

**Environment, Regeneration and Streetscene Services Scrutiny
Committee**

**(Multi-Location Meeting - Council Chamber, Port Talbot & Microsoft
Teams)**

Members Present:

14 November 2023

Chairperson: Councillor S.Pursey

Vice Chairperson: Councillor T.Bowen

Councillors: S.M.Penry, C.James, W.Carpenter, A.Dacey,
R.Davies, N.Goldup-John, S.Thomas and
R.W.Wood

**Officers In
Attendance** D.Griffiths, C.Morris, C.Plowman, M.Roberts,
T.Rees, S.Brennan, K.Lewis, S. Owen and
D.Rees

Cabinet Invitees: Councillors J.Hurley and S.Jones

Observers

1. Chair's Announcements

The Chair noted that the Members of the Scrutiny Committee had agreed to scrutinise the following items from the Cabinet Board agenda:

- Item 7: Key Performance Indicators 2023/2024 - Quarter 2 (1st April 2023 - 30th September 2023)
- Item 11: Highway Asset Management Plan
- Item 12: Street Lighting Energy
- Item 13: Zero Emission Vehicle
- Infrastructure Strategy (ZEVIS)
- Item 14: Electric Vehicle On street Home Charging
- Item 15: Electrical Vehicle and Charging Infrastructure Transition to Ultra Low Emissions Update.

2. Declarations of Interest

There were none.

3. **Minutes of the Previous Meeting**

The minutes of the meeting held on 14/07/2023, 28/07/2023, and 14/09/2023, 06/10/2023 were approved as an accurate record of proceedings.

4. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny**

Key Performance Indicators 2023/2024 - Quarter 2 (1st April 2023 - 30th September 2023)

Members received information on the Key Performance Indicators 2023/2024 - Quarter 2 (1st April 2023 - 30th September 2023 as presented within the report circulated.

Members highlighted that on page 29 of the report, planning was in the red. Members acknowledged that the department had lost a member of staff and queried if they had replaced that person and how far the department was behind?

Members were advised that the officer who had left was in the enforcement team so does not affect the KPI referenced. Members were advised that the red related to major applications and the time taken to determine those applications.

Officers explained that this KPI is a difficult one to achieve due to the complexity of applications that come forward and as a result that team always try to work with applicants and developers to frontload the process through pre-application negotiations to try de-risk the process.

Members were informed that the team did meet the KPI target for the first quarter but this quarter they failed mainly down to the fact that there were four large applications which is unusual. This also coincided during the summer period where most of the team take annual leave.

Officers explained that the lessons learned were that when officers can see that they are going to have difficulties to determine the applications, they will start to work with the applicants and developers and get an extension of time if required.

Members were advised that overall, with planning applications, the team's performance is good. But on this issue, there are specific circumstances that explain this dip in performance.

Members wanted to know what areas the officers are covering in relation to the dog fouling KPI. Officers said they can send the members information on where they have been in relation to dog fouling.

The report was noted.

Highway Asset Management Plan

Mike Roberts introduced the report and advised that this is the 6th update of the plans. The cycle had been affected by COVID so this has disrupted things and there are still a couple of bits of work to do on it. The Regional Transport Plan (RTP) will have an impact on how the authority manages the assets and they will need to bring back a new report after the RTP is in place. Officers advised that historically the HAMP was all about the management of the adopted highway. Officers advised that when taking account of active travel, in the covering report it is saying that they now need to look at the overall cycleway network as well. This will take time and is a further piece of work. Officers advised that in light of this they could either extend the report for a year or provide the interim report in which they are acknowledging that they need to do 2 other pieces of work.

Members raised that on page 115 of the report where it references retaining walls, it has listed over 1262 that the authority didn't know who owned them and wanted to know if this is just down to terminology or whether the authority didn't know.

Members also asked what the abbreviation SCRIM stands for and with the report being abbreviation heavy can they have a glossary included in reports like this?

Officers advised that the authority don't know who owns the properties relating to the retaining walls. There is a duty of care on the authority that if it is brought to officers' attention that a structure abutting the highway that is of concern, then the authority must investigate the ownership and then officers will take any necessary actions to carry out any repairs.

Officers may issue formal legal notices on landowners and if they fail to respond then the council will action it and then act to recover costs from the owners. In circumstances where there are no registered owners, then duty falls back on the authority to arrange to make it safe. Not knowing all the owners of the abutments is a risk area for

the authority as identified on the corporate risk register. It was noted that there is no specific funding allocated to inspect these structures and that the authority takes a reactive roll.

Officers apologised for using several abbreviations and advised that they amend the report to include the full names where there are acronyms and clarified that SCRIM relates to how officers measure skid distance and stands for Sideways Coefficient of Resistance Investigation Machine.

Members raised the issue that the plan says that part of the assessment process is traffic usage and that is used to calculate the need and benefit is of certain repairs. Members stated that some valleys communities which are more rural areas have lower traffic levels but also have poor public transport meaning that the need is perceived as a lot higher locally. Is that considered? And why isn't that factored in as the report doesn't state any impact on valley communities.

Officers explained that HGVs have the biggest impact on road wear and that features a lot in designing carriageways. Officers understood the need of rural areas being reliant on roads but advised that in maintenance terms, HGVs and 'a million standard axels' is what affects the design, lifecycle, and maintenance of roads. It doesn't look at the priority of valley areas in terms of lifecycle and looks at the usage of the road as the main factor.

Members stated that the Impact assessment didn't say an impact on valley communities. Members said that the wear to the road is irrelevant at that point as the road is already damaged and part of assessment on where the fund to repair is directed is based on traffic usage and need. Members feel that is a little bit late once it needs repairing.

Members understand wear being part of the scheduling process because roads that are used more by heavy vehicles are going to need more maintenance, but not part of the assessment process for repairing roads that have damage.

Officers advised that there is a reactive system to reports of repairs and then planned maintenance. This HAMP is part of a suite of documents, including the Highway maintenance plan, Highway inspection regime and in the future the status and options report which looks at the assets of the authority. The document indicates

what you need to spend over the longer term to maintain certain levels of highway condition.

Members highlighted page 127 where the report states, 'managing access to the town' in Pontardawe and wanted to know what was meant by this as it sounds like it is trying to stop people going there.

Officers explained that Welsh Government (WG) no longer supports capacity improvements so in the past if there was any congestion, they would look to deal with it by developing capacity. Now that there is no money for this, the authority must look at other options unless the authority can fund increasing capacity themselves. The authority now must look at managing capacity and how they encourage people to take alternative forms of travel like bus, active travel etc. The reality is that the authority must manage what they have.

Members stated that on page 140 under the statutory undertakers, members asked if the authority could increase the maintenance period for the utilities companies aren't doing a good job to 4-5 years to incentivise better performance.

Officers explained that there is a maximum cap under statutory guidance for this.

Members asked what 'Political aspirations' mean on page 153.

Officers explained this related to if there was a consideration from members that they wanted to prioritise highway maintenance work, to have an increased standard of maintenance and condition. Officers used an example that hypothetically members may want no more than 2% of main roads and 3% of side roads needing maintenance, so members may set that as a standard (the aspiration) but then the status and options report would mean officers would then need to look at the level of spend required to maintain that standard.

The Chair responded to the opening remarks by officers about work still needing to be done on the HAMP and the reference made to the Regional Transport plan RTA currently under consideration by the Corporate Joint Committee (CJC). This is due for completion by March 2025 and noted that further discussion will be taking place with WG on the extremely tight timescale for the adoption of the plan. Should Welsh Government accept an extension to the current timetable then that would take us to the end of this version of the HAMP. The chair said that he was concerned that this version of the plan would not be updated within the time scales of the RTP. The

other side is that in terms of where the plan doesn't currently comply with Llwybr Newyd and the Wales Transport Strategy (WTS), he wanted to know what the timescale is for updating the plan in relation to that? The chair highlighted that the WTS/Llwybr Newyd was already in place when HAMPS was to be put in place and he was disappointed it was taken forward without fully considering the WTS and national policy and it is quite urgent that HAMPS complies with all national policy.

Officers advised that historically the HAMP hasn't looked at anything outside of the adopted network and officers aren't sure if that is covered in the national plan but officers recognise that in light of the context of encouraging active travel that the authority now needs to extend beyond the adopted network and look at the overall cycle network whether those are on adopted or unadopted public or private land. Officers know there are cycle routes on the plan not on adopted highway and that don't meet adoptable standards and that there needs to be a more holistic approach.

Officers advised that there are further matters that will assessments beyond the adopted highway and looking at all aspects of cycle network. If you bring it all within an inspection regime, they will need to look at whether there is an adopted standard or minimum standard and then for maintenance they may have to look at minimum standards across the whole adopted and unadopted network. Doing that also could bring funding issues as presently the authority doesn't fund unadopted network to the same standard as the adopted network. Officers advised that this is a significant piece of work and could take a year to complete and subject to available resources.

Members were also informed that in relation to active travel there is a disparity between the management between the different types of provisions, officers need to rationalise to ensure that footways, cycle ways and shared use parks are inspected and maintained appropriately which is not currently consistent. Officers noted that this is a gap within the act as the HAMP deals with adopted highway but much of the cycle network is private land or unadopted highway.

Officers explained that in relation to the CJC and RTP, although all regions are raising timescale concerns with WG as part of submitting the implementation plan it is a very challenging programme to deliver the number of studies required within that period. Officers are suggesting that to come up with a meaningful and robust plan that covers all stakeholders views it would take another 12 months at

least. Officers aren't certain how WG will view this. Currently there is no flexibility on this and there is very limited funding to undertake the work. Members were informed that the Southwest region has submitted its draft implementation plan by the due date at the end of October and are awaiting WG feedback.

Officers advised that they will likely be advised that the RTP must consider the land use planning across the region, but the strategic development plan is further behind the RTP. They are dependent on each other; officers aren't certain if WG will extend this period and get the STPs to bring forward interim plans or not. Officers are working towards 2025 for an adopted plan. Officers believe that they could bring back a report on the Active travel element of the HAMP even if the other elements are delayed.

The Chair advised that he believes that it is essential that the active travel work does come back as soon as possible and that its worth emphasising that it's not just about overall cycleways management work but also how adopted highways and road space are being categorised and prioritized as well in relation to active travel.

Members referenced page 171 about bridges and how they are assessed periodically and that is the objective but also on page 183 the report states that this has slipped on the assessment of bridges and members wanted to know why there isn't a 3–5-year schedule as a target to stop it slipping going forward.

Officers explained that there are two types of inspections. A general inspection which is visual and that is over 2 years. 50% of those inspections are undertaken per Annum. There are also principal inspections undertaken in accordance with statutory guidance this is done every 6 years and on average they do 20 per year. Currently they are on target, however there was a point that they were behind when some inspection engineers left the authority but now, they are back on track.

Members enquired about the drainage infrastructure survey and asked if this was possible for member to see based on their areas. Officers advised they are happy to share information on this but given the amount of information the council holds it might be easier to sit down with officers or look through them online. Officers explained that the authority is only responsible for highway drainage and land drainage on the authority's land. The council also has an interest in

Welsh Water combined sewage systems which receive the authority's drainage.

Members wanted to know if there was a map that shows where the problem areas are as it might be useful for members to know what officers are working on. Officers advised that they have a budget of £300,000 but a multitude of priorities to deal with. This amount has been the same for many years and combined with the weather changing they have a long list of needs with the most pressing at the top of the list. Members are due to receive a revised Flood Risk Management Plan in due course.

Following scrutiny, members were supportive of the recommendations to be considered by Cabinet Board.

Street Lighting Energy

Members received information on Street Lighting Energy as presented within the report circulated.

Members made comments regarding the increased risk to public safety vs the costs saved by dimming street lighting or turning lights off and urged the cabinet to look at the matter carefully and strive to keep lights on.

Members asked a series of questions;

What the 3-watt dimming equates to in percentages?

What criteria has been used for target areas?

Could sensors instead be used to go on and off at certain times?

What impact will this have on the Christmas lights as they are supplied by streetlights?

When was it trialled before what percentage was it dimmed to?

Officers advised that this is early days regarding the proposals and they have been tasked to see if it is possible to make any savings because of the energy cost increases. These are set out in the report and officers need a consultation to inform an integrated impact assessment. There are over 500 pages of locations for potential dimming and part light burning. These locations will be available in

the consultation for the public to look up their individual streets, both for dimming and part light.

Christmas lighting is not done by the council anymore and is up to town councils and local groups. Dimming the lanterns will not affect the power available for Christmas lights linked to street lighting supply cables.

The chair asked about the rationale around the areas chosen for part night lighting. The chair also felt that the list would be very difficult for the public to ascertain how the areas they would use frequently would be impacted.

Officers advised an experienced consultant had been engaged that had applied guidelines issued by the Institution of Lighting Professionals. Officers could make that consultant's report available to members, there is a list of part night lighting exclusions including high traffic density junctions/roundabouts, high accident areas, areas where CCTV is present within 50 meters of a lighting column, high crime rate areas, town centres, public car parks, and main traffic routes. The consensus of the report is that its residential areas for dimming rather than active principal routes.

Regarding the lists of streets for part night lighting and dimming, officers would ask IT if they can make lists that are searchable by street name to make it easier for residents. Members stated that a map would be helpful so the public could plot regular journeys and see how they are affected. Officers replied that producing a map could be difficult but they would see what they could do with IT.

Members also asked what the criteria was for determining what roads would be dimmed. Officers noted a lot of estate areas in particular are already dimmed. More recently LED lights have been put in to replace the higher wattage high pressure sodium lights and it is these which are now proposed to be dimmed. So the impact could be seen, Officers proposed some demonstration sites where people can see the dimming at 25%.

Members questioned what is happening about trees obscuring lights at present as if lights are dimmed without the trees cut then they would be poorly lit. Officers advised that these are and will be picked up when reported.

Members acknowledged the consultation with the Police and urged further consultation in relation to areas where crime occurs and dimming of lights.

Members support the idea of a trial of dimmed lights so that councillors had a better understanding of what it looked like and welcomed the offer to see the full consultant's report.

A member made a suggestion that a high threshold of 80% of respondents at least to public consultation need reply for any changes of any lighting goes ahead due to the number of people affected by any changes.

Members stated that several LED lights have been too bright in some cases and required residents to use blinds.

There was further discussion around the benefit of having clear mapping of areas affected. Officers were unable to give 100% assurance of being able to produce a map but would look to make it as easy as possible for residents to look up where changes are proposed.

Officers would look at what geographical information they could give but would have to take account of the time and cost element to what they could do.

Following this discussion, the following amendments were put forward by the scrutiny committee:

The Consultation to include clear mapping of areas affected.

Following scrutiny, the recommendation was supported to the Cabinet Board with the amendments.

Zero Emission Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy (ZEVIS)

Members received information Zero Emission Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy (ZEVIS) as presented within the report circulated.

Members referenced page 287 that it talks about reinforcing the grid and cost associated with reinforcing the grid. Members wanted to know who would pay those costs?

Members also referenced the decarbonisation of the grey fleet and if the authority offers and promotes an employee sacrifice scheme.

Members referred to page 320 of the report specifically the implementation action plan and wanted to know when that would be produced, who was producing it and where the budget would be coming from for the production of the plan?

Officers advised that with grid connections there is a significant cost and this increases as you put in faster chargers. National grid now charges a proportional cost rather than the complete cost of a new substation. This is an improvement but still high figures for high powered chargers. The project would pay for that and while funding is available that still goes through the project's costs.

Officers explained that the salary sacrifice scheme it is launching shortly, officers they will monitor uptake when it's up and running. Officers advised that there are implications that need to be understood by people who take it on, in relation to mileage they can claim when using their salary sacrifice car. These vehicles will help reduce the emissions of the grey fleet.

Members were advised that for the action plan, the next steps are being worked towards as a fast-track programme so they can work relatively quickly. Property the council owns such as schools, car parks community centres etc, they can work with colleagues there and with National Grid. They are working on the fast-track programme now and trying to find that there is a way that residents or authority workers/vehicles may be able to use these chargers in those authority owned locations. The strategic document is deigned to inform and lead officers forward.

Members wanted to know if the implementation action plan is a physical plan yet. Officers advised that it is a work in progress but as soon as they have the action plan ready in report form it will be made available. Officers approximated that it would take 6 months to deliver it. Officers advised it would be a dynamic document as the world will overtake the authority. The private sector will take a lead as commercially it will make sense for them in certain situations. Officers saw the authority as focusing more in areas where people wouldn't get access to a charger as it wouldn't quite make commercial sense.

Members noted that there were options included on street electric charging infrastructure types included in the report and highlighted that the authority needs to be careful on the options they choose and the impact they have on pedestrians and the highway so that there

aren't any unintended negative impacts made to active travel infrastructure.

The report was noted.

Electric Vehicle On-street Home Charging

Members received information on Electric Vehicle On-street Home Charging as presented within the report circulated.

Members felt that given the limited resources the authority has, that they should go with one system and look into how to do that correctly rather than multiple options.

Members asked if the authority is developing the policy now because there is already a problem or because they think it will be a problem with people trailing cables on the pavements. If people are doing this already the authority would need to offer people an alternative.

Members felt that these people could be used in a trial of alternative solutions to a cable on the pavement.

Officers advised that one reason they brought the report forward was to raise awareness because they think there will be a problem. Officers have had a small number of people asking for permission to put cables on the pavement which has been turned down under council obligations, but there isn't a formal policy on it. Officers also feel that Wales needs national guidelines on this and there needs to be coordination of the trials going on. Officers also think that there may be amendments needed to highways act and/or guidance so that everyone knows where they are. This needs a coordinated consideration. Officers appreciate this is going to be a growing problem with the increase of EV purchases and see what they can do. The zero-emission infrastructure strategy could come into play where community hubs could help with charging.

Members asked if WG or TFW have an appetite to look at this. Officers agreed that WG and TFW are keen to look at this and are looking into it. Currently innovation is ahead of legislation and there is a risk of litigation if there isn't a joined-up plan. Officers would be content for NPT to engage in a trial that has not already been done by another local authority to promote the agenda and move things forward and show residents that the authority are taking forward steps. WG are taking feedback from LA's and solution providers for a way to make this work.

Members asked why pop-up chargers/ pop up access points to a charging point in the pavement that is connected to the home supply haven't been considered. Officers not various trial of systems was shown in the report. The Cabinet Member for Climate Change and Economic Growth advised that there are systems that map private charge points where you can charge at cost and thought that enhancing mapping as part of the strategy as additional points may be helpful.

Officers are looking at examples of pop-up charging points but there are considerations to make regarding the minimum standards of active travel for footways etc, so there are implications of what solutions can be used, this is why national standards are important.

Following scrutiny, members were supportive of the recommendations to be considered by Cabinet Board.

Electrical Vehicle and Charging Infrastructure Transition to Ultra Low Emissions Update

Members advised that the refuse lorries being trialled now were having to go back into communities more than once and it is a concern that the vehicle used can't do a second run to certain communities. Based on this they wanted to know whether a charger may be put in those areas.

Officers advised that they are looking to replace the recycling vehicles and they have purchased one and it is working well. Officers advised that so far, they haven't found an electric refuse truck that suits the authorities' geographical circumstances and can complete two runs of going up and down the valley and still have sufficient battery storage. The weight considerations of fully loaded electric refuse trucks is the main issue for their lack of suitability as there is a lot of strain on the batteries and motors. Officers advised that if electric vehicles that don't suit the authorities needs by the time the diesel vehicles are due for renewal, then they will look at Hydrogen as an alternative although it was noted that there would need to be a readily available supply of green hydrogen.

In relation to chargers in the Cymer area, there is a piece of work going on in relation to the 5-year plan for the transition of the fleet to EV and exiting Tregellis court and as part of that plan they are hoping to put a heavy-duty charging facility in each of the valley communities

and are looking to source grants to enable this strategy. Officers are hoping for the Swansea valley, Dulais valley, Neath valley and Afan valley as locations so that the workforce can rapid charge if necessary in those areas.

Officers also informed members that South West Wales are leading on the whole of Wales in the transition programme to ULEV. In terms of NPT, it is classified as a mixed local authority and early indications are that NPT are well ahead of the curve in terms of average Mixed local authorities, with NPT at 11.9% of the fleet being electric and others on average of those who are mixed authorities are at 5.67%. It was also notes that 90% of vans and all of the cars purchased in the last year are zero emissions vehicles.

Officers are out on Sell to Wales on the contract to extend the lorry parking and to install the associated charging points in down at the waste transfer station for the waste fleet. There will be fast chargers and whilst drivers take their statutory driving break the vehicles would be charged charge for completion of the rounds.

The report was noted.

5. **Urgent Items**

There was none.

6. **Committee Action Log**

The Members of the Committee noted the Action Log.

7. **Forward Work Programme**

The Members of the Committee noted the Forward Work Programme.

8. **Access to Meetings**

Members decided not to scrutinise any private items.

9. **Pre-Decision Scrutiny of Private Item/s**

Members decided not to scrutinise any private items.

CHAIRPERSON