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HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL

TUESDAY, 18 APRIL 2017

PRESENT: Councillors Hari Sharma (Chairman), Jesse Grey (Vice-Chairman), Malcolm Beer, Marius Gilmore, Maureen Hunt, Paul Lion and Julian Sharpe

Officers: Wendy Binmore, Mark Lampard, Ben Smith and David Scott

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

None received.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllr Sharma – Declared a Pecuniary Interest in the item on the Borough's bus service as he works for First Group as a bus driver and he holds the portfolio as Bus Champion. Cllr Sharma stated he would be available to answer any questions from the Panel but, would leave the room during the debate and vote on the item. Cllr Grey chaired this item on the agenda.

POOL AND MAYORAL CARS AND THE INTRODUCTION OF ELECTRIC VEHICLES

Ben Smith, Head of Transport & Highways introduced the report and stated it covered three main elements which were the pool car fleet, options for the replacement of the Mayoral car and on street electric car charging stations. Delegations to the Lead Member to assess the outcome of work and the way forward.

Cllr Grey stated he was trying to see where the benefits were in financial terms. He saw that item two and three in the report covered some of the information but he could not see where the financial benefit would be. The Head of Highways & Transport stated there were a number of issues discussed in the paper. When the pool cars were procured, they needed to cover approximately 10,000 miles per year to make the business case. However, at present they were covering approximately 6,000 miles per year; therefore, it was costing the council more money for the lease due to the lack of mileage covered. He added it made no difference if the pool cars were petrol, diesel or electric vehicles, in order to get the best deal, they needed to drive up the usage of pool cars.

Cllr Grey stated that if they were not being used, they would cost the council more money. He added that it was inconvenient for officers to use the pool cars and then have to bring them back to the Town Hall to collect their own cars. It would make more sense if officers could keep the cars overnight and then bring them back the next day. The Head of Transport & Highways confirmed that it was possible for staff to take the vehicles home but, they were unable to do that everyday as that would make them personal cars with different tax issues. The primary purpose of the pool cars was for short term use. David Scott, Head of Communities and Highways explained that the pool cars were there for officers to make site visits and carry out other duties that meant they had to travel. It was important to try and get as many of those visits carried out in pool cars.

The Chairman stated analysis was required to see if the pool cars were still needed. The Head of Highways and Transport confirmed that at present, there was a choice for staff to use their own cars for site visits or, for them to use the pool cars. To make the business case, officers had to use the pool cars and have them on the road. A report could be brought to Cabinet on the business case to see if the council needed 13 pool cars. The Chairman said he was very supportive of electric cars; he had driven electric buses which were eco friendly. The cars

would be very quiet, there were no parking charges in London for electric cars, the cars could be charged using 32amp and so could be charged at home and there was no road tax or emissions. He added that there was a government grant available to purchase the cars. The Chairman stated the council needed to encourage officers to use the pool cars instead of their own cars and claiming mileage.

Cllr Hunt stated she could see various options to terminate existing leases and she would like to see information on why the council is in the position with officers using their own cars and not pool cars. The Head of Highways and Transport stated historically, the business case established how many cars were required in the fleet. Work carried out on this confirmed that the council needed 13 cars and they needed to do 10,000 miles per year. Following the changes in Adult Services and Children's Services, the demands and shape of the council had changed significantly so, it was a good time to be looking at the fleet. At present, the council encouraged staff to use pool cars instead of their own personal transport. It might be possible to look at the policy on that and the council also needed to see if all journeys made were necessary.

Cllr Beer said it seemed to make a lot of sense if the council were paying penalties for not maximising the use of pool cars, that would be offset by cancelling the contract. If the average mileage for the pool cars was 6,000 miles per year, then it would make business sense to reduce the amount of pool cars required; then the vehicles left available for pool usage would increase their mileage. He added that taking pool cars home would need to have very tight controls. Cllr Beer said there was reference in the report to allowing the pool cars to be used at weekends so, the details would need to be worked out for that such as insurance or, it could cause problems. If a pool car was used at the weekend and the battery was run down, it would need to be charged, what would happen if there was no charging point for the car when being used at weekends. The Head of Highways and Transport confirmed that the pool cars could continue to be petrol or could be converted to electric. Charging points were not relevant to pool cars as the charging points would be on the kerbside to allow and enable the public to charge cars and encourage the public to go electric.

The Head of Highways and Transport confirmed that for weekend use, the pool cars would be converted into a car club for cars not used by staff at weekends to maximise usage. The cars would start off as pool cars for use by council staff and then extended into public use at weekends. Cllr Sharpe stated that would help to pay for the lease of the cars and save the council money. Cllr Beer stated he was concerned about the insurance costs and details for the pool cars to be used as a car club. The Head of Communities and Highways confirmed the cars would be tracked and members of the public would have to sign up to the car club to be able to make use of the vehicles.

Cllr Beer requested additional recommendations be put forward to Cabinet which were that the council look at the number of pool cars and equate them to anticipated mileage to see if the number of pool cars could be reduced. After some discussion with the Panel, it was agreed that this suggestion would be minuted but, not put forward as a recommendation.

With regards to the Mayoral car, Cllr Gilmore stated it was a good asset and although there was a potential liability on maintenance, the resale value was not great. However, compared with lease costs of a new vehicle annually of approximately £7,500 running leasing costs were quite expensive. He was not sure it was the tight message to be sending out to the public as premium cars were costly. Cllr Grey commented he was all for the new Mayoral car in principle but, the council needed to bare in mind the prestige of the Mayoral role; when the Mayor went to functions, they needed to look the part. Cllr Hunt agreed, it would not look good if the Mayor arrived at functions in a small car. The Head of Communities and highways stated the current Mayoral car was ageing with a low residual value. The council will either have to lease a new vehicle or, buy a new one. He added that tables 5 and 6 illustrated no huge difference between the two options. The message was that the new Mayoral car needed to be either electric or hybrid.

Cllr Grey confirmed the current Mayoral car was 10 years old and had covered 158,000 miles. The Chairman stated hybrid was difficult to operate and difficult to repair. His preference was electric; with the government grant, it would be good value to choose an electric car. It would be eco-friendly and green as there would be no emissions. Cllr Grey agreed and commented the amount of mileage the car was likely to cover meant he favoured the electric car option. But, he wanted to look at the style of the car and colour before a decision was made to ensure it was suitable as the Mayor's car. The Chairman explained that he had looked online and had seen Tesla had a silver and black model with a range of 200 miles without needing to be charged and the S model of the car could cover more miles. The Chairman added that with a hybrid car, if the diesel side was broken, the car would need a mechanic, electrician and a technician to fix it and that sometimes, when the diesel side was being repaired, it broke the electric side therefore, a single fuel type system would be better.

Cllr Grey said it was important to get the message across that the colour of the car was very important; other than that, he was happy with an electric car. Cllr Sharp questioned whether buying into the electric car technology at this stage was wise as it was still an emerging technology with the technology improving all the time. He added the council would be paying a premium for early technology and he thought the council would do better right now to buy a non-electric car and then have the discussion again in five years when the technology had moved on. He added he supported the idea of electric cars but, he was not sure on having an electric car for the Mayor right now. The Chairman said the UK were very far behind the rest of Europe and the UK had to catch up. As batteries and technology evolved, it would become cheaper. TFL had done a lot of work because electric cars were the way forward. If the council wanted to help protect the environment, it needed to start and also encourage residents to swap to electric cars. Cllr Grey stated there had to be the right balance moving forward. He suggested highlighting to Cabinet the timing aspect and saying that in principle, the Panel supported green energy and swapping the Mayoral car with an electric car but, it was early technology.

Cllr Sharpe asked if the council was looking to buy an electric car that saves the environment and sends a green energy message which was different to needing to buy a new car for the Mayor. He added the council could replace the Mayor's car with any other cars within the report, not just electric. Cllr Lion stated he sat on the Panel when the current car was bought. He requested a try to get a further two years out of the current car to allow time to make an informed decision. The Head of Communities and Highways confirmed the Borough had had the current car for a few years and the mileage varied year to year. He felt the existing car could carry on past April 2018 but, the car was getting older and could incur more costs. It may save money to not buy a new car but, any savings would be offset by higher maintenance bills.

Cllr Beer said that one key thing is that the council would be putting a lot of money into a new car but the technology was still in its experimental stage. The Head of Communities and Highways stated the lease would cover a lot of potential issues that may occur. Cllr Sharpe agreed but added that the technology was young and still evolving. If the car was to be replaced, he felt that a regular car should be chosen which would do the job for a long time. The Head of Highways and Transport confirmed the lease would be for four years. The report confirmed a car could be leased on a short term contract. Cllr Beer said he did not know how long the electric vehicles would last before they went wrong. Leasing companies would build risks into the lease costs. He felt the council should keep the current Mayoral car and look at this in another couple of years. The current car was a quality vehicle and not used in a heavy manner so it should last for more years. The Chairman disagreed; he said the council was requesting bus operators to reduce emissions and meet targets whilst the Borough was not meeting those targets by driving an old diesel car. Cllr Beer responded that the Chairman was comparing diesel buses with a small car. The Mayor of London was ordering buses off the roads but, that was different to this situation and not comparing like for like. The way the Mayoral car was used was not in a damaging way. Cllr Grey explained the council needed to be sending out the right message. Residents were always asking for air pollution figures so the Borough needed to send out the right message. Cllr Beer responded saying the alternative

message was that the council was putting £80,000 into something which might not be reliable. The Head of Communities and Highways confirmed the costs would not be £80,000; it would be £6,000 over a three, four or five year term.

Cllr Lion said he was all for an electric car in time. he felt the Panel should wait for two more years and then look at this issue again.

Members of the Panel endorsed the recommendations with the following additions and amendments:

Recommendation i) c. should state that more investigation was required before procuring a new electric Mayoral car during 2017/18

The panel requested Cabinet take into account the costs of the leasing agreement against the costs of the maintenance of the current Mayoral car.

The Panel wished to highlight they felt the timing of looking at procuring an electric vehicle was premature as the technology was still relatively new and still emerging.

PUBLIC BUS SERVICES IN THE ROYAL BOROUGH

Ben Smith, Head of Highways & Transport stated bus services operated in different ways. There were stand alone commercial operators, some were subsidised by the council and some would not run without a subsidy. In May 2016 operators of some services came to the council saying that without financial support, some routes would cease to run. Cabinet funded some services for 12 months and work was carried out on how the subsidies worked.

The number 16 by Courtney Buses wrote and said they would end the route in April 2017 if the council did not subsidise so the report was requesting extra funding to continue to subsidise the route.

The Head of Highways & Transport continued that Surrey County Council had ceased funding therefore, RBWM needed to increase funding for buses to continue running to Staines. The Panel needed to consider continue funding each year for the services to continue.

Mr Henry Perez attended the Panel in order to speak about the petition he and others submitted in keeping services on specific bus routes running. He stated he was there to tell us about route 305. He had asked to address the Panel as he wanted to keep the 305 bus route on the radar and emphasise the need for the bus service. He and his friend Mr Cribbin decided to petition the council to request funding for the service. He set a limit of 12 days for the petition to run and at the end of the period, there were over 1,200 signatures; other residents had also contacted him to help get more signatures on the petition.

The bus service was used to carry school children to and from Magna Carta school in Staines and without the service, there would be no other way of them getting there. There were a number of elderly residents that used the bus route to visit friends and family and elderly residents used the bus to get to the bus station in Staines; without the service, they couldn't visit anyone. Mr Perez ended by saying the 305 bus service provided a lifeline in the community.

The Chairman left the room during the rest of the discussion and Councillor Jesse Grey chaired the item.

Councillor Hunt said she thought it was excellent for RBWM to keep the service running to keep communities together. She said she had heard from the speaker regarding the 305 route; that service would be paid for by the Borough but, it would also pay for residents in areas not within RBWM. The route also took the Borough's residents outside the Borough to shop in Staines in another Borough. She added that she could understand paying for a bus to bring residents from outside the Borough to shop in the royal Borough. The Head of Highways & Transport confirmed that the bus service was operated by Surrey and they stopped funding it so it fell to the Borough to step in; it was now being run on a monthly rolling contract. He added that Slough, Colnbrook and Poyle would be approached and asked to contribute to the route as their residents also benefit.

Councillor Sharpe said he was troubled by the situation as the service was useful and played an important part in the community. There were a number of children that relied on the bus to get to school in Staines. The Head of Highways & Transport confirmed there was a duty on the local authority to provide home to school transport. At present, there was only one child in that area that went to a school outside the Borough that was under the Borough's duty. The other children in that area had attended the school through parental choice and so would have to make alternative arrangements should the bus service to Staines stop running.

Councillor Grey stated he understood Mr Perez standing up for his area but, there was a balance to be struck. He wanted to encourage more usage of the bus services in the Borough before the council committed to running the service for a very small number of people. He was not against funding the route, but it was a question of affordability. The head of Highways & Transport said there had been cuts to subsidies; there was a government grant two years ago for bus services to grow and become sustainable but, it was not viable and the funding ended.

Councillor Beer stated the Borough was an affluent area so while people could afford to use their cars, people would continue to do so. In the borough with such a large proportion of elderly people, buses became more important. He felt it was strange that residents in Wraysbury and Horton used Staines for their shopping instead of Windsor but it was probably to do with having better transport links. Councillor continued that it was essential to try and cut pollution and reduce parking problems. Buses were essential in that and it might have been a good idea to stretch intervals between buses when there was low usage. The Borough should be supportive at all costs to keep transport links operating.

UNANIMOUSLY RESOLVED: Members of the Highways, Transport and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel recommend That Cabinet:

- i) Approves additional annual expenditure of £153,000 for five-years from 2017-18 for the continuation of the operation of the existing network of bus services from 1 May 2017.**
- ii) Provides delegated authority to the Interim Executive Director in conjunction with the Deputy Leader and Lead Member for Highways and Transport to award contracts for the tendered bus services from 1 August 2017.**

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 8.35 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....