

Mark Moran looks at what local authority parking teams should seek out when contracting bailiffs

Bailiffs are the best team players during penalty time

There now over 170 decriminalised parking enforcement (DPE) schemes now operating in Britain, issuing some seven million penalty charge notices (PCNs) annually. While the majority of PCNs are paid before the 14-day 50% discount period expires, many are left unpaid and unchallenged in the appeals system. These are ultimately registered as civil debts at the Traffic Enforcement Centre at Northampton County Court, after which they can be collected by bailiffs — now increasingly called civil enforcement agents.

With DPE schemes increasingly widespread — and set to grow in number — the parking sector has become increasingly attractive to debt recovery companies. But when hiring debt recovery companies what should local authorities be looking for? The answer, according to key players in the field, is to first assess the reputation and financial solvency of civil enforcement agencies, then ask about factors such as their ability to trace offenders on a national basis and to track persistent evaders.

“Your business partners represent you, so make sure you know what you are getting,” says Andy Rose, managing director of Bristow & Sutor Civil Enforcement Agents. “When appointing enforcement agencies, local authorities should first and foremost make certain that the organisation in question is a member of professional bodies such as the British Parking Association (BPA), Enforcement Services Association (ESA) or Association of Civil Enforcement Agencies (ACEA). It is also recommended that they are accredited through a recognised quality assurance system.”

Rose advises that it is of critical importance to check the financial stability of potential partners. “You should ensure that your money is safe in their hands,” he advises. “Insist that you receive copies of audited accounts and adequate guarantees to eliminate financial risk. A visit to the supplier’s office will also go a long way to visibly seeing the resources, processes and support teams that are essential to the successful operation of any enforcement operation.” For example, Bristow & Sutor has 290 staff with a

support team ratio greater than one-to-one, says Rose. Recent clients include Wychavon District Council.

Following up references is crucial, Rose says. “An enforcement agency that is confident in its ability, performance and level of complaints would have little hesitation in providing a complete list of clients for you to contact at random. Good collection rates depend on a sufficient number of adequately trained and certificated resources with a thorough knowledge of the law.”

