

ENVIRONMENT SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Environment Scrutiny Committee held on Wednesday 17 July 2024 at the Committee Room - Shire Hall, Gloucester.

PRESENT:

Cllr Roger Whyborn	Cllr Emma Nelson (Vice-Chair)
Cllr Gill Moseley	Cllr Brian Tipper
Cllr Sajid Patel	Cllr Wendy Thomas
Cllr Dr David Willingham	Cllr Robert Vines
Cllr Chloe Turner (Chair)	

Apologies: Cllr Alan Preest and Cllr Vernon Smith

2. MINUTES

The minutes from the meeting held on 8 May 2024 were agreed as a correct record.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

No declarations of interest were received.

4. ELECTRIC VEHICLE STRATEGY UPDATE

4.1 The Chair invited Steve Lowe, ULEV (Ultra Low Emission Vehicle) Programme Manager, to give an overview of this item. Members noted the following points:

- A high-level map at 2.1 of the report showed the deployment of public charge points to date. This included 33 locations with 4 charges per location and each district had at least 2 locations.
- This deployment was 60% funded by Department of Transport (DfT) funding and 40% by GCC.
- This phase of the strategy was aimed at providing on-street charging for residents who did not have access to a driveway. Whilst some of the locations were in busy town centres, the coverage was equitable across the county.
- It was hoped that by providing residents with assurance they would have access to charging, this would provide an incentive to make the change to an electric vehicle.
- Some of the areas had low utilisation at the moment (as shown in the graph on page 17) but this was expected to increase over time. The Council were also not trying to provide chargers in commercial locations as it was expected the private sector would fill this space, and local authorities would focus their resource on the less commercially viable locations for the benefit of residents.
- For the next phase, GCC had been awarded £3m in LEVI funding from Government, in addition to £500K internal funding and £400K LEVI capability funding over 2 years.

- LEVI funded Phase 1 would be delivered within the 2024-25 financial year and provide another 200 charge points across 50 sites. Locations were currently being identified and officers were engaging with local members on these.
- LEVI funded Phase 2 required a tender process which GCC had begun to progress. This phase would expect to see a much larger volume of charge points installed as a concession arrangement gave the operator more control over the deployment.
- Pages 22 – 23 gave an overview of the GCC Fleet Migration progress by location and the graph at 3.6 gave an idea of the already significant energy benefits of the change.
- Within the new Arle Court Transport Hub, there were 100 contactless charge points being installed, and these will be activated in stages according to demand.
- The final section of the report gave an overview of the £6m secured from DfT to introduce Zero Emission Buses.

4.2 In response to question about county coverage, which was referred from the Corporate Scrutiny Committee, officers advised that all district areas in the county were covered in the first phase of the Council's deployment. When next year's delivery operator was selected, there would be strict criteria around equitable coverage enforced to ensure this continued. Officers were also working with district councils to deploy charging points into their car parks, for example.

4.3 It was noted that often the biggest requirement for residential charging was within areas of parking contention, residents may be concerned that having a charging point installed outside of their house would have implications on their ability to park. This would be avoided where possible, installing them at the end of a street for example, but the solution would not be perfect for everyone. There had to be a compromise to enable access for those residents who wanted it. It was hoped that the sensitivity around location would decrease as the use of electric vehicles increased.

4.4 Officers added that they were waiting for direction from the DfT on the use of footway gullies to allow residents to run cables from their home to their on-streetcar.

4.5 In response to concern around grid capacity, it was noted that Government was tasking all major supply companies to work on this. GCC's role in this area would be to ensure all the infrastructure was in place for when the grid capacity was available. This was an issue continually raised with suppliers and contractors.

4.6 A member raised concern that there was a potential issues arising around different providers using different apps to pay for charging, and therefore requiring the public to have numerous apps installed depending on where they stopped to charge. It was advised that all of the chargers deployed in residential areas in the county used one app. This was done so in the

thinking that most of the users will be the same residents or guests charging overnight. Whereas the facilities at Arle Court, for example, had been upgraded to include contactless payment technology as it was more likely the users would be different each day.

- 4.7 There was a general discussion around the environmental and social implications of the move to electric vehicles. It was noted that the cost of vehicles at the moment excluded many residents from making the change, including young people, and there were concerns around the environmental impact of their production.
- 4.8 Officers recognised these concerns but explained that society had to make progress on decarbonising the way we travel, and electric vehicles were the best 'worst' solution available at the moment. It remained a transitional technology and was only one part of the Council's multi-pronged approach. Officers would continue to work on encouraging modal shift, moving away from single use private vehicles and improving the public transport offer.
- 4.9 Arle Court was just one of multiple future Transport Hubs that would be built in the county, these would act as 'collector points' for all different transport modes and then use electrified buses, for example, to connect people into city centres, places of work etc. Officers also noted the incredible pace of change with rail connections for Gloucestershire over the past few years.
- 4.10 It was questioned whether the move to electric buses could come faster. Officers advised that there was internationally a massive push for electric buses, and the limitations on moving faster were things such as lead times on building the vehicles and work needed to ensure depots were retrofitted with the right infrastructure. In the meantime, work would continue to reduce emissions on existing diesel buses.

5. DEFINITIVE MAP MODIFICATION ORDERS UPDATE

- 5.1 The report was taken as read and the Chair asked for members questions.
- 5.2 Noting the significant recruitment issues faced for this area of technical expertise, a member suggested working with higher education establishments in Gloucestershire as a potential avenue for developing the expertise locally. Officers advised that they had reached out to the local University and Agricultural college but hadn't received engagement on the issue. It was further commented that the knowledge required to process applications is very niche, and apprenticeships were often more generalised, thus consideration had to be made whether any benefit to the team would likely be more than offset against the training input required for the length of time of the placement.
- 5.3 Officers explained that Gloucestershire was not the only local authority struggling with a backlog of applications and recruitment. They also confirmed that the Authority is part of a national 'Best Practice' group and

has altered some processes as a result; However, on the whole, we were in line with best practice. The process could be very complex, there were no set timescales around how long an application could take as it would entirely depend on the amount of engagement/documentation included etc.

- 5.4 It was added that officers had taken steps to make more use of the option to use officer delegation to decide on applications, which was a faster process. A Terms of Reference had been put in place to ensure this power was used appropriately.

6. APPROACH TO HIGHWAY REPAIRS

- 6.1 Kath Haworth, Assistant Director of Highways & Infrastructure, introduced the item. Members noted the following points:

- The long-term solution to road condition was resurfacing and capital repairs to the network, but in the meantime, there were potholes and other defects that need to be fixed as well.
- Good progress had been made on resurfacing across the 600,000km road network, with specific focus on improving the quality of A and B roads, which were the roads that carried the most traffic and were important to the county's economy. The next phase would be to focus on Gloucestershire C and unclassified roads, which made up 50% of the network.
- The department was now a year into its Transformation Programme, and this had included trialling initiatives such as the Find and Fix gangs, who operated separately from the safety defect gangs and were programmed to visit locations where there were less critical, road condition issues, such as a cluster of defects in one area.
- The Find and Fix gangs had been really helpful in terms of having extra capacity to fix defects before they turned into potholes or safety issues and had also been very positive from a customer feedback perspective.
- Officers felt that initiatives like this were enabling the department to move towards a more preventative position, being able to address defects before they turned into safety issues.
- Safety gangs were also now able to address multiple defects in one site where they were attending to address a safety issue and traffic management was already in place. This was resulting in an additional 10% of defects being addressed.
- A lot of different trials had also been explored and these were outlined in section 5 of the report.
- The Fix My Street application was allowing customers to report issues in a much easier and slicker way and the use of this was increasing month on month, as well as the number of issues being reported.
- Officers reflected that this had been a really positive journey for the department, and they were hoping to reach a position that allowed capacity for more preventative works, rather than just reactive repairs, more efficiency and financial savings as a result.

- There was no 'single' innovation, technique or process that would achieve improvement but a 'jigsaw of pieces' that needed to be put together in a coordinated way to get the right solution. This also needed to be done alongside sustained investment.
 - Section 8 of the report outlined future opportunities.
- 6.2 Members questioned what the next phase for the 'Fix My Street' application was. They raised suggestions such as being able to report maintenance to streetlights or road signs, the need for street sweeping or gully cleaning etc. Also, for the application to have functionality to send district responsibility requests to the right Council, it was noted that often the public were not aware which council had responsibility for which area and we needed to make it as easy as possible to connect these.
- 6.3 Officers confirmed this was the intention for the application to be used in a multitude of ways and be a 'one stop shop' for anything highway related. There were some areas that already had the functionality to send requests to district councils where appropriate, and if this wasn't yet automatic, the contact details for where it needed reporting would be provided.
- 6.4 A member queried whether the recent budget amendment allocated to the 2024/25 revenue spend to purchase a 'JCB Pothole Pro' machine had been used. It was advised that officers wanted to test the product before purchasing and therefore procured it on a temporary basis. It had been concluded that the machine was not the right fit for the wider defect programme and therefore the remainder of the budget allocation had been directed into other innovative trials for pothole repair.
- 6.5 A copy of this year's Highways Transformation Annual Review had been published as part of the meeting papers. It mentioned under 'Communication and Engagement' that an agency had been engaged to conduct high level research into other councils' best practice. A member suggested the learning from this exercise would be useful for the Committee to see.

ACTION: Kath Haworth

- 6.6 A member stated a recent issue of an emergency road closure not being properly communicated to residents. It was advised that this was an area the department were working to improve, when its an emergency situation, officers tended to be more focused on the operational emergency, rather than the wider communication aspect. It was suggested that the duty officer on call during the period could be tasked with updating messages to residents (normally via social media channels). Officers agreed to take this away for further consideration.
- 6.7 Communication in general was raised as an area of improvement, members suggested that if more awareness was raised with the public on things such as, the impact of adverse weather on road condition, it would be easier to manage expectations.

- 6.8 Concern was raised on the quality of footways and feeling that these were often overlooked at the expense of the road network. It was advised the footways were part of the highway and were therefore included in the Council's defects statistics. Repairs could therefore also be reported through the 'Fix My Street' application. A footway resurfacing programme existed as well and a lot of members allocated their Highways Local Funding into additional footway resurfacing. Officers accepted that more communication was needed to raise awareness of the ability to report footway defects in the same way as potholes.
- 6.9 A member stated that a lot of the rural network in Gloucestershire were C roads or unclassified, which did not receive the same attention as the county's A and B roads. They asked for reassurance that once the rest of the network was in better repair, attention would be given to the other roads. Officers confirmed that they were starting to see more resurfacing programmed for C and unclassified roads than before, this was due to keeping pace with progress on the rest of the network, which they hoped would continue. It was added that the Find and Fix gangs generally worked on the unclassified network as well so there was an added benefit of having this additional, moveable resource.
- 6.10 Referencing the new Find and Fix gangs that were introduced last summer, members were advised that the cost for these were not in the base budget and were currently being funded by transformation programme funding. The cost of 8 gangs for a year was estimated at £1.27m and the work being undertaken represented cost avoidance rather than cost savings. Officers reflected that the introduction of the gangs had been the most significant improvement during the transformation programme due to their impact on customer satisfaction and the ability to 'get ahead' on repairs.
- 6.11 The service hoped to move towards a more preventive model in the future, rather than reactive repairs, and initiatives like the Find and Fix gangs would make that easier to achieve. There would always be variables at play for highway quality, including the increase in adverse weather, and therefore a level of safety inspection and repairs would always remain, but the service hoped to be able to focus more attention on preventive measures to avoid the level of disrepair recently seen.

7. EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S REPORT: ECONOMY, ENVIRONMENT & INFRASTRUCTURE

- 7.1 The report was taken as read and opened up to questions from members.
- 7.2 The Chair noted that Cllr Whyborn had pre-submitted three questions and a written response to these can be found at an Annex 1 of the minutes.
- 7.3 A member raised a significant delay he had experienced in delivering a Traffic Regulation Order for a school in his division and questioned how the

recent budget amendment allocating additional funding to school road safety improvements would be used. It was advised that the pressure for the TRO team was largely around capacity due to recent recruitment pressures. The additional money had allowed extra resource to be brought in and officers would follow up with the member after the meeting on specific details.

- 7.4 There was a discussion about the future of The Robin service. It was noted that further expansion beyond the current trial would depend on continued and increased utilisation of the service. Officers were monitoring the use at the moment, but it remained unclear what decision would be made once the trial had come to an end. It was also noted that the service was currently funded by Government and therefore continuation and/or expansion after the trial would need to have alternative funding.
- 7.5 It was added that the current service hours of 7am – 7pm did not encourage young people to use the service and officers could consider working with youth services to help promote it. In response, officers advised that they had used all the available funding for this initiative at the moment and were providing the best service possible, within the financial constraints.
- 7.6 Members concluded the item by paying their thanks to Jane Everiss, who was due to retire from her position as Head of Library and Registration Services, for all her years of hard work.

8. CLIMATE LEADERSHIP GLOUCESTERSHIRE

- 8.1 The report was noted.

9. UPDATED COMMITTEE TERMS OF REFERENCE

- 9.1 The updated Terms of Reference were noted.

CHAIR

Meeting concluded at 12:30.

For a full overview of this meeting, please use the following link to access the recording <https://gloucestershire.public-i.tv/core/portal/webcasts>