



Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 21 October 2021

Attendance

Members of the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Paul Appleby (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Mary Bateman
Cllr Greg Brackenridge (Via MS Teams)
Cllr Christopher Burden
Cllr Alan Butt
Cllr Christopher Haynes (Via MS Teams)
Cllr Keith Inston (Via MS Teams)
Cllr Barbara McGarrity QN (Chair)
Cllr Andrew McNeil

In Attendance

Cllr Steve Evans (Portfolio Holder for Environment and Climate Change) (Via MS Teams)

Employees

Martin Stevens DL (Scrutiny Officer) (Minutes)
Julia Cleary (Scrutiny and Systems Manager)
Earl Piggott-Smith (Via MS Teams)
Steve Woodward (Head of Environmental Services) (Via MS Teams)
Oliver Thomas (Project Manager) (Via MS Teams)
Shaun Walker (Service Lead – Environmental Crime) (Via MS Teams)
Ian Crutchley (Compliance Officer – Environmental Protection) (Via MS Teams)

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies**
There were no apologies for absence.

Cllr Greg Brackenridge indicated that he had a Mayoral appointment and would therefore have to leave the meeting early.
- 2 **Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest.
- 3 **Minutes of the previous meeting**
The minutes of the meeting held on 22 July 2021 were confirmed as a correct record.

4 **Climate Change Action Plan Review**

The Project Manager presented a report on the Climate Change Action Plan review, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes. The Council had procured a renewable energy provider which had significantly reduced the Council's carbon footprint. The LED street light programme was 50% complete. The Staff Climate Tool Kit had recently been completed, this helped employees reduce their own carbon footprint. The Council 2020 action plan had been approved which had about 80-90 actions, 20 of which were currently ongoing.

The Project Manager remarked that there were 30,000 street lights across the City, which contributed to about 50% of the Council's electricity consumption. The LED street light programme reduced carbon emissions and energy expended. It was hoped that the remaining 50% of street lights would be fitted with LEDs by September 2022. To the present date there had been 12,500 installations, approximately 20% reduction in energy consumption and 350,000 of savings.

The Project Manager presented a slide on Buildings and Energy. There were 84 Corporate buildings to decarbonise. A fabric first approach was required, which meant making buildings as energy efficient as possible before replacing heating systems and introducing solar panels. The Council already had half a mega watt installed across the Council buildings, there was however a lot more which could be done. Officers were working on a fully costed programme lasting until 2028 to decarbonising and improving energy efficiency in the Council's buildings.

The Project Manager spoke on the matter of the Council's fleet. There was about 500-600 vehicles in the Council's fleet, most of which were quite old. An all electric fleet would lead to an 87-100% reduction in Co2 emissions, depending on how the vehicles were charged. There would be approximately £817K of fuel cost savings each year and a significant reduction in maintenance costs. The first step was to update the fleet management system and install telematics on all the Council's vehicles. This process would provide useful data on the Council's approach to converting the fleet to electric and help to improve the efficiency of the vehicles as they were being driven. It was hoped that the Council would have a fully electric fleet by 2028.

The Project Manager presented a slide on consumption, waste and plastics. Plastics had been removed from Committee rooms in 2019 but more work needed to be done to remove them from other areas. Plastic use at the Council had decreased significantly since Covid with people being at home. Steps were being taken to ensure that future contracts included recyclable packaging. The Procurement team was identifying ways in which waste and climate change could be incorporated into future tenders following government advice.

The Project Manager spoke on the City 2041 Action Plan and the work the Council was completing with the West Midlands Combined Authority. He then presented a slide on communications and the Citizen Assembly. Following the recent Citizen Assembly on climate change the participants couldn't be contacted as none had selected follow-up engagement on the form. They were however looking to ensure they had regular future assemblies in the future as part of the consultation process. They were currently in the process of developing a quarterly newsletter, which would provide updates on the action plan and offer tips, tools and advice to subscribers on their carbon footprint.

The Chair on behalf of the Panel thanked the Project Manager for a comprehensive presentation. She praised the idea of the quarterly newsletter.

The Vice-Chair asked how Officers were calculating the figures in the presentation relating to staff commuting. He also asked if the Council was looking to obtain accreditation such as ISO 14,000 Environmental Management System Certification. Finally, he asked if the Project Manager had everything he needed to be successful in his role.

The Project Manager responded that when lockdown had first been entered, a life in lockdown survey had been conducted so the Council could understand commuting habits across staff. They used the data from the survey to calculate the carbon emissions across the staff that had responded to the survey. He then extrapolated this out for the remainder of the workforce across the Local Authority to come up with a total estimated figure of the carbon emissions. He had not given much thought to the process of accreditation but considered it something that was worthwhile pursuing. They were looking to sign up to various global groups which demonstrated the Council's commitment to decarbonisation. On the matter of resources, as the Council developed the programme they were looking to identify where extra resources were required. Where these were identified they would request additional funding from the Council. They were looking to recruit some people in the near future who would be tasked with delivering actions regarding the fleet and asset decarbonisation.

The Portfolio Holder for City Environment and Climate Change praised the Project Manager for his presentation to the Scrutiny Panel. It was essential to reduce pollution and improve the environment to stop suffering in the future. He referenced the new solar panel farm to power New Cross Hospital, work to manage traffic flows and the tree planting scheme. He paid tribute to Officers of the Council who had progressed the work on Climate Change within the Council.

A Panel Member requested that communications regarding the Citizens Assembly should be sent to Ward Councillors. He believed all Councillors would be willing to distribute this information. Reducing carbon by electrification of the fleet should also be praised for the advantages to Public Health. He asked for a breakdown of the LED Street light installation programme by Ward area to be distributed to Councillors. He enquired about the WMCA targets and programme and where the £500 million needed to carry out this programme in Wolverhampton would come from.

The Project Manager agreed that communication with Ward Councillors regarding Citizens Assemblies was important. They were also thinking of introducing a Councillor newsletter which would be distributed by Councillors in their own Ward. He agreed with the Panel Member of the core benefits which could be achieved with the Climate Change Programme including better air quality and Public Health outcomes. He also referenced a reduction in fuel poverty through the installation of energy efficient measures in social housing. He promised to look into sending the information on the progress of the LED street light programme at a Ward level. There was an anticipation that some funding would become available through the WMCA. He had not yet received any details as to what the funding package would entail. He was happy to enquire further with the WMCA and come back to Members on this point.

A Panel Member asked how the Council intended to save 10,000 tons of emissions by 2028. He asked whether people working from home was in conflict with the plans for the City economy. People working at home was not advantageous for businesses in the City Centre. The Project Manager responded that to reach a saving of 10,000 tonnes there were four themes, transportation, building and energy, consumption and waste, and land use with natural capital. Most of the emissions from the Local Authority were direct emissions from the energy used to heat and power the buildings and the fuel used in the fleet. Staff commuting did not count towards the direct emissions but had been included in the presentation to demonstrate the wider implications. More detailed plans would be available in the coming months. On the question of home working he commented that it was important to find the balance between business needs, the City economy and reducing carbon emissions. There was an ambition to have a more greener, low carbon economy.

A Panel Member commented that the presentation had detailed that as a result of Covid and the consequent changes to service provision a further saving of 1050 tons of Carbon emissions had been saved. He asked what the changes to service provision entailed. With reference to the LED light programme and the estimated saving of 1781 tonnes of carbon, he asked for what period this was being measured. He asked for further clarification on the figure in the presentation regarding the 0.5 MW of Solar Energy already installed. He asked for details on who the Council's renewable energy supplier was, as different suppliers accounted for their green credentials differently.

The Project Manager in relation to the question on changes to service provision responded that the majority of emissions saved was as a consequence of the reduction in SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) transport. Business mileage reduction had also caused significant carbon emission savings. People working from home by proxy was also causing a carbon saving for the Local Authority. The 1781 tonnes of carbon saving for the LED light programme was the saving that would be made when all the street lights were turned on. The figure of 0.5 MW of Solar energy installed was the maximum amount of energy that could be absorbed from sun rise to sun set in one day, if the weather conditions were perfect. The Council's energy supplier was REGO (Renewable Energy Guarantees of Origin) backed. The savings in carbon from this was accounted for in the national carbon accounts and could therefore not be counted twice in the City's overall figures. The Council's energy supplier was called, "Total Gas and Power".

A Panel Member asked about the level of climate resilience in the Council's fabric first approach. The Project Manager responded that climate resilience and adaptation were a huge part of the Council's Climate Change Programme. He saw resilience as a separate piece of work and was happy to talk to the Council's resilience team further about this area.

5 **Abandoned Vehicles Process**

The Chair reported that the item on abandoned vehicles had been requested by the Vice-Chair. The Service Lead, and Compliance Officer for Environmental Protection gave a presentation, a copy of which is attached to the signed minutes.

The Service Lead for Environmental Crime covered a number of areas in the presentation, including the definition of an abandoned vehicle, the huge resources dedicated to dealing with over 1000 vehicle investigations annually, the service challenges, the process and legislation. They were looking to refresh their agreement with Wolverhampton Homes to ensure they were working collaboratively to assess abandoned vehicles and take the appropriate action on land Wolverhampton Homes were responsible for. It was acknowledged that this was an area which needed to be strengthened. They were also looking to make improvements on the mapping system Geowulf as some asset layers were not accurate. They needed to be mindful of a potential increase in abandoned petrol and deisel cars as the country moved to electric vehicles.

The Chair asked about timescales from the moment the Council Officer had placed a notice on a vehicle. The Compliance Officer for Environmental Protection responded that the notice asked for the Council to be contacted with seven days. The legislation made it clear that the Council needed to do everything they could to identify the owners of the vehicle. If they were not contacted within the seven days, they would gather evidence and put the case forward to the DVLA for a registered keepers check. If there was a registered keeper listed, the Council would write to them giving them a further notice of seven days for them to contact the Council in relation to the vehicle. A decision would be reached by Officers within 21 days to four weeks on whether the vehicle should be removed. If a person claimed the vehicle, under the current legislation the Council could no longer consider the vehicle as abandoned. If the vehicle was on Council land, they could encourage them to move the vehicle, failing that they would have to take other Civil steps dependent on who was responsible for the land.

A Panel Member asked how the process could be improved with Tenant Management Organisations (TMOs). Some of the hot spot areas were in areas managed by TMOs. He believed there was some miscommunication with the TMOs and Wolverhampton Homes. The TMOs believed they needed to go to Wolverhampton Hones first before going to the Council. His second question related to how long it took Officers to conduct a site visit from the point a vehicle had been reported as abandoned. His final question concerned if an abandoned vehicle was dealt with by the Police or the Council, in cases where it was clear it was not a legally parked vehicle.

The Compliance Officer for Environmental Protection remarked that they could offer the TMOs the same guidance and training as they offered to Wolverhampton Homes. The Police did have devolved powers from the DVLA to deal with vehicles that were not legally taxed. The Council would give the Police details of vehicles they suspected had been cloned, stolen or been involved in crime. The Police would also give the Council details of vehicles for them to investigate. They therefore worked in collaboration. The Police were able to move a vehicle quickly if it was causing an obstruction.

The Vice-Chair asked if Officers could provide the data which showed the hot spot areas for abandoned vehicles across the City. He thought a map provided to Members of the Council would be useful in showing the hot spot areas within their Wards. He also asked if certain abandoned vehicles could be prioritised if they met certain criteria.

The Compliance Officer for Environmental Protection responded that the hot spot data was easily retrievable at Ward level. They did prioritise vehicles reported as abandoned, such as if it had been reported as burnt-out. For a burnt-out vehicle there was 72 hours maximum turnaround from report to removal. Vehicles that were causing a public nuisance or considered as a hazard (i.e. - smashed vehicles, fire hazard) were also prioritised.

6 **Draft Work Programme**

The draft work programme of the Vibrant and Sustainable City Scrutiny Panel was agreed.

The Chair thanked Members and Officers for their contributions to the meeting.

The meeting ended at 7:17pm.