

## **Public Questions – TECC 16 September 2021**

### **Question One**

Buckinghamshire Council currently operates a fleet of 185 vehicles, of which it owns 101, and the latest Fleet Management report states that 'due regard will be taken of commitments in the Council's climate change strategy in the management of fleet vehicles'.

When the climate change strategy was written, the council operated 'two electric vans and some electric pool cars', so there is clearly vast room for improvement. Unfortunately, the strategy sets no firm targets, merely committing to a review of the fleet and to explore and implement emissions reductions where practical. Given the urgent need to decarbonise and the fact that electric vehicles are already more cost effective in terms of cost of ownership, can the relevant cabinet members give further details on the timetable for the review and concrete commitments to fleet electrification?

### **Answer**

Thank you for your question and I agree there is indeed an urgent need to reduce emissions, not just in Buckinghamshire but worldwide. We must remember as the UK looks towards hosting the COP 26 climate conference in November, that we cannot address climate change in isolation and need to see action from all countries to avoid its worst effects.

I do however wish to challenge what appears to be asserted in the question, that electric vehicles are always more cost effective to run. It is true that in an increasing number of circumstances, they will be. However, this is not a universal fact and it will depend on a range of factors, in particular the upfront cost difference between electric and conventional models and the annual mileage of the vehicle.

For a small electric car with typical domestic use it may be cheaper overall now; however, for larger vehicles such as vans or lorries, which the Council's fleet includes, the higher upfront cost could push the payback beyond their normal lifetime. Clearly such factors need assessing carefully.

Our Fleet Team encourage customers needing new or replacement vehicles to consider alternative fuel options. They will always source quotes for an electric vehicle where one is available and provide technical advice to support customers in making a decision. Along with all other service areas, the Council's internal fleet services will be reviewed to identify the best operating model. Further updates on fleet arrangements will be reported to Members as part of the regular Climate Change updates on the delivery of the Strategy.

Lastly, I would add that the vehicles we are currently using were produced via energy intensive processes and have significant embedded carbon – as do the electric vehicles which could replace them. It is therefore important that we approach this carefully and do not prematurely dispose of vehicles, which have many years of life in them, as this could contribute more to global carbon emissions than it saves.

## **Question Two**

“In February, Buckinghamshire Council agreed its Climate Change Strategy, containing 60 Actions with varying degrees of detail. The Executive Summary cited as a key communication activity “to report regularly on our progress”, with specific Actions within the Strategy to “Monitor and report quarterly on emissions savings across Council operations” [Action 6], and “Report annually on progress made against actions and reducing emissions [Action 9].

Over 6 months have now passed since the Strategy was agreed, a period in which events in Europe and around the world have starkly illustrated the consequences of climate change and the growing urgency of addressing it. Given the self-identified importance of reporting on progress, would the Cabinet Members please provide a brief interim update to the Committee and the wider public on progress on Actions, perhaps on a red / amber / green “on track” rating, with accompanying commentary where relevant.”

## **Answer**

Thank you for the question and I agree with you that we have indeed seen extremes of weather over recent months, including in the UK as well as around the globe. It is a stark reminder that the climate is already changing, and we must expect to see such extremes more regularly.

In terms of the specific question, I must first highlight that the Strategy was not formally adopted at the Cabinet meeting in February this year. At that meeting, Cabinet reviewed the Strategy and requested further engagement activity be undertaken.

As such, the Strategy is not yet in place and you will appreciate that not all the actions can be implemented at the same time. Since the engagement work was completed the team have been focusing on delivery of carbon reducing actions rather than the reporting ones, and so I am not able to provide the requested update today.

However, as per the update I will give to this Committee shortly, we are working to bring the Strategy forward for adoption. When it comes forward for adoption, my intention is that we will provide an update on the work which is being undertaken to implement the Strategy as well as an update on our carbon emissions.

As we then continue the delivery of the Strategy, I can assure you and this committee that we will be reporting back regularly on our progress and the actions being undertaken.