
Minutes of the Highways and Environmental Services Select Committee

Thursday, 21st September, 2023 at 6.00 pm
In Committee Room 2, The Council House, Priory Road, Dudley

Present:

Councillor P Miller (Vice-Chair in the Chair)
Councillors D Borley, K Casey, K Denning, P Dobb, I Kettle and J Martin.

Dudley MBC Officers:

N McGurk (Acting Service Director – Neighbour Delivery), J Deakin (Head of Waste and Fleet Operations), S Edwards (Project Manager) and K Taylor (Senior Democratic Services Officer).

Also in Attendance:

Councillor D Corfield (Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services)

9 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence from the meeting were received on behalf of Councillors E Lawrence and A Lees.

10 Appointment of Substitute Member

There were no substitute Members appointed for this meeting of the Committee.

11 **Declarations of Interest**

No member made a declaration of interest in accordance with the Members' Code of Conduct.

12 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2nd August, 2023, be approved as a correct record and signed.

13 **Public Forum**

No issues were raised under this agenda item.

14 **Transport Fleet Services**

A report of the Acting Service Director – Neighbour Delivery was submitted on an update on the Council's Fleet Service and the future options for its fleet management responsibilities, commensurate with the Council's financial and environmental policy objectives.

In presenting the report submitted through presentation slides, the Head of Waste and Fleet Operations outlined the current vehicle replacement programme and advised that the existing fleet had been previously purchased outright and the vehicles and associated equipment were maintained inhouse at the workshops located at Lister Road Depot. Dudley's fleet operations currently provided a comprehensive vehicle fleet for all aspects of Council services, which included a diverse range of vehicles that were dependent on Diesel fuel as a single energy source.

It was noted that the current fleet replacement strategy was to maximise the service life of the vehicles in order to retain front line functions with a replacement cycle of 7 to 10 years, however, it was acknowledged that a new effective fleet strategy and vehicle replacement programme was needed. It was confirmed, however, that the replacement programme had slowed down further, as a result of the pandemic, impending legislation, production slow-down and fuel options consideration.

Members were advised of the departments commitment in providing the right vehicles and plant to ensure employees could undertake their jobs effectively in a safe, compliant, and sustainable way, whilst considering Dudley's ambition in becoming a Carbon Neutral Council by 2030.

The Project Manager then provided an update on the trials undertaken of electric vehicles for waste collection covering multiple rounds throughout a week to establish capacity and allow operatives to trial the new technologies. The 26 Tonne Mercedes Chassis was powered by five batteries, which were charged overnight at Lister Road Depot, and were found to be able to complete more service duty-cycles resulting in more waste collected, and returning to the depot with 30% battery life remaining. It was noted that a manufacturer warranty of seven years would be awarded with each vehicle, upon which the vehicle would be replaced for a second time for a further seven years.

The Head of Waste and Fleet Operations reported that a number of considerations would be undertaken in developing a clear Fleet Strategy including how the Council would procure vehicles ensuring not to over purchase and reviewing service operations to identify alternative ways of working to reduce fleet numbers. It was noted that work had already taken place in reducing the size of the fleet with over 30 underutilised vehicles removed from the fleet over the last 18 months.

It was noted that an operational review was ongoing which included identifying alternative models in particular in relation to waste collection and the most effective shift patterns and service duty-cycles moving forward. In considering alternative fuels, the current infrastructure at Lister Road Depot would need to be reviewed in order to allow the Council to generate more energy and become self-sufficient.

The Acting Service Director – Neighbour Delivery referred to the wider areas with regard to fleet including climate change and new ways of working. He reported on the departments ambition as a leading authority and marker for the Black Country which he anticipated would significantly support future funding bids. The significant culture change that was required was acknowledged, however, the opportunities available would be transformational. In order to drive the project forward would require big plans and decisions being made but the expected rewards would off-set the work needed.

Following the presentation of the report, Members had the opportunity to ask questions make comments and responses were provided, where necessary, as follows:-

- a) Councillor D Borley, although supporting the comments made, suggested that a balanced and managed approach was needed during the proposed cross-over of diesel fuelled fleet vehicles, and emphasised the need to retain the current weekly waste collection in Dudley.
- b) Councillor D Borley referred to the electric vehicles that had been tested and queried whether they were sufficient to carry out existing service duty-cycles using a single power source only. He also queried whether damage could be caused to vehicles or highways as a result of the poor condition of some roads within the Borough and whether a budget had been allocated for such repairs.

In responding, the Project Manager confirmed that the vehicles tested were Euro 6 compliant operating a rear-steer chassis, allowing a smaller turning circle significantly improving steering and reducing risk of damage. During the trials, the vehicles were carrying a full load of waste averaging on 150% more than normal collection.

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services confirmed that the new vehicles and the extra weight would not impact on roads and anticipated that a saving of £1million could be made negating the need for replacement tyres in addition to £1.8m fuel savings.

- c) The Acting Service Director – Neighbour Delivery stated that during the trials, vehicles were tested excessively and emphasised that providing a more robust and efficient service to residents was a vital element to the proposals. It was noted that the replacement programme would be undertaken by a phased approach.
- d) The Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services reiterated the priority in providing a service to residents whilst being mindful of the Council's commitment to becoming a Carbon Neutral Council by 2030 alongside the continuing increase in the number of housing developments. The trials undertaken had demonstrated that the electric vehicles had significantly performed more efficiently than the current diesel vehicle.

- e) The Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services referred to the Council's award winning recognition in producing enough electricity to power 11,000 homes, and shared his future aspirations for Dudley as a self-efficient local authority processing its own waste with the ability of becoming a traded service to neighbouring authorities.
- f) Further to comments made with regard to hydrogen fuel, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services referred to the energy from waste generated from the Lister Road Depot where it was acknowledged that steam and heat produced from the Incinerator could be converted to green waste energy. However, this would be a long process to implement with the right infrastructure needed. He shared his ambition for the fleet to include both green energy and electric fuelled vehicles, and for Dudley Council to be a benchmark for other authorities in this area. Reference was also made to the positivity expressed by the West Midlands Combined Authority with regard to the green energy agenda.
- g) Councillor K Denning suggested that the current infrastructure at the Lister Road Depot was not sufficient to store and maintain the charging equipment required to support an electric fleet.

In responding, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services reported that the vehicles tested did have charging facility on board. A higher probability of securing funding to upgrade the sub-station through the upcycling vehicles scheme was mentioned.

- h) Councillor K Denning referred to the installation of solar panels and queried whether there was sufficient space available at Lister Road or whether the use of Solar Farms would be more beneficial.

In responding, the Acting Service Director – Neighbour Delivery confirmed that resources were being reviewed, however, it was considered that there was sufficient roof space at Lister Road to support solar panels. He stated that there was potential for the Energy from Waste plant at Lister Road to provide electricity for Electric Vehicle charging points and solar canopies, therefore it was anticipated that Solar Farms would not be needed.

- i) The Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services encouraged all Members to visit the facilities at Lister Road and confirmed that the structure of the plant emulated a combustion filter and suggested that low emissions would still be achieved. It was hoped that an additional turbine would be implemented using available funding with the possibility of charging other Councils to process their waste in order to generate income and produce more energy for residential use.
- j) Reference was made to the significant changes in vehicle maintenance, and it was confirmed that training would be available to employees operating specialist equipment. The opportunity to provide an advanced, efficient and effective service to the Borough and residents was paramount.
- k) In responding to a question raised by Councillor D Borley in relation to implementation timelines, the Acting Service Director – Neighbour Delivery anticipated a small number of electric fleet vehicles to be in operation within 12 months.
- l) Councillor K Casey commented positively on the discussions surrounding use of electric and hydrogen fuelled vehicles and suggested that bold steps were needed to progress in this area further, whilst capitalizing on facilities at Lister Road, and that flexibility should be maintained throughout the process. Reference was made to other Councils that were introducing sizeable electric vehicle infrastructures and vehicles into their fleets, with Nottingham leading the way, and whether the Council had contacted those authorities to assist in the delivery moving forward.

In responding, the Acting Service Director – Neighbour Delivery concurred with comments made and although accepting that other authorities had introduced electric fleets, it was an opportunity for Dudley to consider best practice and lessons learned. Members were assured that once an understanding of the plan and options based on existing infrastructure was confirmed, the implementation of the programme would be accelerated.

- m) It was anticipated that the Fleet Strategy and Decarbonisation Manager would be in position by the end of 2023, with responsibility for issuing and awarding contracts, reviewing and setting up administration systems as well as business development. In order to break down silos working it was envisaged that due to the nature of the role, work would cross-over in a number of departments as part of the future strategy.
- n) In responding to questions raised by Councillor I Kettle, the Acting Service Director – Neighbour Delivery confirmed that service operations were also provided to other internal departments within the Council. It was also acknowledged that significant investment was needed at Lister Road to support the proposals, however there was a number of opportunities that would be considered moving forward.
- o) Councillor J Martin welcomed the positivity and knowledge demonstrated by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services, and queried the resilience of the electric vehicles during the trial period.

In responding, the Project Manager confirmed that extensive testing had been undertaken and longer shifts programmed to determine the resilience of the vehicles. It was reiterated that a manufacturer warranty of seven years would be awarded with each vehicle, upon which the vehicle would be replaced for a second time for a further seven years.

- p) Following comments made with regard to incinerating waste from other authorities, Councillor J Martin queried how low Carbon emissions could be maintained as a result of an increase of large vehicles entering into the Borough.

In responding, the Acting Service Director – Neighbour Delivery recognised the difficulties in achieving net zero Carbon emissions and emphasised that the plans proposed would enable Dudley to become the leading authority across the Black Country and wider region. It was noted that the Decarbonisation and Energy Strategy would be considered and reflect the proposals accordingly.

- q) In responding to a further question raised by Councillor J Martin, the Head of Waste and Fleet Operations referred to the Government's recent announcement in deferring the introduction of Consistency in Collections. This will now be replaced by the introduction of the new Simpler Recycling. The full details of this was still to be announced. This will need to be considered along with mandatory food-waste measures in any future proposed waste collection models.
- r) Councillor J Martin sought clarification as to whether a reduction in the existing weekly residential waste collections would be considered, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services referred to a natural reduction as a result of implementing effective and efficient services together with promotional activities highlighting the importance of recycling. It was emphasised, however, that the purpose in upcycling and testing vehicles and reviewing working processes was to provide a more efficient and reliable service. It was envisaged that within 18 months, the fleet would include up to 4 upcycled vehicles, however it was essential that correct processes, including Procurement, were undertaken.
- s) In responding to a question raised by the Chair with regard to the size of the electric vehicles and whether this would create difficulty for operatives navigating through narrow streets, the Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services confirmed that due to the vehicles operating twin-steer, this offered robust steering, better weight distribution and improved turn stability.

The Chair thanked the Officers and Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services for the informative discussions and commended the work involved.

Resolved

That the information contained in the report submitted, and as reported at the meeting, on an update on the Council's Fleet Service and the future options for its fleet management responsibilities, commensurate with the Council's financial and environmental policy objectives, be noted.

A report of the Acting Service Director – Neighbour Delivery was submitted on the Quarter 1 Corporate Quarterly Performance report of the 2023/24 financial year covering the period 1st April, 2023 to 30th June, 2023, which was aligned to the new 3-year Council Plan. Further data relating to the directorate service delivery was included as appendices to the report submitted, focusing on the Environment Directorate.

Members had the opportunity to ask questions make comments and responses were provided, where necessary, as follows:-

- a) Councillor K Casey referred to PI.324 – No. incidents of fly-tipping in particular the continual increase since Quarter 1 of the previous year and that the number of fly-tipping enforcement actions were low in comparison, and therefore queried whether there was a predominate factor for this and what measures the Council could implement to deter fly-tipping.

In responding, the Acting Service Director – Neighbour Delivery agreed with the comments made however assured Members that the issues surrounding fly-tipping was a national issue. It was also suggested that following a change in data reporting, the numbers would be significantly different to those presented previously. Reference was made to the comprehensive work undertaken by Enforcement Officers, which would be strengthened by the recruitment of an additional three officers. Reference was also made to Dudley's 'You've Been Shamed' campaign on the Dudley Council website displaying images collected from Closed-Circuit Television systems of fly-tipping perpetrators.

- b) In responding to a question raised by Councillor K Casey in relation to PI. 1498 % household waste sent for reuse, recycling and composting (NI 192) and the inconsistency of the figures; the Head of Waste and Fleet Operations confirmed that as green waste was weather dependent, this would impact data. The uncertainty surrounding the collection of dry recycling was mentioned however Members were assured that collections had not been missed.
- c) It was noted that officers had written to the Government with regard to funding pending confirmation of the introduction of mandatory food-waste collections and the publication of the Government's Waste Strategy.

- d) Councillor I Kettle commented positively on the improved service at the Household Waste and Recycling Centre in Stourbridge and queried whether additional promotional campaigns could be undertaken to highlight available appointments and the service provided.

In responding, the Head of Waste and Fleet Operations referred in particular to the number of no shows to the site and acknowledged that further work was needed to promote and encourage users to cancel bookings if no longer needed in order for the slots to be released. Further discussions will be held with the Communications and Public Affairs Department to improve social media promotion.

The Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services also commented on the monthly publications updating residents on current news and announcements. It was also noted that the number of available appointments at the Household Waste and Recycling Centre had been increased in order to accommodate demand.

- e) In responding to a question raised by Councillor J Martin, the Head of Waste and Fleet Operations confirmed that Dudley was working in partnership with Textek to offer residents a service for the collection and recycling of waste goods and materials, including mattresses. It was noted that items such as mattresses that were disposed at the Stourbridge Site were deposited in landfill.
- f) It was recognised that further work was needed to promote and improve recycling from properties that had been issued with communal waste bins.
- g) In responding to a question raised by Councillor D Borley, the Acting Service Director – Neighbour Delivery confirmed that road gritting vehicles had been prepared in advance of the winter period, with grit bins regularly checked and restocked when necessary. Issues with gritting and snow clearance could be reported on the Dudley Council website.

- h) In responding to a question raised by Councillor K Denning in relation to confirmed timescales for the replacement of all street lighting to light-emitting diodes (LED), the Acting Service Director – Neighbour Delivery referred to the three-year replacement programme and confirmed that 25% of lighting had been replaced to date. Members were assured that the programme was on track to be delivered by 2026.
- i) With regard to street signs and bollards, it was noted that a contractor had been appointed to replace LED's together with a review to ensure that there was sufficient lighting throughout the Borough where needed. An internal review had also been requested in relation to illuminate signage and reflective bollards throughout the Borough which was expected to be completed by 2026. Due to the fluctuating electricity costs, it was difficult to determine the amount of savings accumulated, however it was expected that significant savings could be achieved.
- j) In responding to a request by Councillor K Denning, the Acting Service Director – Neighbour Delivery undertook to categorise figures in relation to fly-tipping into areas for future reporting.

Resolved

- (1) That the information contained in the report submitted, and as reported at the meeting, on the Quarter 1 Corporate Quarterly Performance report of the 2023/24 financial year covering the period 1st April, 2023 to 30th June, 2023, be noted.
- (2) That figures in relation to fly-tipping be categorised into areas in future reports.

16 Highways and Environmental Services Select Committee Progress Tracker and Future Business

Resolved

That the Highways and Environmental Services Select Committee Progress Tracker and Future Business, as outlined in the report, be noted.

17 Questions Under Council Procedure Rule 11.8

There were no questions to the Chair pursuant to Council Procedure Rule 11.8.

18 **Comments of the Chair**

The Chair thanked all Members and Officers for attending and the information presented and constructive discussions and contributions made during the meeting.

The meeting ended at 7.40pm

CHAIR