

# Public Document Pack

## Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Monday, 4th March, 2024

6.00 pm

Meeting Room A

Town Hall

Blackburn

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### AGENDA

1. **Welcome and Apologies**
2. **Minutes of the last meeting**  
**PLACE OSC November 2023** **2 - 4**
3. **Declarations of Interest**  
**DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST FORM** **5**
4. **Report on Highways Infrastructure feedback**  
As the Committee will recall, Highways Infrastructure was the main agenda item at the last meeting, and Highways Officers have prepared a report responding to matters raised by Members on this topic.  
**Scrutiny of Highways Infrastructure** **6 - 8**
5. **Electric and Alternative Fuels Fleet Strategy**  
Today's main agenda item is scrutiny of plans to purchase electric & alternative fuel vehicles and develop a fleet strategy for alternative fuels at the Council.  
**Electric Vehicles overview for scrutiny March 2024** **9 - 13**

Date Published: 23<sup>rd</sup> February 2024  
Denise Park, Chief Executive

## PLACE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE Monday 13<sup>th</sup> November 2023

**PRESENT** – Councillor Brian Taylor (in the Chair) Councillors, Brookfield, Khan S, Khan Z, Fielding, Marrow and Russell.

**ALSO PRESENT** – Executive Member for Growth & Development, Qesir Mahmood, Officers – Carmel Foster-Devine, Heather Farmer, Paul Withington, Mark Berry, Saf Alam, Simon Ross and Phil Llewellyn.

### RESOLUTIONS

#### 9. Nomination of Chair for the Meeting

Following recent political changes at the Council, the former Chair and Vice Chair were no longer on the Committee, so Phil Llewellyn requested nominations for a Chair for this meeting. Councillor Brian Taylor was nominated by Zamir Khan, and seconded by Katrina Fielding. No other nominations were received, so Councillor Taylor took the Chair.

**RESOLVED** – That Councillor Brian Taylor serve as Chair for this meeting.

#### 10. Welcome and Apologies

The Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting.

#### 11. Minutes of the meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2023

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2023 were submitted for approval.

Simon Ross agreed to send responses from Tony Watson to questions raised at the last meeting, to the Committee.

**RESOLVED** – That the Minutes of the meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> August 2023 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

#### 12. Declarations of interest

No Declarations of interest were made by Members of the Committee.

#### 13. Highways Infrastructure

The Committee received a report and presentation, which had been circulated to Members of the Committee ahead of the meeting, on the Borough's Highway Infrastructure, with Officers and the Executive Member, highlighting:

- The Road Network

- Surveys and Current Condition
- Funding and Maintenance Works
- Solutions
- Trends
- The Future
- Pot Hole Issues – including Criteria, Inspections, Defects Raised
- Traffic Signals
- Developer Funding for Highway Improvements

Members of the Committee made a number of comments relating to the presentation and report, which are summarised below:

- Issues with Traffic Lights, buses not using filter lane near Cravens Brow/Branch Road because of issues with the lights, and the need for officers to proactively tell Ward Members of issues relating to traffic signals, so they could advise residents. Officers advised that the issue at Cravens Brow/Branch Road was being looked at with Yunex, and that Members were advised of issues with traffic signals that would last a week or more. References were made to supply chain issues and the delay since Covid for spare parts, and some of the equipment in the Borough was old and more likely to need replacement parts, which were scarce or no longer available. Cllr Mahmood advised that this was a key part of Yunex's role, and that officers would ask the company about their procurement strategy and stock levels.

**ACTION:** Officers to contact Yunex re their procurement strategy given the issues that were raised around stock levels the and rising costs.

- A further issue raised relating to Traffic Lights was the view that the lights seemed to remain on red at night, which had implications for fuel consumption and pollution. Officers were not aware of this, but would check with Yunex on the timings at night.

**ACTION:** Officers to contact Yunex re the issue of lights remaining on red at night, which had implications for fuel consumption and pollution.

- Use of the generic Highways Councillor e-mail address rather than having named contacts. Officers explained that there were a number of vacancies at present in the team, and also a high number of MP queries, so the generic e-mail was being used and regularly checked. It was hoped that three current vacancies would be recruited to during December.
- It was noted that there was a significant funding shortfall for road repairs, which was a national issue with a £14 Billion shortfall.
- Members raised concerns about the quality of repairs carried out at Billinge End Road and outside Witton Park, and also questioned the decision making around pot-hole repairs. Officers referenced the funding issues referred to, and the need to prioritise, but understood the views being expressed. The criteria for pot-hole repairs was also

explained along with technical specifications relating to road surfaces and skid reduction.

- Members also raised issues in relation to road marking and line painting, with officers explaining priority categories and the Borough-wide approach, and the Executive Member referenced the extra funding put in by the Council in the last two years, as there was no budget, but this would not last and that a strategy was required for future funding.
- Street signs – it was confirmed that newer signs were more reflective and less reliant on dedicated lighting.
- In response to a comment from Councillor Mark Russell relating to Section 106 funding for signals needed for housing developments, the Chair advised that these matters were addressed during the planning application process.

The Executive Member and supporting officers were thanked for their attendance and input, and then left the meeting.

**RESOLVED** – That the information provided by the Executive Member and Officers be noted.

**14      Date of the Next Meeting**

The next meeting would be held on Monday 4<sup>th</sup> March 2024, and it was noted that the Committee had not selected a topic for the meeting, and the Chair suggested that, as referred to in the presentation by Martin Eden at the July meeting on future areas of focus, that scrutiny of plans to purchase electric & alternative fuel vehicles and develop fleet strategy for alternative fuels would be appropriate, which was agreed by the Committee.

Signed: .....

Date: .....

## DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST IN ITEMS ON THIS AGENDA

**Members attending a Council, Committee, Board or other meeting with a personal interest in a matter on the Agenda must disclose the existence and nature of the interest and, if it is a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or an Other Interest under paragraph 16.1 of the Code of Conduct, should leave the meeting during discussion and voting on the item.**

**Members declaring an interest(s) should complete this form and hand it to the Democratic Services Officer at the commencement of the meeting and declare such an interest at the appropriate point on the agenda.**

MEETING:                      **PLACE OSC**

DATE:                              **4<sup>th</sup> MARCH 2024**

AGENDA ITEM NO.:

DESCRIPTION (BRIEF):

NATURE OF INTEREST:

DISCLOSABLE PECUNIARY/OTHER (delete as appropriate)

SIGNED :

PRINT NAME:

(Paragraphs 8 to 17 of the Code of Conduct for Members of the Council refer)



**TO:** Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee

**FROM:** Head of Highways, PLACE

**DATE:** 4<sup>th</sup> March 2024

**PORTFOLIOS AFFECTED:** All

**WARDS AFFECTED:** All

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**TITLE OF REPORT:** Highways Infrastructure

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## 1. PURPOSE

The purpose of this report is to provide responses to the actions minuted in the previous meeting of the scrutiny committee held on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2023 and to consider other matters raised by Councillors.

## 2. BACKGROUND

At the last meeting the Committee received a report and presentation on the Borough's Highway Infrastructure, with Officers and the Executive Member, highlighting:

- The Road Network
- Surveys and Current Condition
- Funding and Maintenance Works
- Solutions
- Trends
- The Future
- Pot Hole Issues – including Criteria, Inspections, Defects Raised
- Traffic Signals
- Developer Funding for Highway Improvements

Members discussed the report and presentation and various matters were raised during the discussion. These matters are considered below.

## 3. RESPONSE TO MATTERS RAISED

The narrative below considers the matters raised in the form of actions and responses:-

**ACTION:** Officers to contact Yunex re their procurement strategy given the issues that were raised around stock levels and rising costs.

**RESPONSE:** Officers have regular meetings with Yunex and concerns have been shared with them. We are working with them to develop a standardised equipment list for BwD so that issues with replacement parts will be less of an issue moving forward.

**ACTION:** Officers to contact Yunex re the issue of lights remaining on red at night, which had implications for fuel consumption and pollution.

**RESPONSE:** Officers have contacted Yunex about this. Traffic signals along a length of road, during quiet periods of the night will rest on red, this enables them to change to green when demand is detected. If this demand is travelling within the speed limit then they will change to green as the vehicle approaches, however, if the vehicle is travelling in excess of the speed limit then the lights will remain on red.

**ACTION:** That the Highways Department seek to improve response times to Councillor enquiries. It takes very little time to send an update. Current timescales are not acceptable and result in poor service to residents.

**RESPONSE:** The Highway Teams always endeavour to respond to Councillor and MP enquiries within the 10 day response time. However, there has been significant staff resource issues within Network Management Team with no traffic engineers or technicians since May 2023. This has had an impact on the Team's ability to investigate and respond to enquiries. A recruitment drive has recently taken place and The Team has managed to secure a traffic technician however there is still a vacant engineers post and technicians post which will be advertised again.

**ACTION:** That the Council adopt 20mm as a depth for actioning footpath defects.

**RESPONSE:** The Highway Reactive Repair budget is already under significant pressure. The Service is currently looking for savings and is not in a position to increase service levels without additional investment. The Council is currently with the majority of authorities operating at 25mm in footways.

**ACTION:** That the Council adopt a new pothole policy to protect residential amenity, to sit alongside and complement its existing pothole policy which is based upon safety. The existing policy of only actioning defects over 40mm deep means some residential side-streets need never be repaired, as the asphalt layer is not 40mm deep.

**RESPONSE:** The Highway Safety Inspection Procedure already compliments the larger Asset Management Strategy. This balances available budgets with network condition, including residential streets. To tackle more residential streets would require additional funding to be channelled into the Asset Management Plan and in the context of funding challenge faced by the Council, this is not possible.

**ACTION:** The Council should seek to ensure that Highways improvements required as the result of development are put in place at the initial stage of development. Improvements are required at the outset due to all the increased construction traffic that happens from the outset of development. Leaving improvements until the end of development is not sufficient to protect the amenity of existing residents in the area.

**RESPONSE:** The Highways Authority does seek to protect the interests of the Borough, if there are works that are deemed essential for safety reasons, then they would be carried out at the outset. However, there is also a balance to be struck on carrying out works whilst there is construction traffic moving to and from the site. This inevitably results in wear and tear, and it is prudent and more cost effective to carry out the remainder of the works once construction has advanced considerably and vehicles

movements are reduced. Thus supporting the longevity of the works carried out on the highway.

#### **4. RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that the Committee:-

- a) note the matters set out above and the responses provided;
- b) determine what, if any, recommendations should be made to the Policy and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**Report Version:** 1.0

**Report Authors:** Carmel Foster-Devine

**Date:** 4<sup>th</sup> March 2024



## Briefing note to Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

4<sup>th</sup> March 2024

### Alternative Fuels

#### Alternative Fuel Options

The move towards alternatives for internal combustion engines (ICE) for Council fleets continues, with electric being the lead alternative, although hydrogen, bio-methane, compressed natural gas and liquid natural gas are other options, albeit in their infancy in terms of availability and also vehicle refuelling centres being in place.

#### Electric Vehicles

From research, local authorities have continued to invest in Electric Vehicle (EV) infrastructure in the past year, with 44 per cent of councils increasing the number of charging points at their depots year-on-year. The number of charge points increased by 1,117 last year, representing a 40 per cent increase in the number of chargers year-on-year, as the total number of chargers has increased to 4,615 across the UK.

Nationally, Councils were also planning to invest record levels into EV charging infrastructure at their depots last year, with over £12.8 million planned for 2023. This was up 41 per cent from the £9.1million spent in 2022 and up 212 per cent from the £4.1million invested in 2021.

Overall, the number of electric vehicles in council fleets increased by 26 per cent last year. Councils have also been prioritising investment in EV vans ahead of EV cars and larger LGVs. The stock of EV vans increased by 30 per cent in 2023 compared to a 21 per cent increase in the stock of EV cars.

The research also revealed regional differences in how different local authorities were shaping up in their goal to create a greener fleet. Scottish local authorities are leading the charge with electrifying their vehicles as 14.2 per cent of their fleet was electrified. Conversely, Northern Ireland is lagging compared to the rest of the UK's councils, as only 2.8 per cent of their fleet is electrified.

#### Advantages and Disadvantages of Electric Vehicles

Electric vehicles offer advantages and savings including:

- Refilling a petrol or diesel car costs on average between 19 - 21p per mile, while recharging your electric car can cost as little as 3p per mile for home charging, around 14p per mile on lamppost chargers and around 18p per mile for rapid public charging. The savings will be most significant when owners charge at home and have access to an off-peak overnight electricity tariff, for which businesses may not have access to.
- There are fewer mechanical components in an electric vehicle compared with conventional vehicles, which often results in lower servicing and maintenance costs.
- Lower or zero vehicle excise duty (VED). However, from 2025 VED will also be charged on electric vehicles. The first-year rate will still be lower for electric vehicles (cars) – only £10 compared to £120-£945 for petrol or diesel vehicles – but after that all vehicles will be charged a standard rate of £165 per year.
- Zero emission vehicles – those emitting 0g/km CO<sub>2</sub> – qualify for the cleaner vehicle discount available until December 2025. All other vehicles, regardless of their emissions status will be required to pay congestion charges where they are introduced already.

- The lower or zero emissions of plug-in vehicles mean that they will attract lower charges from clean air zones being implemented around the UK and London's ultra low emission zone (ULEZ).

#### **Disadvantages of Electric Vehicles - cons**

- Finding a Charging station - EV charging stations are fewer and further between than petrol/diesel stations.
- Charging takes longer.  
How fast do electric vans charge?  
Recharging your battery can take anything from one to 10 hours depending on how you opt to charge. Here's the low down on various charging speeds:  
Slow charging: 3 pin/off street produces 10-13 miles per hour charge.  
Fast charging: Home/long stay/depot charging produces 20-33 miles per hour charge  
Rapid charging: Motorway/Service Station produces up to 400 miles per hour charge.  
The above figures are estimated, and depending on your vehicle settings, the type of charger you use, and your useable battery, these charging times could differ. It's also important to note that you will get faster charging speeds the lower your battery is. And as your percentage increases, the slower the car will charge.
- The driving range on a full charge.
- Higher Initial Purchase Cost.
- Replacing the Batteries is Expensive.
- There needs to be an adequate power supply to introduce fleet charging

#### **Fleet Replacements**

Blackburn with Darwen BC has a vehicle replacement programme that is reviewed annually, with replacements detailed for the next 5 years. The replacement programme is managed via capital financing provision, with a report taken to Executive Board each year for approval.

For each vehicle planned for replacement, alternative fuel usage is foremost on the list of items to consider. However, the commercial vehicle market, for those vehicles above 5 tonnes, whilst having some specialist companies make adaptations to assembly line vehicles to convert them to EVs and also a minimal number of original equipment manufacturers (OEM) providing commercial options, there are issues with this, in terms of payloads being reduced, with batteries being heavier and of course the main issue, range of the vehicles, with 150 miles being an optimum for large goods vehicles and the resultant need to access a superfast charger that would still take about 8 hours to fully refuel the large commercial electric vehicle. Due to the size of the larger vehicles and their batteries, they are extremely 'power hungry' in terms of electricity supply needed to charge large goods vehicles.

Accordingly, the main thrust of EVs for commercial use is with vans, with more manufacturers developing options for EV vans and also hybrid vans. Blackburn with Darwen's fleet will shortly include a total of 14 electric vehicles, all of which are vans.

As an example of the options for electric vehicles, alternatives for the vans continue to be explored with various options on the market. The cost of these can range from approximately £32,000 for a small van up to £70,000 for larger vans. This is can be up to twice the cost of its diesel counterpart,

with electric vehicles not having the same carrying and towing capacity, which would be needed for a number of the operational teams.

As a replacement option for the large refuse collection vehicles, there is only one OEM option commercially available which is the Dennis Eagle eCollect. The cost of these are around £480,000 each with an additional cost for the charger, the ICE version of this is £210,000. There are other companies that retrofit commercial vehicles to become electric vehicles, but their costs are comparable with OEM produced vehicles.

However, the electric costs to power the electric vehicle can be less than half of that of diesel, with additional savings in the form of zero vehicle tax for EVs until 2025 and reduced servicing costs. There would be additional costs in the form of suitable electric vehicle charging points and associated infrastructure at the depot needed to develop further EV usage in the Council.

There are also current considerations for large goods vehicle usage across the country, with usage restricted to predominantly urban areas. The full impact on how large goods vehicles such as a refuse collection vehicle (RCV) would suit landscapes similar to Blackburn with Darwen is currently unknown, although feedback from Lancaster City Council who use electric refuse collection vehicles is not entirely positive, due to charging issues, reduced payloads and battery life. There is a significant lack of performance data surrounding electric RCV's, meaning there would be a significant risk associated with moving over to large commercial electric vehicles.

There are fully electric options for the footpath and road sweepers but the cost of these can also be 2-3 times more expensive than its diesel counterpart. The reliability of the electric road sweepers has also been questioned and as we do not have spare vehicles, we cannot afford the downtime. There is also the issue of reduced payload due to the weight of the battery pack.

### **Charging Facilities**

The majority of the Council's electric vehicles charge at Davyfield Road depot, where the existing EV charger has in 2023, been supplemented by an additional 8 chargers for fleet use, as well as 2 chargers for staff vehicles to pay to use. There is also a charger at Fielden Street car park where Councils vans can charge.

The 8 new electric vehicle chargers at Davyfield Road depot cost £39,000 and whilst an application for grant support from the Government was pursued, we were not successful.

Despite the new chargers being in place, the Council cannot charge larger vehicles at the depot, as there is insufficient electrical feed capacity available at present. Discussions with Electricity North West are commencing, but the costs for the work needed to increase electrical supply for more electric vehicles to be charged is likely to exceed £110,000. At present, we have though reached the limit of supply for charging capacity at Davyfield Road depot, due to the limits outside of the Council's control.

All Council depot EV chargers are linked to a back-office system. This as well as giving intelligence on usage and future requirements, can accommodate variable charging, e.g., which vehicles to charge first if site supply capacity is restricted, by how much (e.g. a vehicle may only require 50% charge to undertake operational requirements), and the charging rate (e.g. a single 60 kW dual charger can charge one vehicle at 60kW DC, or two at 30kW DC simultaneously, or one at 10kW and one at 50kW DC simultaneously).

Locations chosen for the installation of EV chargers are those where EVs will be based or operate from and solutions for charging infrastructure are all site and electrical supply dependant, in addition to operational requirements. Considerations include:-

- Whether it is possible to charge vehicles in turn overnight to spread load and reduce peak supply requirements.
- Charging vehicles only to the level they need for service requirements rather than to a full charge every time.
- Linked to both above points, the maximum output of chargers required on each site (this may be a combination of low and higher output chargers).
- Requirements for on demand rapid charging.
- Electrical input supply available
- Usage regimes of vehicles etc.

It will not always be practically possible or economically viable to install either any charging infrastructure, or to a required capacity, at every council location where EV's may be operating from, but in these cases other solutions to facilitate the use of ultra-low emissions may be viable, such as commercial on street or service area charging may be an option for some of these depending on work patterns. In some cases the Council may consider making use of commercially available rapid charging facilities. There are several practical issues that will need to be resolved, one way forward may be to introduce a pilot scheme, following discussions with commercial EV charge point providers.

### **Infrastructure Partnering**

On the face of it, building partnerships with nearby organisations that operate similar fleets of vehicles to share the planning and cost of installation of charging infrastructure is appealing. However, in practice, this has proved challenging on the limited occasions when discussions have taken place across the country. The reasons for this include differing organisational objectives, financing/procurement, prioritisation of use and back-office systems.

The other potential option for ULEVs within Lancashire is the use of Hydrogen.

There are two forms of technology, one is the use of hydrogen to power fuel cells to run an electric motor, and the other is a form of Internal Combustion Engine (ICE) that runs off hydrogen. Both technologies allow for substantially zero tailpipe emissions and come within the Ultra-Low Emission scope. At present the nearest proposed commercial hydrogen station is at BOC close to the A580 at St Helens a few miles outside of Lancashire, but it is expected that provision will grow over the next few years and there may be options for hydrogen fuel to be stored in depots for county council vehicles. For some larger vehicles hydrogen may be a practical solution for the Council.

Lancashire is home to leading edge technology firms and academic research in relation to Hydrogen provision.

- The Lancaster Hydrogen Hub Lancaster Hydrogen Hub - Lancaster University is a local university/industry collaboration that includes the development of hydrogen for transport

- The high technology firm Nano sun, based in Lancaster, NanoSUN Hydrogen Fuel, Storage & Distribution Solutions have developed solutions for transporting hydrogen in containers to supply transport depots.

It is possible that partnering for hydrogen use may be an option, but supply and refuelling technology is insufficiently advanced to make an informed judgement on this.

Tony Watson

Head of Environment