

At a meeting of the ENVIRONMENT AND ATTRACTIVE CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on MONDAY, 25TH JULY, 2011 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Miller in the Chair

Councillors E. Gibson, Heron, Lauchlan, Porthouse, D. Richardson, Tye and A. Wright.

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were submitted on behalf of Councillors Bonallie, I. Richardson and Scott.

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee held on 13th June, 2011

On page 2 of the minutes, Helen Lancaster, Scrutiny Officer advised that Councillor Porthouse had received the specific information requested on dropped kerb schemes via Andrew Jackman, Interim Assistant Head of Traffic Road Safety.

On page 3 of the minutes, Ms. Lancaster advised that Councillor Tye's enquiry on feedback on speed limits across the City would be provided as part of the performance report that was due to come to the September meeting of this Committee.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 13th June, 2011 be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the following amendment:-

On page 3 of the minutes, the Chairman advised that the Local Transport Funding had been reduced by £1 million, and had not ceased.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Low Carbon Vehicles – The Delivery of Public Services in Sunderland Policy Review 2011/12: Draft Scoping Report

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to put forward proposals and seek Members agreement in relation to the forthcoming policy review into low carbon vehicles in the delivery of public services in Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

2. RESOLVED that Members:-

- (i) agreed the scope of the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee's policy review for 2011/12 as outlined in the report; and
- (ii) agreed that all Members of the Committee would be invited to any Task and Finish activities deemed necessary to focus on specific work within the review that lends itself to that way of working.

Low Carbon Vehicles: The Delivery of Public Services in Sunderland - 2011/12: Scene Setting Report and Presentation

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide the national and local policy background and overview to the Committee in relation to Low Carbon Vehicles – the Delivery of Public Services in Sunderland policy review, along with a supporting powerpoint presentation, detailing the local context.

(For copy report and powerpoint presentation – see original minutes).

Mr. Paul Lewin, Group Engineer and Mr. Ian Bell, presented the report and powerpoint, advising that under the plugged in places programme, 30 electric vehicle charging points had been installed under Phase 1 with an additional 13 installed under Phase 2, which was in progress. Upon completion of Phase 2, 90% of firms would be within one mile of an electric charging point.

The Authority had three vehicles as part of a trial and had purchased two as a pilot for use by Planners/Building Control Officers to show the Council was leading by example.

An expression of interest had been made to take part in Phase 2 of the scheme which was due to commence in 2012 and would take on more heavy goods vehicles.

Mr. Lewin advised that a meeting was to be arranged with partners to demonstrate that the Authority could deliver on efficiencies and where a draft business case would be produced. Sunderland City Council would Chair this group.

The Committee was also advised of the partnership with Go North East to provide a Low Carbon Bus Service with two buses to be purchased and owned by Sunderland City Council. The anticipated start date for the service was 4th September.

Councillor E. Gibson commented that she believed firms would buy electric vehicles as a fleet rather than individually, as they are a little expensive at present but as they were used more widely and more electric sockets became available, they should become more popular.

Councillor Porthouse queried if the Authority was only concentrating on electric vehicles as there were other forms of Low Carbon Vehicles such as gas powered for example and that we seemed to be rather narrow in our investigations.

The Chairman enquired if other areas had been looked at.

Mr. Lewin advised that the funding had been available for the electric vehicle programme and that the two buses purchased were hybrid vehicles. The fleet would be looking at other forms of low carbon also, as and when the technology develops.

Mr. Bell advised that at the present time electric vehicles were better than diesel vehicles, but the Hydrogen Cell if developed, would be better.

Councillor Porthouse commented that large diesel engines could be converted to run on bio fuel. Mr. Bell advised that this was true but was not cost effective at the moment.

Mr. Lewin advised of a research project to be carried out by Sunderland University on the Council's fleet cars in relation to data usage and omissions. This would be a three year project starting in the coming months.

In response to Councillor Porthouse's enquiry, Mr. Lewin advised that at the wheel there were no omissions from the electric vehicle over its lifetime, however this was not the case with the manufacturing process.

The Chairman commented that the carbon footprint of manufacturing these vehicles would have to be included in the review to see if it was cost effective and if we were actually achieving our goal of reducing omissions throughout the whole process.

Councillor Porthouse agreed that everything would have to be taken on board when looking at the carbon footprint.

Mr. Bell commented that there were many things that needed to be included concerning the footprint, the rolling resistance of the tyres which can reduce mileage for instance.

In response to the Chairman's query, Mr. Bell advised that Phase 2 would include 13 additional parking sockets and that no additional funding was available as it was more about data collection, monitoring and finding out the usage of locations. They were also trying to get private developers involved such as shopping centres for example.

The Chairman commented that no doubt this would be looked at over the year and that the charging point issue would also have to be monitored.

Mr. Bell commented that there was only one quick charge point at the Metro Centre and that the problem with quick charges was that they reduced the overall life of the battery.

Mr. Lewin advised that part of the plugged in places project was for charging points to be implemented in homes.

Councillor D. Richardson commented that he was aware the battery only had a five year life span and a £5,000 replacement cost.

Mr. Bell advised that it was hoped the cost of replacing the batteries would reduce as more people started to use them.

The Chairman commented that the question had to be, would the cost and circumstances involved, outweigh the benefits of implementing such a programme.

Mr. Lewin wished to clarify that the figure of five years for a battery life was a little misleading. After five years the batteries would only be 80% efficient, they were not completely useless, they also had secondary life uses such as powering residential units, so they were not worthless.

Councillor D. Richardson suggested approaching Gentoo, if the introduction of charging points in homes was free to do.

Mr. Bell advised that it was only free for the first two years until 2013, then they would start charging fees.

Mr. Lewin commented that there was free charging on the street until March 2013, after that date it would be for Committee to decide on the relevant fees.

In response to Councillor Porthouse's enquiry, Mr. Bell advised that you did not get supplied with the apparatus for home charging when purchasing an electric vehicle but you did get the street charging apparatus.

3. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

2011-2012 Highway Maintenance Programme for Planned Works

The Executive Director of City Services submitted a report (copy circulated) to update the Committee on the proposed Highway Maintenance Programme for 2011/2012.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Graham Carr, Highway Asset Manager, presented the report and advised that out of the 85 streets identified, 23 had already been completed and it was hoped that by the end of the summer they would be two thirds of the way through the programme.

Mr. Carr also advised that the Highway Maintenance Programme was available electronically and on the web if Members wished to view it.

Councillor Porthouse enquired as to why maintenance was not carried out at night times to create less inconvenience.

Mr. Carr advised that night time works was not possible due to the available times workers would need to gain access to the plant for materials, it would cause issues especially around residential areas in relation to noise and it would also drive costs up.

Councillor Heron commented on the 25% increase in compensation claims and felt this was due to the severe winters encountered recently.

Councillor Heron queried if Councillors should be inspecting, reporting potholes when Officers carry out inspections already.

Mr. Carr advised that there was an inspection regime carried out twice a year so if a pothole were to appear it may go unnoticed for six months therefore they do rely on Councillors/public to inform of issues which can help Officers identify problem areas and then produce programmes of work.

In response to Councillor Heron's enquiry on the financing of consistent problem areas, Mr. Carr advised that they tend to do site investigations and if a great deal of money needed to be spent then a programme would be made where the costs could be spread over a number of years.

Councillor Tye commented that the Silksworth area had done extremely well from road maintenance carried out but that Leechmere Road was starting to disintegrate and he imagined it would take a significant outlay to tackle, therefore a plan may need to be established to look at how to deal with the issue in the future.

Mr. Carr commented that we had benefited from investment over the years but we were now starting to see the signs of long term failures and if there was no more investment we would struggle, so there was an importance to make sure the level of investment met our needs.

Councillor Porthouse enquired if follow up examinations were carried out when utility companies had dug up paths etc to perform works.

Mr. Carr advised that the Authority was paid by the utility companies to visit the sites and inspect as the work was being carried out. Also, if the re-laid paths failed within a two year period, the works had to be redone by the Company.

The Chairman commented that the target was to repair 1% of roads a year but if we were only achieving 6.5 km of road works a year, then we were falling behind schedule and the issue needed monitoring.

Mr. Carr advised that they were addressing the issue of potholes but there were also issues of structural damage which required new surfacing, but that takes investment. At present they were dealing with the small scale problems, but if this were to carry on then there could be issues in the future.

In reference to the utility companies, the Chairman commented that he did not believe their standard of repairs was up to our standard required and this issue may need to be discussed with our partners.

Mr. Carr agreed that the subject may need to be considered for a review and that the utility companies be invited to discussions.

The Chairman felt that if we did not address these issues they would haunt us in future years.

Mr. Carr commented that it was a very difficult problem as unfortunately mains pipes do burst etc, which requires the paths to be dug up.

4. RESOLVED that the Committee received and noted the report.

Report of the Draft Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) informing the Committee of the findings of the Draft Preliminary Flood Risk Assessment (PFRA) for Sunderland. A draft copy was submitted to the Environment Agency on 22nd June, 2011 to meet regulatory deadlines. The Environment Agency would be informed in due course of any changes required to the draft PFRA following its consideration by Members.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Neil Cole, Lead Policy Officer for Planning and Phil Marshall, Team Leader of the Environment Agency presented the report and Mr. Cole advised in relation to paragraph 4.1 of the report, that the Authority had been given funding of £20,000 to finance the specialist consultant but we had secured the services of JBA Consultants for £3,000 so we had made a significant saving.

Councillor Porthouse commented that he understood there were no flood risk areas in Sunderland and found it incredible that outside consultants had been required. If it was a statutory requirement then we had no other option but it was not the best way to spend money.

Mr. Marshall advised that the PFRA also covered flood risks from surface water, of which, there was a risk to Sunderland.

Councillor Heron referred to issues in the Coalfield area of flash flood drainage and the surrounding banks becoming unstable and queried if it would not be better to hold the water upstream and release steadily over time rather than the deluge which currently occurs.

Mr. Marshall commented that this was a good point and the new Act tries to address the issue, with a local strategy for each Authority to look at each individual issue. The SUDs approval body was also looking at drainage in estates.

The Chairman commented on the increasing issue of residents tarmacing their gardens and then complaining of flooding.

Keith Lowes, Head of Planning and Environment referred to Councillor Heron's comments and advised that Northumbria Water would not support or maintain the sustainable drainage needed, therefore we end up with the one dimensional system.

The Chairman agreed with Councillor Heron's comments, the question was, how the solution could be implemented and it may be that the legislation on housing/ tarmacing gardens etc needed to be looked at.

Mr. Cole advised that he believed there had been an amendment so that gardens could only be tarmaced with a permeable surface so that water could drain through.

The Chairman questioned how this could be enforced.

5. RESOLVED that the Committee:-

- (i) endorsed the Officer comments as detailed within the report; and
- (ii) authorised Officers to forward a copy of the report together with any further comments to the Environment Agency.

Work Programme 2011-12

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) which was attached for Members' information, the current Work Programme for the Committee's work during the 2011-12 Council year.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Tye raised the issue of the 20 mph speed limit zones that he had queried at the previous meeting. Ms. Lancaster advised that an update would be provided as part of the performance review due at September's meeting of this Committee.

Councillor Porthouse commented that he and Councillor A. Wright had attended several PACT meetings where no car lanes had been discussed and he believed the Council needed to be brave and remove such lanes and that this issue should be looked at.

Mr. Lowes advised that the no car lanes were also about encouraging the use of public transport.

The Chairman commented that he would be happy for the Committee to look at the matter through the Call for Action protocol.

6. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1st July 2011 – 31st October 2011

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1st July 2011 – 31st October 2011 which related to the Environmental and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

7. RESOLVED that the Committee had considered the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1st July 2011 – 31st October 2011.

The Chairman thanked everyone for their attendance and closed the meeting.

(Signed) G. MILLER,
Chairman.