

At a meeting of the ENVIRONMENT AND ATTRACTIVE CITY SCRUTINY COMMITTEE held in the CIVIC CENTRE on MONDAY, 24TH OCTOBER, 2011 at 5.30 p.m.

Present:-

Councillor Miller in the Chair

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

Apologies for Absence

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

Minutes of the Last Meeting of the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee held on 12th September, 2011

Councillor Scott asked that his attendance at the meeting be recorded.

On page 3 of the minutes and Ms. Peverley's commitment to investigate how consultation would be carried out with Members in relation to the Ambassador's Programme, Sarah Abernethy, Scrutiny and Area Support Officer advised that there would be two strands, Community and Business, which Members would be briefed on.

The Chairman suggested that Ms. Peverley be invited back to the Committee in the New Year with further detail around how Elected Members would be involved in this.

On page 4, paragraph 6 of the minutes, Les Clark, Head of Street Scene advised that a report on Sustainable School Transport would be brought to the February meeting of the Committee as requested by Councillor Tye.

Councillor Porthouse referred to Councillor A. Wright's comments on the shortage of School Crossing Patrols and asked if this could be looked at. It was agreed that a scoping report could be incorporated into the Sustainable School Transport Report.

Page 5, paragraph 3, Mr. Clark advised that he would circulate notes to Members regarding Councillor E. Gibson's enquiry on fixed penalty notices and also in relation to Councillor I. Richardson's query on the figures of insurance claims due to potholes, as mentioned on page 6, paragraph 5.

On page 7, paragraph 8, the Chairman was referring to the Jacobs report on 20 mph zones, which had highlighted issues in Silksworth which was where the £210,000 had been allocated for.

1. RESOLVED that the minutes of the last meeting of the Committee held on 12th September, 2011 be confirmed and signed as a correct record subject to the amendments above.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Change to Order of Business

The Chairman proposed that Items 4 and then 6 be heard as they both involved Mr. Bernard Garner of Nexus. This was agreed by the Committee.

Low Carbon Transport in the Delivery of Public Services in Sunderland Policy Review 2011/12: Low Carbon Public Transport

The Chief Executive submitted a report and powerpoint presentations (copies circulated) to provide Members of the Committee with an overview of Low Carbon Public Transport in Sunderland. The presentations were delivered by Nexus and Go North East to inform the Committee's policy review for 2011/12 into Low Carbon Vehicles in the Delivery of Public Services in Sunderland.

(For copy report/powerpoint presentations – see original minutes).

Bernard Garner, Nexus, gave a short powerpoint presentation advising of the 'Euro' Ratings for the Tyne and Wear bus fleet and that over three years, they have seen a substantial shift towards greener, less polluting buses and with more investment in hybrid technology, this improvement should gather pace.

In reference to the Metro, Mr. Garner commented that they were very aware the Metro was clean at the point of use but it was up to them to reduce the energy consumption to as low as possible and with a concession made to reduce by 5% they had started to tackle this by installing devices in the drivers cabs to slow down and accelerate at the correct times to use energy more effectively.

Kevin Carr presented a report on behalf of Go NorthEast advising that they were going to trial a gas powered vehicle but as there were health and safety risks in using gas, this would be evaluated.

They have two new hybrid vehicles in Sunderland that they were still looking at the benefits of, with the only problem being the £100,000 premium for each vehicle.

In the last three years, £6 million investment had been made each year and they would continue to invest in new vehicles but were also looking at the existing fleet and how to improve. Improvements such as monitoring tyre pressure, rolling distance for best fuel consumption, installation of telematics computer systems to monitor harsh acceleration/deceleration and idle engine use. These measures have seen a 2% reduction of fuel consumption.

Mr. Carr also advised that the overall target for reduction of CO² omissions was 20% by 2015 and whilst they were not there yet, they had made a reduction of 3% so far.

Councillor Porthouse referred to the technology in new cars which cut off engines if standing idle and enquired if this was available on buses.

Mr. Carr advised that the technology was available for buses but is not on their vehicles at present and needed to be trialled. Mr. Carr also added that training the drivers not to partake in idle engine use had helped majorly in fuel reduction.

In response to Councillor Scott's request for clarification on the use of urea, Mr. Carr advised that it was used on SCR vehicles to reduce toxic gases from coming out of the exhaust.

Councillor A. Wright referred to a previous trial of electric powered mini-buses carried out by City of Oxford Motor Services, which the University had studied and calculated that more damage had been done to the environment, through production/charging of batteries.

Mr. Carr advised that technology had moved on in relation to battery production and longevity, but there were still issues of long charge times, range and if the batteries would be able to stand rapid charges.

Councillor A. Wright enquired if any on site energy saving measures had been taken as it was important to tackle the footprint of producing vehicles also.

Mr. Carr agreed that it was important and they had looked at on site energy consumption in fine detail such as installing motion sensed lights in the garage, noise levels of machinery and efficiency output were also looked at.

Councillor A. Wright enquired if gas was used to inflate the tyres.

Mr. Carr advised that nitrogen could be used rather than air, which was being investigated in other areas of the country but he had no feedback on this at the moment.

Councillor Heron enquired as to how far away we were from not being dependent on fossil fuels.

Mr. Carr advised that he did not have the answer to this and he believed hydrogen fuel cells were ultimately the way forward but these were a long way off and that he felt the hybrid technology was just an interim measure.

The Chairman commented that with the demand for a massive reduction in carbon omissions, there was real work to be done to tackle this and it was important all avenues were looked at and he was pleased that different forms of fuel provision were being investigated.

2. RESOLVED that the report be received and noted.

Update on Developments in Public Transport in Sunderland

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide Members with a progress report regarding public transport in Sunderland, with a particular reference to secured bus services.

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

Mr. Garner presented the report/powerpoint and advised that Nexus fully recognised there were problems in the bus network and they were happy to work with Councillors to find possible solutions.

Councillor Scott commented that the reinvigoration scheme of the Metro trains had been well carried out and wished to thank Mr. Garner for his work on the scheme.

Councillor E. Gibson commented that in a time when we were trying to encourage residents to use public transport, the costs of fares were high for families and enquired if anything could be done.

Mr. Garner advised that 87% of fares were determined by Commercial Operators and that Nexus did provide concessionary travel for under 16's so they could travel for the day at a cost of only £1. Take up of this had increased massively.

A Gold Card was also available on the Metro for people who qualify, this provides unlimited travel for £25 and time restrictions were removed during the summer.

Mr. Garner also wished to warn that future costs were likely to rise due to the cost of fossil fuels.

Councillor Heron referred to complaints received in relation to only one bus covering a massive area such as Hetton and enquired as to the possibility of introducing Community Buses to cover any shortfall at main routes as the service was stretched to the limit and yet there was a need to cover more areas.

Mr. Garner commented that he understood the problem and was happy to meet with Members and look at the issue further.

Councillor Heron referred to the Metro reinvigoration scheme and commented that he understood new vehicles would be provided rather than refurbished and enquired if the refurbishment was continuing.

Mr. Garner advised the scheme was comprised of three phases. Phase 1 was carried out between 2007-2011 to improve Stations such as Sunderland Central and Haymarket. Phase 2 which was ongoing until 2021 was to refurbish the Metro cars and Phase 3 would be when the cars needed to be replaced. Mr. Garner advised that they did not know what they would be replaced with as technology was moving on, they did not know what would be available at that time but the work being carried out now ensured that the Metro would be around for the next 20-30 years.

Councillor A. Wright enquired as to the possible refurbishment at the street level of Sunderland Station and if there was an opportunity to include public toilet facilities as this was a major issue in the area.

Mr. Garner advised that he would take this request back to designers.

The Chairman commented that he believed it farcical there was no toilet provision in that area.

Councillor Porthouse referred to the non payment for tickets and enquired what the progress was in relation to installing barriers.

Councillor Porthouse commented that the refurbished Stations in Newcastle at Haymarket and Monuments for example had been given white panelling and queried why Sunderland Station had not received the same design.

Councillor Porthouse also queried if the Metro would be extended further afield.

Mr. Garner informed the Committee that they had looked at using white panelling at the Sunderland Station but there had been insufficient clearing to enable this, therefore the cleaning of the bricks had been the best option as the Sunderland Station was a very different environment to work with.

In terms of new routes for the Metro in the future, they were starting to look at new technology and what would be available. They were working with Planning Authorities on potential demands for major transport corridors not yet served and to look at how these could be covered. It was estimated that it would take one year to eighteen months to get a blueprint for the future vision of what the Metro may possibly look like.

In terms of the likelihood for the Metro to be extended to Washington, Mr. Garner advised that he would not like to speculate on their research but as soon as proposals were available he would wish to liaise with the Council at that time.

In relation to the installation of barriers, once the new tickets machines had been introduced they would be gating the 13 busiest stations around the system and the other stations would have validator machines. The level of ticketless travel on the

Metro was down to 4% due to having staff on the system, staff which would still be in place once the barriers were installed.

Councillor D. Richardson enquired as to what the 4% of ticketless travel equated to in monetary terms.

Mr. Garner estimated it would be between £700,000 - £800,000.

The Chairman commented that with the cost of transport continuing to increase, the current framework needed evaluating, especially in relation to quality contracts.

3. RESOLVED that the Committee receive the progress update from Nexus.

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

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) informing Members of progress on the Scrutiny Committee's Policy Review for 2011/12 into Low Carbon Vehicles – The Delivery of Public Services in Sunderland.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Sarah Abernethy, Scrutiny and Area Support Officer presented the report and informed Members of the recent site visit undertaken to Smith Electric on Wednesday, 12th October.

Councillor A. Wright commented that he found the Smith Electrics process of procuring vehicles with standard engines and then converting them a little strange, but they did give good reasons for this and in the long term once the vehicles were ready made the costs should come down.

Councillor Porthouse commented that he felt the process needed a standard engine first as it was necessary to test the car beforehand, then the engine was sold back to Ford.

The Chairman commented that he found the electric cars to be surprisingly good on the road and Smith Electric had been very honest and helped debunk the urban legends around battery powered vehicles.

The Chairman also commented on the low statistics in relation to mileage and that this may not be a concern for the Local Authority and our needs but would not be suitable for the bus companies.

Councillor Porthouse commented that he believed electric vehicles only had a small part to play in reducing our carbon footprint.

Councillor Heron raised the issue of the different types of charging points throughout the country which may not be compatible for the user's particular vehicle.

The Chairman advised that from the Local Authority's perspective, using light vehicles for short journeys would not be an issue but it was a problem for those that would be travelling greater distances.

Councillor Porthouse commented that electric vehicles were not fit for purpose in relation to cross country travel.

Councillor Heron informed the Committee that the Fire Authority had acquired two electric vehicles to trial.

The Chairman commented that Smith Electric had informed of a whole new secondary life for the batteries, but if the Council were to adopt electric vehicles we would need a clear understanding of what would be done with the battery after its primary use had expired.

The Chairman also commented that the site visit had been interesting, showing that electric vehicles may not be the answer to everything but they were part of the answer overall.

4. RESOLVED that:-

- (i) the report be received and noted; and
- (ii) Members noted the dates of the forthcoming task and finish activities and to indicate whether they were able to attend.

Waste Management and Recycling – Update

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy attached) to update Members on Waste Management arrangements as set out in the Committees workplan for 2011/12 and to advise the Committee of the position reached in the procurement of a PFI supported contract for the treatment of residual waste.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Councillor Scott commented that in the past Waste Transfer sites had been approved in locations close to residential properties, instances of which still occur now and enquired as to how planning permission could be granted and enquired if this could be looked at in relation to what conditions were placed on the applications so as not to affect people's homes nearby.

The Chairman advised that this would be a planning matter and not for consideration by this Committee.

Mr. Clark advised that the applications referred to were private operations, not part of the Council's operations and once they had secured planning permission they would have been regulated by the Environment Agency to adhere to Environmental Standards.

Councillor Porthouse commented that there was 30 million tonnes of kitchen waste, of which, methane could be captured and used as energy.

Mr. Clark advised that by 2014 food waste would be used for energy.

Councillor Heron enquired if the new waste facilities would be similar to the station at Deptford.

Mr. Clark advised that the facility would be a newer version of what is in place at Campground with strong environmental controls in place so that any issues associated with dust and rubbish would be kept within the building.

5. RESOLVED that the Committee considered the report and noted the measures being taken to improve recycling levels; and the position reached with the PFI supported procurement of a strategic residual waste facility.

Environment Agency Catchment Flood Management Plans Consultation

The Deputy Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to bring to Members attention a consultation from the Environment Agency (EA) on its catchment Flood Management Plans (CFMP) for the region and sought Members' endorsement of main comments on the proposals and any further comments.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

Neil Cole, Lead Policy Officer for Planning presented the report and was on hand to answer any Members queries.

The Chairman commented that thankfully Sunderland was well placed and there was minimal risk of flooding issues.

6. RESOLVED that the Committee:-

- (i) endorse the comments as set out in the report; and
- (ii) authorise Officers to forward a copy of this report together with their detailed comments to the Environment Agency as representing the City Council's views on the proposals.

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).

7. RESOLVED that Members noted the information contained in the Work Programme.

Forward Plan – Key Decisions for the Period 1 November 2011 – 29 February 2012

The Chief Executive submitted a report (copy circulated) to provide Members with an opportunity to consider those items on the Executive Forward Plan for the period 1 November 2011 – 29 February 2012 which related to the Environment and Attractive City Scrutiny Committee.

(For copy report – see original minutes).

8. RESOLVED that the Committee had considered the Executive's Forward Plan for the period 1 November 2011 – 29 February 2012.

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

(Signed) G. MILLER,
Chairman.