

Streetscene and Engineering Scrutiny Committee

(Via Microsoft Teams)

Members Present:

22 January 2021

Chairperson: Councillor S.M.Penry

Vice Chairperson: Councillor R.W.Wood

Councillors: J.Hurley, A.McGrath, C.J.Jones, W.F.Griffiths and J.Hale

Officers In Attendance: D.Griffiths, P. Jackson, M.Roberts, N.Headon and C.Davies

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors A.Wingrave, D.Jones and C.Clement-Williams

1. **Chairs Announcements**

The Chair thanked all those who had helped and provided their support in the recent flooding incident in the Skewen ward within the County Borough.

2. **Minutes of Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the following meetings were approved:

- 22 July 2020
- 20 November 2020

3. **Neath Port Talbot's Electric Vehicle Infrastructure, Implementation Plans and an Overview of the Wider Strategy for Public Charging in the County Borough**

The Committee was presented with Neath Port Talbot's Electric Vehicle Infrastructure, which also contained the implementation plans and an overview of the wider strategy for public charging in the County Borough.

A discussion took place in relation to the capacity of the heavy fleet vehicles. Officers stated that in terms of heavy transport, the low carbon future was uncertain, however hydrogen vehicles and/or battery electric vehicles were a potential possibility; this part of the market was still evolving. It was noted that the industry had currently been focusing on battery electrical vehicles, which was now available in cars and light vans, with larger vans and vehicles also becoming readily available. Members were informed that recently there were a few electric refuse collection vehicles on the market and the Council had started to trial the vehicle within the County Borough for the past three days; the vehicle had successfully completed a full shift, and when it was returned to the yard it had 17% capacity left in it. It was added that these vehicles had about 1 tonne of batteries in them. Officers mentioned that they were currently looking at options to de-carbonise the Councils fleet in line with Government targets.

With the expanding numbers of the electric vehicles, Members asked why the Council was not considering the rapid chargers instead of the 7kW chargers. It was explained that most vehicles were returned in the afternoon and were in the yard overnight, so there wasn't a need for them to be rapidly charged; Officers had also monitored the usage of the vehicles and most of the vans were travelling around 110/115 miles, with very few exceeding that distance. It was noted that when the vehicles returned in the afternoon, they had adequate time to charge; the non-rapid chargers were better on the longevity of the batteries, whereas the rapid chargers would degrade the batteries quicker. Officers stated that currently, charging over a longer period would be of no issue; however, noted that there will be rapid chargers available (50kW rapid charger) which would charge vehicles up to 80% of their capacity within around 30 minutes, however this would not be used as a standard charging mechanism for the fleet vehicles due to the reasons highlighted.

Given the area that Neath Port Talbot County Borough covers, it was asked if the Council will be working with its strategic partners such as Tai Tarian, the Police and the Fire Service to ensure that the maximum amount of points would be obtained within the County Borough. It was noted that the Councils regional colleagues were in the process, as part of the City Deal project, of commissioning consultants to help with the strategic plan; in doing so, they would be working with the university and will need to consult with other public service providers, such as the Police and Fire Service, to ensure that they were part of that agenda. It was added that the Police and Fire

service would probably need an infrastructure of their own within their depots and stations, due to the size of their fleet. Officers mentioned that in planning terms, as legislation moves forward, it was possible that it will become a planning requirement within new residential developments to include public charging facilities within the new build estates; most houses that will be developed going forward will also likely have as a standard, electric charge points for the residential properties. It was confirmed that it was a large piece of work that needed a regional approach, so that the locations of the charging hubs and the distances between them were suitable; there will be a lot of challenges in terms of infrastructure and power supplies, however this would be part of the feasibility study.

It was asked whether the Council will need to purchase equipment that may be required if the vehicles do run out of charge to allow for them to return to their depot. Officers confirmed that they were looking at purchasing charge packs which will plug in to any vehicle and provide enough power for them to charge for around 10-15 minutes to facilitate their return to the depot.

Detailed within the circulated report, it stated that it was intended to explore the opportunity of opening the charging points for use by the public which could be operated on a cost recovery basis; Members asked if the rapid chargers weren't installed, would it be viable and would the public choose to use the charging facilities with the non-rapid chargers as it would take longer to charge their vehicles. Officers confirmed that they were aware of this potential issue, however this was something that would be a focus in the future; the report was based around the fleet vehicles and their usage as this was what Officers were currently looking at. It was highlighted that there would be rapid chargers available, however there would be a lot of factors to consider including what the requirements were and how much power was currently available at the Quays. Further update reports would be provided in the future once the basics were installed and the infrastructure was up and running. A part of the long term plan was to provide the opportunity, as part of the infrastructure installed, for staff to charge their vehicles also.

Members were informed that the Councils Fleet Manager was the chair of the Welsh Public Sector Fleet Group in which the Fire Service, Police and others were represented; being part of that Group, the chair had also been able to work with the Welsh Government Energy Service on how to change Council fleets to low emissions over the next 10 years.

It was asked if Officers had looked into offset charging throughout the night in order to obtain the cheapest rates, and if it was an option to upgrade existing Council owned buildings with solar panels in order to use them to draw power for charging purposes. Officers highlighted that they were looking at other green infrastructures to support charging at the hubs; there were a number of buildings around the County Borough that may be suitable. Officers were working with valley communities and voluntary organisations to identify opportunities where hubs could be placed in. Members were informed that the Councils property assets were also being reviewed to establish where green credentials could be implemented in order to top up the grid as part of a green energy strategy.

Following Scrutiny, the report was noted.

4. **Consultation on Streetscene and Engineering 2021/22 Budget Proposals**

An overview was received on the Streetcare and Engineering and Transport draft budget proposals 2021/2022, as detailed in the circulated report.

Members were informed that there were no proposed cuts in budgets for the Streetcare or Transport and Engineering divisions in 2021/22.

The report captured that there was a budget pressure of £400k on Waste Services; Officers provided detail on the particular pressures which included:

- A reduction in the Sustainable Waste Grant of £1million across Wales; this reduction had been ongoing for the last few years, and based on Neath Port Talbot Councils share of the money, there was a pressure of £45k in respect of this cut;
- The need to retender the management contract for the Household Waste and Recycling Centres; the contract had been in place for some time, and the costs will be increasing above inflation in terms of 'catching up', following fixed increases over the life of the contract, along with increased costs associated with maximising recycling and composting. The report detailed that £250k had been allocated in this regard;
- There was a further general shortfall in the waste management budget arising from a lasting national reduction in incomes for most recycle materials to which £105K had been allocated.

In regards to Highways and Streetcare, it was noted that a budget pressure of £350K was identified which made allowances for the following:

- Trade waste income had been affected by the outbreak of Covid-19 and whilst a lot of the reduction was going to be temporary and will bounce back in due course, some overall decrease was likely to be permanent; it was expected, as a minimum, that the normal inflationary uplift on the trade waste income budget will be unachievable resulting in a pressure, therefore £13k had been allocated for this;
- The provision of recycling services and participation had expanded and there had been a growing demand for ongoing additional household recycling equipment and associated deliveries; £36K was allocated to resource additional deliveries, which included an additional member of staff and an extra van to make those deliveries;
- The revenue works budgets for road and footway pavement maintenance needed increasing for ad-hoc and general repairs, in which £88k had been allocated; an inflationary increase was built into the budget which would cover resources such as staffing, however extra budget was needed for certain materials as the prices of these materials increase significantly more than the inflationary increase;
- Road marking renewal budget needed increasing to facilitate a five-yearly renewal programme, following a detailed analysis on the assets; if the Council wanted to facilitate this programme across the County Borough then the budget needed to be enhanced by £30k to accommodate that;
- Officers identified that there were some large countryside structures, old viaducts for example, which were not adopted by highways and had previously fallen outside of the regular periodic inspection regime; this needed to be corrected, therefore £20k had been allocated for this;
- There was a need for an additional drainage minor works gang to help address the numerous minor drainage issues, backlog of issues and associated service demands, involving blocked and broken drains etc. It was stated that flooding was a high profile issue of significant concern to the public, local Members and the Council, especially given the rising number of flood events and associated damage across the county borough;

- An additional budget of £10k had been allocated for extra sand bags and standby costs to facilitate extra support for areas where there were hot spots.

In relation to Port Talbot Town Centre, an additional pressure was noted to be included in order to manage the daily raising and lowering of the bollards to stop vehicles indiscriminately accessing the pedestrianised zone of the town centre; a security firm would be hired to operate the bollards all year round, in the morning and the afternoon.

It was highlighted that there was a pressure associated with Port Talbot Bus Station, which was allocated to the Estates Department; the pressure was linked to the ongoing costs associated with Port Talbot Bus Station and the WC facilities and their relationship with the bus operators around the charges for the use of the station.

Members were informed that car parking income had been severely affected by the pandemic and footfall had also reduced in the Town Centres; this was reflected in the budget pressure for this coming year. Officers hoped, with the roll out of the vaccine, that the situation will improve but nevertheless it was anticipated that income streams will continue to be affected in this service area during 2021/22.

It was noted that the Chancellor had previously announced that the entitlement to use red diesel will end from 2022; the Council had a number of Streetcare vehicles as well as other pieces of machinery which used red diesel, therefore this will have a knock on effect and a pressure of £48k. It was added that the Council would not be recovering the fuel duty costs in future due to this.

The Committee was informed of some of the budget pressures proposed to be met from specific reserves:

- Additional resources in procurement – Streetcare services and other services monitored by the Streetscene and Engineering Scrutiny Committee will be one of the beneficiaries of the additional resources in procurement; as the service areas require a lot of support from the Council's Procurement Section, which currently had limited resources. An example provided was the insourcing of the Transfer Station at Crymlyn Burrows; there were a number of contracts that needed to be migrated over into the Council's processes and procedures;

- The pilot of Absorbent Hygiene Product collections – the pilot collection were due to be introduced later this year and pending the delivery of the vehicles, which were currently on order; the funding will help with the roll out of this process;
- One-off waste composition survey – the Councils Waste Strategy was programmed for a review in 2022 to ensure that the Council was on track to deliver the 70% target in 2024/25; as part of this, Officers were intending to do another composition survey and look at participation as well if possible, in order to provide more information to Members as part of the deliberations in the review process;
- Highway IT Costs – this was noted to be a one off cost for the Councils Highways Development Control Section; it was associated with the new functions for the Sustainable Drainage Approval Body (SAB) linked with new development, to purchase software models to enable enforcement, appeals and inspections as part of the councils iDox system.

The circulated report detailed the two corporate income generation strategies which may have implication for services overseen by the Streetscene and Engineering Scrutiny Committee; one of which was that there will be impacts on the telephone calls at the Call Centre for example, residents calling to access Streetcare and Parking Services. The second point highlighted was the pressures around advertisement and sponsorship; the Environment Department will be involved with the corporate working group on income generation, however specifically for the Department it will be in connection with highway assets and where income could be contributed and/or generated going forward.

Members raised their concerns in relation to the amount of food waste bins that get damaged and that if this issue was looked into further, money could be saved as they would not need to be replaced. Officers mentioned that last year, 600 tonnes more food waste was picked up as more people were recycling and more food waste was being generated; there was a higher participating in recycling food waste and residents were requiring two bins instead of one due to the quantities. It was noted that these factors, along with the issue with service expansion, all contributed towards the Members concerns. Officers also recognised that there had been some issues with breakages, and were looking at the design of the food waste bins to make them more robust. It was added that

supervisors try to ensure that their staff were as diligent as they could be, in terms of putting the bins back carefully.

In relation to the bollard management at Port Talbot Town Centre, Members questioned the need for bollards in Station Road as this street could be accessed through the security barrier next to Port Talbot Civic Centre. Members also asked if this work could be carried out via a grant to the Business Improvement District (BID) rather than contracting a security company. Officers explained that there needed to be a means of emergency access and exit should there be an incident in the Town Centre when the bollards were raised, which is why the area next to Port Talbot Civic Centre would be left without bollards. It was stated that a formal quotation had been received from the security firm which managed the bollards at Neath Town Centre; the quote referred to the costs per annum and there was a need for repairs to be completed on existing bollards.

Members asked what work had been done to assure the Committee that the budget figures for the service areas were accurately forecasted. Officers explained that formal estimates had been completed based on knowledge, however this year a lot of the estimates were based on what had been experienced through the pandemic. In relation to the car parking budget, it was highlighted that Officers had analysed this with the Director of Finance and accountants, and found that it was very difficult to gauge the uptake going forward, however there were hopes that situations would change as Spring/Summer approaches; there were still some concerns around the recovery of parking income and it would be monitored very carefully in the future. It was added that Aberavon Sea Front had surprisingly generated more money this year as people had been travelling to exercise locally. In terms of the Streetcare area, it was noted that a lot of the items were accurately calculable, for example Officers knew the costs for the vehicles and the teams; there were some elements that were variable, for example the income for recyclate materials, in which Officers had to look back at historical data and trends to make an estimate. It was added that there will be fluctuation throughout the year which would be dealt with within the contingencies of the budget.

Following Scrutiny of the budget details contained within the report, Members were reminded that their comments from this meeting would form part of the formal consultation response for the budget 2021/22. They were asked that if they had any other proposals for

budget savings, not included within the attached report, that they approach Officers for their consideration.

5. **Forward Work Programme 2020/21**

The Streetscene and Engineering Scrutiny Forward Work Programme 2020/21 was noted.

CHAIRPERSON

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