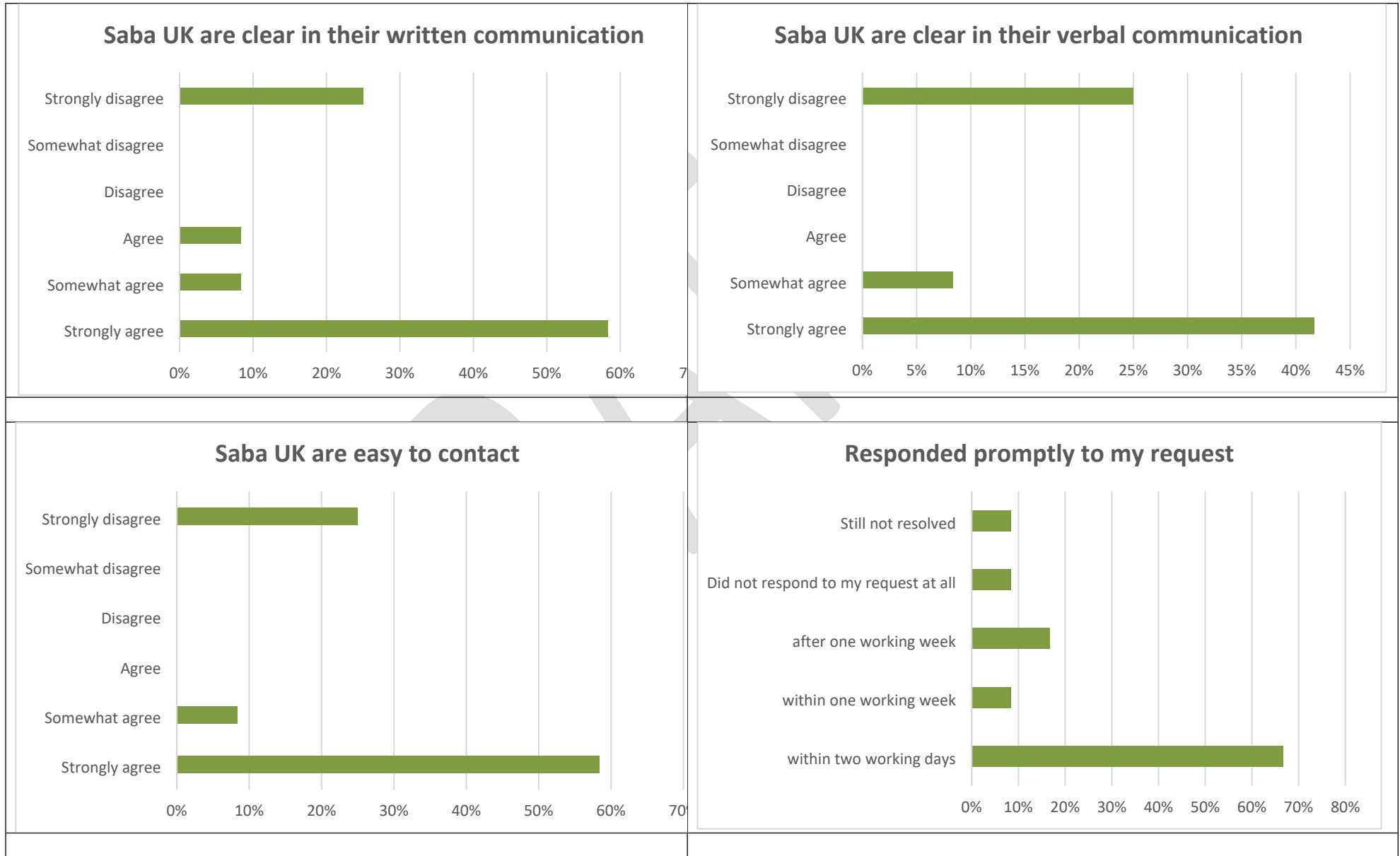
Background Papers

None

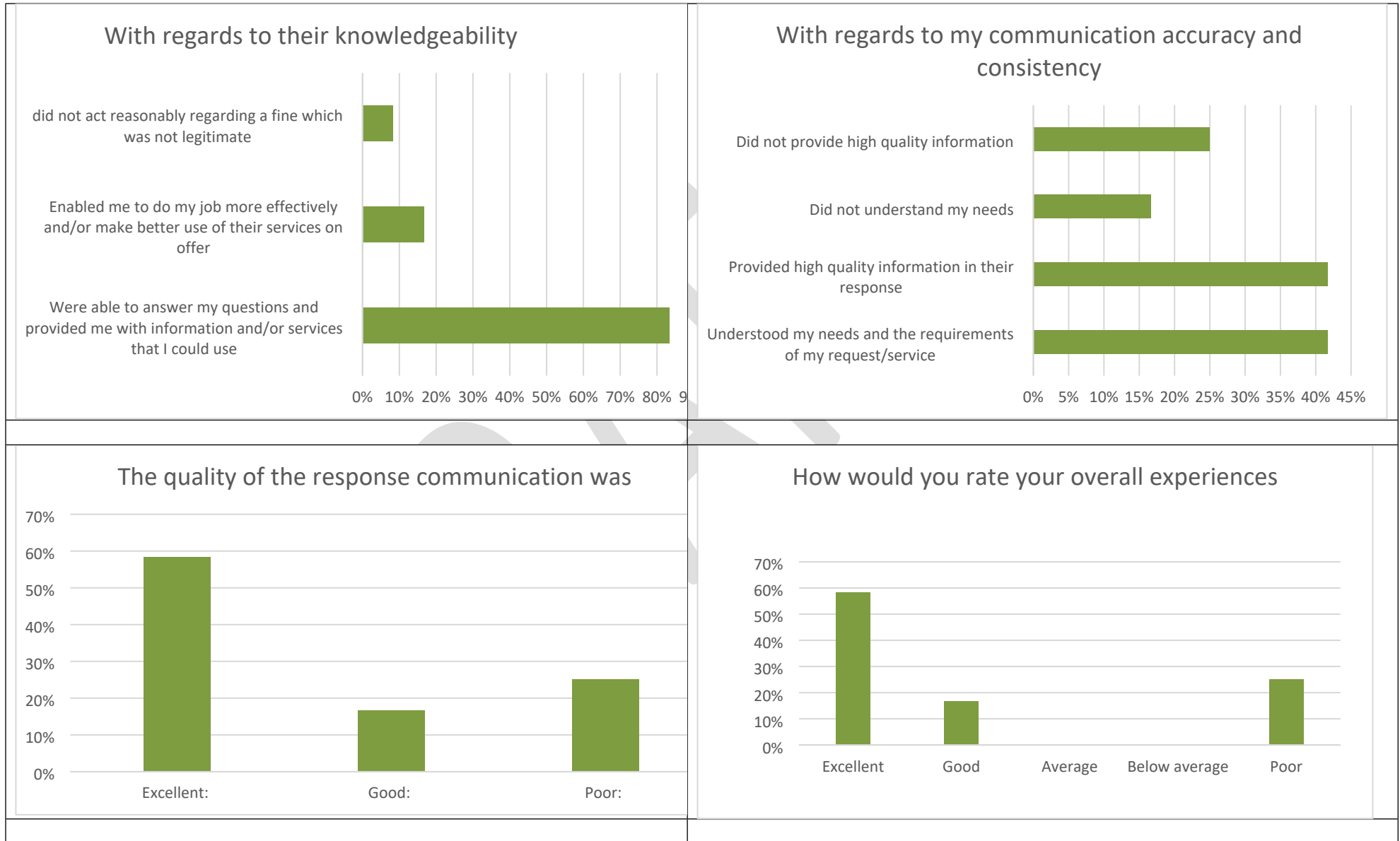
Appendix A – Saba Key Performance Indicators

	Area	KPI	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	23-24
KPI 1	Administration		89%	100%	100%	100%	100%
1.1	Administration	Reply to all public, officer and councillor parking and car parks queries (where relevant to Saba, for off street, public parking), 100% of full responses sent within 10 working days	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
1.2	Administration	% of call outs for lock-ins to the Charter Car Park were responded to and released within 30 minutes. .	87%	100%	100%	100%	100%
1.3	Administration	2 usage surveys (one for each council of all car parks) completed per annum with results published within 30 days of the survey end date (Council to give 30 days' notice)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
KPI 2	Notice Processing		99%	91%	86%	94%	100%
2.1	Notice processing	% achievement of target for notice progressions (for 1984 regs) - Send out 7-day letters after 21 days of being unpaid after the 23 rd day	100%	92%	100%	100%	100%
2.2	Notice processing	% of all notice disputes fully replied to within 10 working days	99%	82%	58%	81%	100%
2.3	Notice processing	% achievement of target for cpi error "excess charge notices" (not to exceed 7% of total issued averaged over the year)	99%	100%	100%	100%	100%
KPI 3	Reporting		100%	99%	94%	95%	98%
3.1	Reporting	Patrol the car parks - in accordance with the deployment plan - TBC South and Vale visits	99%	93%	68%	76%	92%
3.2	Reporting	% of monthly reports (stats in tabular and graphical format on notices issued, P+D income and permits issued (number and income) issued by the tenth of each month	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
3.3	Reporting	Provide monthly financial records on income vs budget for pay and display fees, ECN/PCN and permits and all other miscellaneous uses separately for each council in table and graphical format.	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
3.4	Reporting	Requests from the council's (Internal) auditors, acknowledge requests within 24 working hours and provide all relevant information requested within five working days	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
3.5	Reporting	Production of Annual Report (summarising all aspects of the car park operation and service) – Annually (by 30 April each year)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
KPI 4	Financial management		100%	100%	97%	100%	100%
4.1	Financial management	100% of all records of cash collected for the previous month to be reported and reconciled by the 10th of each month. (Agresso vs Saba collection)	100%	100%	100%	99%	100%
4.2	Financial management	100% of all records of non-cash collected for the previous month to be reported and reconciled by the 10th of each month. (Agresso vs Saba collection)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
4.3	Financial management	% of payment vouchers and refunds raised within five working days of requests	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
4.4	Payments processing	All payments received at Abbey House to be banked within 24 working hours of receipt (on site)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
4.5	Payments processing	All funding collected from the ticket machines to be transferred to the Council's bank account within 6 working days	100%	100%	85%	99%	100%
KPI 5	Disputes Management		100%	71%	94%	100%	100%
5.1	Disputes management	Forward all draft second and third dispute responses to the council where relevant - within 5 working days of receipt	100%	43%	88%	100%	100%
5.2	Disputes management	% achievement of target for number of second disputes - 97% of total issued averaged over the year (up to 3% can be cancelled at 2nd dispute) ie incorrect interpretation of cancellation criteria	100%	100%	100%	99%	100%
KPI 6	Authorised Use		100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
6.1	Authorised use	% of permitted use issued or forwarded for agreement, within three working days being agreed	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
6.2	Authorised use	Issue 100% of (parking) permits (season tickets) within 3 working days once agreed (excluding bulk application requests)	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
KPI 7	Customer satisfaction		0%	100%	100%	92%	100%
7.1	Customer satisfaction	To send out customer surveys for completion to all customers who contact the service by email or other means.	0%	100%	100%	92%	100%
KPI 8	Asset Condition		99%	97%	99%	96%	95%
8.1	Asset condition	Report H+S issues and confrontational situations monthly to the council (incidents and accidents and near misses) via monthly report	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
8.2	Asset condition	Car park inspection survey (all car parks including those free) – Completed an agreed check sheet once a quarter to identify issues within the car parks that need resolving by the Councils.	100%	100%	100%	92%	100%
8.3	Asset condition	% achievement Risk assessments - to review and update Saba risk assessments once per year or as required following any reported incidents. 100% compliance required	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
8.4	Asset condition	% of car park machine faults responded to and fixed within three working days of identification - via monthly report (Three working days Monday to Saturday)	97%	90%	96%	92%	80%
Average KPI score			86%	94%	96%	97%	99%

Appendix B – Customer Feedback



Appendix B – Customer Feedback



Appendix C Contractor 360° feedback

CONTRACTOR'S REACTION / FEEDBACK ON COUNCIL'S ASSESSMENT

An excellent year, which saw the full transition to CPE, incorporating additional training, project engagement, multi-party collaboration, monitoring and ensuring that service delivery was maintained in full, with no disruption to service, customer experience or council process. In tandem, considerable works were complete by both teams relative to the re-positioning of KPI's. Successes in KPI management are hopefully clear to see, with many KPI's fulfilled and exceeded albeit that the scoring mechanism is a hardline of 100% and therein over-achievement cannot therefore be represented, despite over achievement.

Recruitment remains a challenge in a highly competitive employee lead marketplace, where wage rates are at an equal level, The Contract Manager (Nigel) has completed an excellent job, in extending the reach to prospective candidates by maximising both local recruitment outlets and national agencies, using all available channels to ensure resourcing is maintained as a key priority.

The aged parking equipment requires significant maintenance, primarily as they are now considered 'end of life', however the Saba team have completed a sterling job in maximising 'up time' in order to protect the council's revenue. Discussions remain on-going regarding replacement, and Saba would fully support the council in this decision, this is reflected within KPI 8 – Asset condition. Saba would ask for a level of mitigation to be considered by the council relative to performance of this KPI.

Customer satisfaction feedback remains low in terms of the quantity received, primarily in our view as the subject of parking remains emotive, with little engagement from members of the public outside of PCN appeals. That said, in the main the responses received were of a positive nature. Combined works and discussions continue over improving the capture rate of survey information, although this remains challenging when purely attempting to capture a reflection of Saba services alone, without the inclusion of the parking estate, charging and aged assets.

Positive collaboration has been completed throughout the year, working closely with the council counterparts with discussions and proposals having been submitted for new services, equipment, and technology lead solutions. We hope to have the continued opportunity to explore these options and are grateful to the Council's parking team for their engagement and support across the year.

ANY AREAS WHERE CONTRACTOR DISAGREES WITH ASSESSMENT.

None

WHAT COULD / SHOULD THE COUNCIL DO DIFFERENTLY TO ENABLE THE CONTRACTOR TO DELIVER THE SERVICE MORE EFFICIENTLY / EFFECTIVELY / ECONOMICALLY?

Feedback provided by

Andy Marr
Regional Commercial Manager

Date 21 August 2024