

Minutes of Economy Skills Transport and Environment Scrutiny Board

**Monday 8th November 2021 at 5.45pm
in the Council Chamber, Sandwell Council House, Oldbury**

Present: Councillor Moore (Chair);
Councillors M Gill, S Gill, Hughes, Jalil, Kaur, Owen, C
Padda and Rollins.

Also present: Councillor I Padda (Cabinet Member for Regeneration
and Growth)

Officers: Tony McGovern (Director of Regeneration and Growth)
and Gary Charlton (Waste and Fleet Service Manager).

32/21 **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies were received from Councillor Abrahams (Vice-Chair).

33/21 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest made at the meeting

34/21 **Minutes**

Resolved that the minutes of the meeting held on 30
September 2021 are confirmed as a correct record.

35/21 **Additional Item of Business**

There were no additional items of business to consider.

36/21 **Fleet Management Overview**

The Board received an overview of the Council's Fleet Services.

Fleet Services provided two core services - maintenance, which included the Council's fleet, contractors and the general public; and vehicle and asset replacement for the Council. There was a designated MOT test facility at the Waterfall Lane depot. The service was also approved to carry out insurance repairs.

The Council's current fleet comprised of 508 vehicles and 725 items of plant. A further 154 vehicles were maintained on behalf of third parties, which included Serco, Sandwell Children's Trust, Community Transport, Staffordshire & West Midlands Community Rehabilitation Services.

As part of a rolling asset replacement programme, an indicative replacement/disposal date was provided, taking into account the anticipated life of the vehicle, and maintenance costs. Assets were normally disposed of at auction. After a review of need by the service area, replacement vehicles were normally funded through prudential borrowing, which would be recovered via the monthly hire rate over the life of the vehicle or item of plant. Each service area was responsible for determining its own vehicle needs, whilst Fleet Services facilitated the procurement.

The majority of the Council's owned fleet was currently diesel or petrol. Following the government's announcement that petrol and diesel vehicles would no longer be available to purchase from 2030, the type of vehicle offered through Fleet Services over the next 5 years would change to electric. The electric vehicle market was constantly evolving, with better vehicles being released by manufacturers each year

however, there was still limited market availability for vehicles over 7.5 tonnes.

All internal fleet services vehicles had been converted to electric. To support change within the Council's internal fleet dependent departments, Fleet Services had purchased a pool of electric vehicles for service/business units to trial. The limited number of electric charging points across the Borough and on Council owned sites remained a barrier to full conversion. However, there was still time for the Council to begin the necessary infrastructure changes.

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were made, and issues highlighted:-

- Fleet Services did not hold information on vehicle usage, however it was expected that individual service areas would.
- Waterfall Lane was currently operating at capacity. To develop the commercial aspect of the service further, a larger site would be required, which was currently being considered.
- Fleet Services would be looking at the number and type of assets across the Council to establish whether best use was being made of all assets.
- With the migration from petrol and diesel vehicles to electric vehicles by 2030, services managers had started investing in training the mechanics to preparation to the changes. Whilst the majority of maintenance and servicing should remain the same, upskilling would be required to appropriately manage heavy the loads of electricity.
- The Serco site at Shidas Lane was currently being assessed to establish whether an electricity sub-station could be built there.
- Fleet Services currently procured vehicles via the Government's framework, which was the most cost effective route. However, the second hand market for electric vehicles was developing slowly.

- The types and specifications of vehicles required varied greatly across the Council, depending on the service need.
- Presently there were no bicycles in the fleet, however, this could be looked at for officers making short journeys.
- Hydrogen and hybrid vehicles had also been considered as alternative options, but this was largely dependent on marketplace availability and having the means to maintain them.

Members requested a further report with a detailed breakdown of the Council's fleet and plant, further information on service capacity and data on vehicle usage from the Council, along with an outline of the preliminary work undertaken to identify a suitable alternative location for the services currently provided from Waterfall Lane depot.

Resolved that a further report is submitted to a future meeting of the Board with a detailed breakdown of the Council's fleet and plant, further information on service capacity and data on vehicle usage, along with an outline of the preliminary work undertaken to identify a suitable alternative location for the services currently provided from Waterfall Lane depot.

37/21 **Levelling Up Fund**

The Board received an overview of the government's Levelling Up Fund (LUF). The LUF was a competitive fund, distributed to places across the UK on the basis of successful project selection. £4.8 billion was available for England over the next four years (up to 2024-25). Funding was targeted towards places with the most significant need, as measured by an index taking into account the need for economic recovery and growth; improved transport connectivity; and regeneration.

The first round of the Fund had launched in March 2021, and sought proposals that supported high priority projects that would make a visible impact in local areas, focusing on

transport investments, regeneration and town centre investment and cultural investment.

The Board noted the key aspects of the Fund:-

- Schemes were required to have a net zero element.
- Local authorities could bid for up to £20m per constituency for non-transport related projects or £50m for transport related schemes.
- Match funding of 10% was required.
- Business cases had to be supported by the relevant member of parliament (MP).
- With the exception of major transport schemes, which needed to be spent by the end of March 2025, funding needed to be spent by 31 March 2024. This applied to all current and future rounds.
- The Council had received capacity funding of £125,000 to support the preparation of business cases.

Sandwell had not submitted any businesses cases in round 1 due to the need to focus officer resources on issues relating to the £67.5m Towns Fund Programme. Some neighbouring authorities had been successful however. The West Midlands Combined Authority (WMCA) had also submitted a bid for £50m to upgrade the Metro Depot at Wednesbury, however, the outcome was not yet known.

Sandwell was able to bid for either three projects up to £20m, or two £20m projects and a major transport scheme of up to £50m. Although the criteria and deadlines had not yet been announced for Round 2, officers were drawing together a long list of proposed projects for discussion and engagement with members.

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were made, and issues highlighted:-

- The capacity funding would be used to recruit a manager and a support post to co-ordinate the development of round 2 bids.

- The Combined Authority had assigned a link transport officer to support the development of a transport based bid.
- Engagement on the proposed bids would be council-wide, however, MP support was required in writing so individual briefings with MPs would be taking place.
- In regard to the 10% contribution match funding, it was likely that the government would require cash as opposed to land donation.

Members felt that the town for a should be used as a mechanism for consultation on the proposed bids. The Board requested a further report on the long list of bids.

Resolved:-

- (1) that a report on the longlist of proposed Levelling Up Fund projects be submitted to a future meeting of the Board;
- (2) that town fora be used as a mechanism for consulting councillors on the proposed bids.

38/21 Update on Waste Services and the Cleanliness of the Borough Review

It was reported that two inquiry sessions had taken place which included an examination of the Serco contract and hearing evidence from Litterwatch, along with GMB and Unite trades unions. A further session was scheduled for Unite and senior management from Serco to attend.

The Chair highlighted the efforts of the frontline staff during the pandemic and emphasised that the inquiry would focus on the wider management and performance of the contract.

39/21 Scrutiny Action Tracker

The Board noted progress on previous actions and recommendations.

40/21 **Cabinet Forward Plan**

The Board noted the Cabinet forward plan for the period September 2021 to January 2022.

41/21 **Work Programme**

The Board noted its work programme for 2021/22.

Resolved that the following items be added to the Board's work programme for 2021/22:-

- Levelling Up Fund: long list of projects
- Activities of community transport
- Options for efficiency savings in Fleet Services
- Grass Cutting Programme

42/21 **Exclusion of the Public and Press**

Resolved that the public and press be excluded from the rest of the meeting to avoid the possible disclosure of exempt information under Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act, 1972, as amended by the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006, relating to the financial and business affairs of any person, including the authority holding that information.

43/21 **Towns Fund – Programme Update (Sandwell Civil and Mechanical Engineering Centre)**

Further to Minute No. 31/21 (of the meeting held on 30 September 2021) the Board considered a business case for a bid for Towns Fund funding for the development of a Civil and Mechanical Engineering Centre in Sandwell, on the site of the former Shaftesbury House in West Bromwich.

The project would deliver an education centre with a new adult and young people's offer around civil engineering, advanced manufacturing and construction. The centre would

provide learning opportunities for approximately 400 students every year, including apprenticeships and T Levels. The Centre would also provide training and support for 50-70 small businesses.

Construction was West Bromwich's highest growth sector, seeing a growth of 1000 jobs (+80%) since 2013 and the town had a heritage of construction and engineering. However, these skills were not appropriately catered for by existing education facilities and engagement with businesses indicated this had been a major limiting factor to further growth. Engagement with local engineering and construction employers demonstrated a clear demand for improved and modernised facilities to meet changing advanced manufacturing and construction techniques, whilst still providing 'traditional' skills to meet replacement demand.

The project was in line with government objectives to provide greater access to adult education by working with both employed and unemployed adults and young people including NEETs.

As well as securing the revenue funding to operate the facility, Sandwell College would also secure additional funding from the Skills Funding Agency. Additionally, Sandwell College was already in discussions with the Department of Education about a potential expansion.

Members welcomed the proposal and the redevelopment of Shaftsbury House.

The proposal had been approved by the Towns Fund Superboard and the Cabinet would be considering the proposal at its meeting on 24 November 2021.

44/21

Towns Fund – Programme Update (Urban Greening Project)

Further to Minute No. 31/21 (of the meeting held on 30 September 2021) the Board considered a business case for a bid for Towns Fund funding for an urban greening project.

The project aimed to implement new and enhance existing green spaces to improve the appearance of the town centre, complementing planned infrastructure works and establishing a path from West Bromwich centre to Sandwell Valley. The project sought to improve the overall connectivity and aesthetic of the town. Furthermore, the project would include the delivery of a Cultural Programme which would be a key component in improving the physical and mental wellbeing of people.

It had the potential to link to the Birmingham 2022 Commonwealth Games Delivery and Legacy mode workstreams through the provision of new signage along the route. It would also provide a link to the Commonwealth Games Live site proposed at Sandwell Valley.

Following comments and questions from members of the Board, the following responses were made, and issues highlighted:-

- The Director of Regeneration and Growth would explore the suggestion of creating bee gardens on bus shelters.
- It was suggested that the business cases would benefit from a section dedicated to climate change considerations.
- Members expressed concern at the level of maintenance required for such a project.
- Members felt that the Council's approach to cycling infrastructure was poor.
- There would be Towns Funds projects coming forward relating to walking and cycling infrastructure.

The proposal had been approved by the Towns Fund Superboard and the Cabinet would be considering the proposal at its meeting on 24 November 2021.

Meeting ended at 7:36pm

Contact: democratic_services@sandwell.gov.uk