

Minutes of the Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee

**Wednesday 21st December, 2022 at 6.00 pm
in the Council Chamber at the Council House, Priory Road,
Dudley**

Present:

Councillor P Dobb (Vice-Chair in the Chair)
Councillors C Bayton, K Casey, R Collins, J Elliott, J Foster, S Henley, M Rogers
and T Russon

Dudley MBC Officers:

A Vaughan (Interim Director of Public Realm), P Parker (Head of Communications and Public Affairs), J Deakin (Waste Operations Manager), R Bowdler (Transport Manager), S Edwards (Project Manager) and K Taylor (Senior Democratic Services Officer)

Also in Attendance:

Mr T Weller (Member of the Public by invitation)

Together with 2 members of the public.

15 Ben Corfield – son of Councillor D Corfield

The Committee observed a minute of silence in respect of the recent tragic death of Ben Corfield, son of Councillor D Corfield.

16 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence from the meeting were submitted on behalf of Councillors D Corfield, C Eccles and K Shakespeare.

17 **Declarations of Interests**

No Member made a declaration of interest, in accordance with the Members Code of Conduct, in respect of any matter considered at the meeting.

18 **Minutes**

Resolved

That the minutes of the meeting held on 28th September, 2022 be approved as a correct record and signed.

19 **Climate Change and Environment Engagement Feedback, Obtain Views from Scrutiny on their Priorities**

The Committee received a presentation from the Interim Director of Public Realm on the feedback from the Climate Change and Environment Engagement. The Committee were asked to consider the feedback and make comments which would be forwarded to the Cabinet Member for Waste Management and Climate Change for consideration.

In presenting the information it was reported that the 'Your Borough, Your Future' public consultation, undertaken during a five-week period between 18th October, 2022 and 18th November, 2022, sought to understand resident's views on what the Council could do and what individuals would be willing to do, to address the challenges of climate change.

The main drivers for change in Waste Management was in response to Government Legislation and Local Policies, however it was recognised that there would be challenges moving forward given the financial constraints of the Local Authority. It was noted that corporate policies had started to incorporate and reflect Dudley's commitment to the climate emergency agenda, together with strategic and operational planning with particular focus on fleet sustainability.

It was noted that 3,195 responses were received to the survey, which was considered positive and demonstrated the importance of this area and the need for change moving forward. A range of events and activities, including roadshows, community forums and visits to community groups, leisure centres, and schools had been organised and held by the Council during the consultation period.

The Interim Director of Public Realm provided an overview on the findings of the survey, with the majority of residents being supportive of the Council reviewing changes to the waste and recycling services in order to increase recycling, make savings and reduce carbon impacts. Although new services such as food waste collections were welcomed, it was noted that this would result in expenditure of up to £4million each year for the Local Authority.

Arising from the presentation, Members asked questions and made comments. Responses were provided where appropriate as follows:-

- a) The Chair suggested that marketing information would need to be targeted and informative in relation to food waste collections.
- b) Councillor C Barnett referred to the legislation in relation to food waste management in which he considered to be an important element to addressing climate change, and emphasised the responsibility of the Local Authority in this regard. The 'Your Borough, Your Future' survey was welcomed, which allowed residents the opportunity to present their views and suggestions.
- c) Councillor S Henley requested that further consideration be given to amending the opening and closing times of the household waste recycling centre to allow users to visit at varying times to help reduce air quality.

In response, the Interim Director of Public Realm advised that further consideration would be given to optimising services provided by the Council and ensuring that the most efficient route was being made available for residents.

- d) Councillor J Foster considered that the responses to the survey were disproportionate and suggested that further work was needed to ensure that effective engagement was made to those that had not responded.

The Head of Communications and Public Affairs acknowledged comments made and confirmed that a multi-channel approach had been undertaken and considered that the fluidity of the sample and response rate was good. Following a request made, the Head of Communications and Public Affairs and Interim Director of Public Realm undertook to provide a breakdown of the areas within the Borough in which respondents of the survey resided to the Committee for information.

- e) Councillor T Russon considered that the response to the consultation was positive, however emphasised the need in ensuring value of investment for the proposed all electric fleet.
- f) Councillor C Bayton highlighted the need for change in order for the Local Authority to meet forthcoming legislation requirements, and referred specifically to the challenges in relation to food waste collection in flatted estates and queried whether those particular residents had contributed towards the consultation. It was also suggested that a dedicated policy was needed to address similar areas including the appropriate receptacles needed for collections dependent on the accommodation.

The Interim Director of Public Realm acknowledged comments made and agreed that bespoke designs would be developed in a number of areas in order to provide an effective and efficient service.

In responding to the question raised by Councillor C Bayton, the Head of Communications and Public Affairs also agreed to include further information in relation to properties in his response as requested by the Committee.

- g) Councillor C Barnett suggested that the survey indicated that residents were aware of the climate change emergency, however considered that there was very little information contained on the Dudley Website that would help inform members of the public, and provide a summary of the work undertaken by the Council and future proposals.

The Head of Communications and Public Affairs acknowledged comments made and referred to discussions held with the Decarbonisation Working Group during December and confirmed that additional information for publication on the Dudley Website would be considered further.

- h) Reference was made to the UK Climate Change Risk Assessment independent review undertaken by Central Government with Dudley being assessed as zero with further action needed. Councillor C Barnett made particular reference to the improvements made by Solihull Metropolitan Borough Council and considered that the Local Authority was not moving fast enough with regard to Climate Change.

In response, the Interim Director of Public Realm assured the Committee that the Local Authority had made steps and acquired resources including the appointment of dedicated staff. It was confirmed that a new Sustainability Team would be implemented, and a recruitment process for a Climate Change Policy Manager would be undertaken. It was further noted that the Public Realm Directorate would be restructured as the Environment Directorate, and it was hoped that further resources would be identified in order to challenge further.

- i) Councillor R Collins referred specifically to a question within the consultation survey with regards to the Council providing larger bins for more materials to recycle and raised concerns of the space required for those bins, in particular in smaller or terraced properties, and requested whether commingling had been considered by the Local Authority.
- j) Councillor R Collins also suggested that residents within her Ward had been notified of the roadshows the day before the event and queried whether there would have been more attendance and participation if sufficient notice had been given.

In responding to comments made, the Interim Director of Public Realm reported on the significant response to the consultation and that commingling was a legitimate consideration for the Local Authority moving forward. It was also acknowledged that the storage of waste bins would be easier in some areas than others.

- k) Mr T Weller referred to the extensive information developed over time in relation to Climate science and raised concerns about resource completion and emphasised the need to address sustainable living.
- l) The Interim Director of Public Realm provided an overview of the process involved with Anaerobic Digesters in which the biogas produced would be generated into renewable electricity. It was noted that the nearest Anaerobic Digestion Plant was based in Kinver, Stourbridge.

- m) In responding to a question raised by Councillor J Foster in relation to Employee Engagement, the Head of Public Affairs and Communication confirmed that 8% of Council employees had responded to the consultation, recognising that a significant proportion of employees were Dudley residents. It was noted that further Employee and Elected Member engagement would be undertaken during the process.
- n) In responding to comments made, the Committee agreed to formulate a recommendation to the Cabinet Member for Waste Management and Climate Change to consider prioritising and maximising the facilities at the Roundhill Anaerobic Digestion Plant based in Gibbet Lane, Kinver for food waste for the Dudley Borough.
- o) A further report on progress made was also requested to be submitted to the Committee in six months.
- p) In responding to a question raised by Councillor J Elliott in relation to lessons learnt and participation in surveys moving forward, the Head of Public Affairs and Communications reiterated that the response to the survey was good and above expectations and confirmed that stakeholder mapping and programme of events together with a multi-channel approach had been implemented during the consultation period. The lack of notice for events and the condensed consultation period would be considered moving forward with a comprehensive process and programme developed for future engagement.

The Chair thanked officers for the information presented and work undertaken.

Resolved

- (1) That the presentation on the feedback from the Climate Change and Environment Engagement be noted.
- (2) That the Head of Communications and Public Affairs and Interim Director of Public Realm be requested to provide a breakdown of location and the properties in which the respondents to the survey resided, for information.
- (3) That the Cabinet Member for Waste Management and Climate Change be recommended to consider prioritising and maximising the facilities at the Roundhill Anaerobic Digestion Plant based in Gibbet Lane, Kinver for food waste for the Dudley Borough.

- (4) That a report on progress made be submitted to the Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee in six months.
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20 **Transport Fleet Services**

The Committee received a presentation from the Transport Manager on the Transport Fleet Services. In presenting the information it was reported that the Fleet Service was a Council wide service operated predominately from the Lister Road Depot, Dudley as a traded service.

It was noted that there were currently over 478 vehicles within Dudley Council's fleet, including refuse collection, highways and green care vehicles, with regular meetings undertaken to ensure the safe management of the vehicles, drivers and operation. The Committee were advised that the Grey Fleet utilised by Housing Maintenance Teams had been replaced with Council provided vehicles.

It was noted that the Council's overall transport costs equated to £6million, with fuel costs of £1.5million per annum, and in light of the geographical size of Dudley, the average annual mileage undertaken was 5,000 miles per annum. The Transport Manager advised that the replacement cost of the Fleet that were due by age profile up to and including 2023-24, was £11.8million for diesel, rising to £21.6million for low carbon alternative fuels, diesel and electric.

Data analysis identified a significant increase of the number of vehicles replaced since 2020, despite challenges arising from manufacturers and the Covid-19 Pandemic.

It was noted that the Lister Road Workshops currently operated from 5.30am until 6.15pm, however this would be reviewed to ascertain whether there was a demand for availability outside of core hours. The re-location of the Taxi testing operation, currently undertaken at Narrow Boat Way, would also be considered.

The challenges faced in attracting and retaining vehicle Technicians was mentioned together with the increasing costs of Fleet vehicles over the last two years. The significant increase in fuel costs and age profile of the waste collection Fleet was also referred to.

The Transport Manager advised the Committee that the Council operated specialist type vehicles and plant of which electrical versions were currently not available and that future technology, such as hydrogen, was not considered mainstream. It was emphasised that Depot and Council wide electronic infrastructure required substantial investment.

The opportunities available included the use of whole life costing to help justify a higher initial outlay on the basis of lower running costs in conjunction with the determination of Transport Services in decarbonising the Fleet. It was confirmed that 24 vehicles had been removed from the Fleet over the past four months, in conjunction with other saving initiatives within Transport, this had generated savings of £402k and reduced Carbon Dioxide emissions.

Reference was made to the draft Fleet Strategy 2022-2032, attached as Agenda Item No. 7b within the agenda, which focused primarily on supporting frontline operations in the most cost effective and environmentally considerate way. It was emphasised that safety, quality and efficiency was complimentary and led to better utilisation and associated cost reductions. Although the financial constraints of the Local Authority were acknowledged, the priority was to operate a high-quality maintenance regime whilst remaining competitive in marketplaces.

The success of the strategy would be dependent on the support and cooperation of all employees that utilised the transport services. Focus would also be given for the service to provide additional opportunities and become intelligence consultation led in relation to the procurement and modification of high-quality vehicles that met operational demands whilst achieving best value. The need for vehicle replacement parameters to be maximised in order to achieve long-term service life was also mentioned.

It was reported that spare vehicles within Public Realm would no longer be retained by the client departments and that the Transport Services function would be restructured to provide a 'fully managed' service.

The difficulties in inspecting, servicing and maintaining the diverse specialist plant and equipment within the Local Authority would require further consideration for procuring external contracts or hire where better value for money could be demonstrated.

Reference was made to the Government's announcement whereby the sale of new diesel vehicles would no longer be permitted, including new non-zero emission Light Goods Vehicles (under 3.5ft) by 2030. The Local Authority declared a climate emergency in 2020 with a commitment to reach net zero emissions by 2041, and it was confirmed that the proposed Fleet Strategy established the framework for the Council to achieve a zero emissions fleet within the timescale of the period of the Strategy.

Arising from the presentation, Members asked questions and made comments. Responses were provided where appropriate as follows:-

- a) Councillor M Rogers although welcomed the presentation given, considered that the budget of £1,676,200 for vehicle maintenance and overheads did not reflect the size of the fleet and requested clarification on the number of vehicles located at the Lister Road Depot and the proposed review of future vehicle manufacturers.

In responding, the Transport Manager confirmed that the budget had been allocated reflecting the aging profile of the vehicles, and that approximately 147 vehicles were currently based at the Lister Road depot. He also confirmed that manufacturers, such as Mercedes and Dennis Eagle, were being considered in relation to 100% Battery Electric Vehicles.

- b) In responding to a question raised by Councillor M Rogers in relation to the replacement of diesel vehicles totalling £11.8m, the Transport Manager reported that currently there were no suitable alternative to an economic efficient replacement of diesel crane vehicles, however further investigation would be undertaken. It was also confirmed that there were no hybrid vehicles currently operating within the Fleet.
- c) Members were assured that whilst the safe operation of vehicles for employees, contractors, other road users and the public was maintained in order to meet statutory commitments, the purpose of the Fleet Strategy reinforced these principles.
- d) Councillor C Bayton undertook to submit detailed questions to the Transport Manager for a response, however requested clarification as to the purpose of the presentation to the Scrutiny Committee and in particular whether the Fleet Strategy had already been approved and endorsed.

In responding, the Interim Director of Public Realm clarified that the presentation had been submitted to the Scrutiny Committee to allow for discussion and comments which would be considered as part of the formal decision-making process. He commented positively on the current position of the Fleet and stated that constructive steps had been made in raising questions and the focus needed for the replacement of the Council's Fleet Vehicles. Members were assured that the replacement vehicles and systems would be adequately tested prior to formal approval and implementation.

- e) Councillor C Bayton reiterated that reports submitted for consideration by the Scrutiny Committee should clearly outline the purpose of the report and the response or observations required by Members. She also shared her disappointment that the Local Authority had not developed an overarching Climate Change and Transport Policy.
- f) In responding to a question raised by Councillor S Henley in relation to proposed savings achieved by generating waste collection into sustainable fuel which could then be utilised in the new fleet vehicles, the Transport Manager referred to the work undertaken in other Local Authorities including Manchester and Nottingham which would assist in identifying the appropriate model for Dudley. Due to the uncertainty of future usage and costings, further analysis would be undertaken utilising a whole life costing plan.
- g) Councillor C Barnett undertook to submit detailed questions to the Transport Manager for a response, however he believed that the replacement of the Fleet was driven by forthcoming legislation requirements and queried whether the Council had the determination to complete prior to the deadlines stipulated by Government. He also referred to the proposed change to an electric Fleet, and whilst it was acknowledged that the fuel generated at the electricity Waste to Power plant was not diesel, it was not considered to be net zero, and therefore queried whether reducing the mileage of vehicles was the predominant aspiration.

In responding, the Transport Manager confirmed that the main objective was the reduction in the number of fleet vehicles and further assessments undertaken in relation to the journeys undertaken with discussions needed with customers regarding future usage.

- h) Councillor C Barnett referred to the number of aging diesel fuelled taxi vehicles within Dudley, and queried whether the Local Authority had given consideration to employees commuting to the workplace, and the measures that could be introduced to alleviate the mileage used.

The Interim Director of Public Realm referred to taxi vehicles that operated within different areas and the challenges faced by the Local Authority in implementing policy in areas including identifying replacement vehicles or fuel consumption.

- i) Councillor K Casey welcomed the information presented and stated that the Local Authority should lead by example by transitioning the Fleet to electric vehicles and raised concern to the length of time taken by the Council in considering the replacement. He also suggested that additional Government Funding should be petitioned in relation to the Climate Change agenda.
- j) Reference was made to the number of fleet vehicles replaced since 2020, and in responding the Transport Manager confirmed that there were no electric vehicles purchased during this period.
- k) Councillor J Foster raised concerns of the absence of a covering report to accompany the agenda items to allow sufficient preparation time for Members to effectively scrutinise and requested that the comments made by Members at the meeting be considered and reflected in the Fleet Strategy.
- l) Following a suggestion, it was agreed that a further report be submitted to the Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee at the first meeting of the next Municipal Year together with a feasibility study and programme or prior to formal approval by the Cabinet.
- m) Mr T Weller suggested that electric trams should replace buses and all metro extensions withdrawn. He also referred to the incineration undertaken at the Lister Road Depot and urged that waste should be recycled, and solar panels installed to generate electricity for usage. He recommended that Officers monitor the mileage of each vehicle per annum to allow longer life usage; that drivers be encouraged to switch off vehicles whilst stationary, and employees be inspired to cycle to their workplace to help reduce vehicle usage.

The Transport Manager expressed his thanks for the discussion undertaken and acknowledged comments made by Members, which would be considered further.

The Chair thanked the Transport Manager for the presentation given and work undertaken.

Resolved

- (1) That the presentation on the Transport Fleet Services be noted.

- (2) That a further report be submitted to the Climate Change and Environment Scrutiny Committee at the first meeting of the next Municipal Year together with a feasibility study and programme or prior to formal approval by the Cabinet.
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21 **Public Forum**

A Cradley and Wollescote resident was in attendance and requested clarification as to whether Dudley was utilising powers awarded to Local Authorities outlined within the revised Environment Act 2021; queried whether an Environmental Policy had been implemented, and the support available to Dudley residents for the replacement of efficient boilers. He also suggested that further information was needed for residents specifying materials that could be recycled and how these should be separated when collected by refuse collectors.

In responding to a question raised, Councillor C Barnett confirmed that the Local Authority had not developed an Environment Policy.

The Chair, on behalf of the Committee, thanked the member of the public for his attendance and the questions asked.

Resolved

That the Interim Director of Public Realm be requested to arrange for a written response to be provided to the member of public.

22 **Action Tracker**

Resolved

That the Action Tracker as outlined in the report, be noted.

23 **Closing remarks of the Chair**

The Chair wished everyone a happy Christmas and thanked all those in attendance for their contributions to the meeting.

The meeting ended at 8.05pm

CHAIR