

DURHAM COUNTY COUNCIL

SPECIAL JOINT ECONOMY AND ENTERPRISE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE AND ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

At a Special Joint Meeting of the **Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Environment and Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held in the **Council Chamber, County Hall, Durham** on **Thursday 6 June 2024** at **9.30 am**

Present:

Councillor S Zair (Chair)

Members of the Committee:

Councillors B Coult (Vice-Chair) A Surtees, A Batey, R Crute, M Currah, G Hutchinson, B Kellett (substitute for J Miller), C Lines, R Manchester, R Ormerod, K Shaw, M Stead, D Nicholls, J Purvis, A Simpson and D Sutton-Lloyd

Co-opted Members:

Mrs R Morris

Prior to commencement of the meeting, Members observed a minute silence to commemorate the 80th Anniversary of the D-Day Landing.

The Chair formally thanked Councillor Bill Moist, the former Chair of Economy and Enterprise Overview and Scrutiny for his commitment to the role.

1 Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors M Abley, E Adam, G Binney, L Brown, J Elmer, D Freeman, C Kay, J Miller and Mr E Simons.

2 Substitute Members

Councillor Kellett was substitute for Councillor J Miller.

3 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4 Items from Co-opted Members or Interested Parties

There were no items from Co-opted Members of interested parties.

5 Regional and Local Transport: Policy and Delivery Update

The Committee received a report of the Corporate Director of Regeneration Economy and Growth and presentation which provided an update on transport policy and delivery in County Durham and the wider region (for copy of report and presentation slides, see file of minutes).

The Head of Transport and Contract Services and his Team provided a detailed presentation that focused on:-

- DCC Transport, Policy and Devolution;
- NECA Transport, Key Principles and Powers;
- Active Travel Policy and Delivery Plan – Vision and Aims – Projects and Opportunities;
- Bus Provision – Improvement Plan;
- New Transport Infrastructure and Rail Delivery and Opportunities;
- Electric Vehicle Infrastructure;
- Transport Policy and Delivery.

The Head of Transport and Contract Services commenced the presentation, introducing the officers from his service in attendance at the meeting and explained the service management structure. He continued by outlining the scope and scale of the work of the team, namely Transport and Infrastructure Projects, Integrated Passenger Transport and Strategic Traffic Management. He explained that current national transport policy had a focus on plans for decarbonisation and the government's 'Bus Back Better' strategy aims to deliver better bus services for passengers. At a Sub-regional level, a new Strategic Transport Plan had been introduced with Transport for the North which had been out for consultation. Regionally, there had been changes with the formation of the North East Combined Authority (NECA) which would bring forward a revision of the North East Transport Plan and introduce a new Active Travel Strategy to improve connectivity and provide more opportunities and economic benefit across the North East. He continued by commenting that the Mayor was now appointed and that during the pre-election she had highlighted that the refresh of the North East Transport Plan would be one of the first tasks to be undertaken. In addition, the election of the Mayor would lead to better outcomes for all and that she had highlighted the need for bus reform and confirmed that she has access to franchising powers and key route network powers. Locally, work continued with the objectives, policies and principles that sit within the County Durham Plan. He continued by confirming that County Durham has a Local Transport Plan and it was noted that the Local Transport Plan for County Durham had successfully gained funding over the years and delivered a number of schemes. He advised that Nexus was to remain however County Durham and Northumberland have their own transport functions and confirmed that this was a better outcome for County Durham.

He then highlighted the introduction of integrated ticketing, an IT based intelligent ticketing system providing the opportunity to use multiple forms of transport for a single price per day, highlighting that this was much more cost effective and a simpler approach to travelling, linking from Berwick to Barnard Castle.

In response to a query from Mrs R Morris regarding preparation for the NECA Transport Programme and whether DCC had undertaken any work prior to the programme being in place, the Head of Transport and Contract Services confirmed that there are a pipeline of schemes in place that would continue to be delivered and that these were Durham specific schemes. He highlighted that one of the schemes which was a priority of the Mayor and within County Durham was the Bowburn relief road scheme. He commented that Durham schemes and interventions would continue to be delivered through the capital programme and the authority continued to push forward with the levelling up process, with work to stabilise the A690, Bowburn relief road and the expansion of Jade.

The next section of the presentation provided detail on Active Travel. The Strategic Traffic Manager provided details on the Active Travel key agenda delivery plan and policy framework which aimed to provide high quality cycling and walking networks that were safe and usable for everyone, ensuring quality of experience for the user and encouraged and enabled greater participation across all demographic groups.

The Strategic Traffic Manager advised members that there was more to active travel than walking and cycling and that a change of mindset was needed to persuade people not to use their cars and highlighted that it is about giving people options. He advised Members of the various policy commitments to decarbonise transport at a national scale and confirmed that the governments vision was best articulated in their 2020 Cycling and Walking strategy 'Gear Change'. He continued by informing Members that government had also created 'Active Travel England', a new inspectorate for walking and cycling links, whose mission was to ensure that all new developments must include quality active travel links.

He continued by confirming that the Active Travel policy and the importance of walking and cycling is now embedded within the County Durham Plan and its supplementary planning documents. He highlighted that the Council had developed Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans (LCWIPS) for 11 main towns which must be considered as part of the planning application process.

The Strategic Traffic Manager advised that in terms of progress, that Durham County Council had been awarded £10.75m to develop and deliver schemes such as the North Durham Active Travel Corridor (New College to Arnison Centre), Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plans, Aykley Heads Innovation District, Towns and Villages Walking and Cycling Programme, National Cycling Network Route 1 improvements, 12 new town cycling maps, ad campaigns detailing the different

active travel options available and the delivery of the Borrow and Bike scheme across the County.

With regards to other projects, opportunities and next steps, a further £13.5m had been identified and secured to develop further projects and opportunities including the Towns and Villages schemes. Targets were linked to funding and programmes had to be delivered by the December 2024 and March 2025 target dates. Ongoing elements were noted with regards to the Active Travel Corridors, intervention programmes, funding stream for cycle parking and storage and input into major schemes funding bids and planning and development.

Councillor A Surtees referred to the £3.75m for the Towns and Villages Walking and Cycling Programme and requested that details be provided on what had been delivered, the location of those schemes and clarification as to the determining factors for a scheme to be progressed. The Strategic Traffic Manager explained that he would get back to the member regarding the request for detail of the schemes delivered and the locations however in relation to the second part of the question the deciding factors in determining whether a scheme progressed were, where schemes interlinked with other developments/schemes, where there was movement, work-based travel etc. With regards to the North Durham Active Travel Corridor, they were able to link the Active Travel route to the Arnison Centre from New College Durham where there was a large concentration of students and new housing developments. He continued that in relation to Bishop Auckland this is an area of investment and development and similarly with Newton Aycliffe, there are a number of work places and therefore the movement of people, providing the opportunity for choice and other alternatives to the private motor vehicle.

The Head of Transport and Contract Services added that the Active Travel Fund was a competitive fund at national level and the Northeast as a region were able to bid for funding. Durham was able to tap into the funding source by providing a business case for various schemes that would create the biggest impact, with the best business cases being successful. He confirmed that £7.5m of funding had been awarded for schemes that met government's criteria for the allocation of funding. He explained that schemes that serve smaller communities would not be as successful in the bidding process, resulting in funding being allocated elsewhere in the Northeast.

Councillor D Nicholls referred to New Brancepeth and other areas within his division that were in close proximity but where there were no complete footpath links. In relation to one village in his division to finish off work undertaken to link up the footpaths would cost £175,000 however there was no funding within the Service for this work to be undertaken. He went on to explain how transformational this work would be for both communities allowing access to services such as pharmacies and access transport services to other parts of the region for employment. He added that currently there is ongoing improvement works on the A690 costing £35m and queried whether funding could be transferred from other areas to connect footpaths

to communities which would require small amounts of funding but would be transformative for local communities. The Strategic Traffic Manager acknowledged that it was hugely frustrating and explained how the funding streams worked with the government funding criteria applied when assessing bids and allocations of funding based on how schemes meet that criteria, with the funding body deciding which schemes would be allocated funding with the emphasis in the criteria on links to employment. He confirmed that unfortunately connecting footpaths to communities does not meet the funding stream criteria from Central Government.

Councillor D Nicholls further commented that the above mentioned stretch of road was dangerous with no footpath and highlighted that decisions had been made in advance of Members being elected. He added that strategic processes needed to be looked at to allow Members to become more pro-active and timely in being able to put forward schemes for their communities. The Head of Transport and Contract Services advised that Members requests were all logged, noting that demands were high across the whole County. Programmes were in place and prioritised to help deliver schemes, however finance was a major issue and he confirmed that the case raised by Councillor D Nicholls did not quite meet the criteria. He continued that government's current funding priorities focus on highway maintenance and that whilst this is a priority DCC does not receive the level of funding to meet the deterioration in the highway network. He highlighted that specific schemes that were important to certain areas can be delivered from Member's budgets which could be discussed with colleagues from the Traffic Management Team.

Councillor C Lines shared Councillor D Nicholls' frustration and referred to the NCN improvements and asked if he could have more detail and confirmed that he would speak to the officer outside of the meeting. He added that Active Travel and the resulting schemes are to encourage more people to walk and cycle and it was clear that the scheme needed to enhance footpath and cycle networks. He agreed that Members could use their budgets for small schemes providing a combined funding source to deliver schemes and make a difference locally. He commented that he felt that a key challenge was convincing the public that it was safe to cycle and walk in communities and asked the Active Travel's Teams view on rolling out mandatory lower speed limits across towns and villages within the County. The Strategic Traffic Manager advised that the speed limits within the county are in line with Government Policy with the Speed Management Policy providing guidance relating to putting in place appropriate speed limits. However, the setting of inappropriate speed limits for the environment would not necessarily make it safer for walkers and cyclists. He advised that various studies had been carried out and found that setting lower speed limits does not necessarily make roads safer, the actual speed would only reduce by one mile per hour and that it was about creating the environment so that drivers will reduce their speed, he continued by commenting that there will always be some drivers that would exceed the speed limits. The Head of Transport and Contract Services added that speed should be adjusted for the environment in which a person is driving. He continued that engineering measures to change the environment was something that could be looked at, however such measures

cannot be added to A and B roads. He added that an article had been released which advised that all vehicles sold after 7 July 2024 would have speed limiter technology that would not allow the speed limit to be exceeded, which was a great initiative and a lot of drivers would adhere to it, however, there was still the possibility of it being overridden should the driver chose to do so. He advised that there was an initiative to educate school children regarding the dangers of speeding and he highlighted the importance of getting the message across to children as they will in turn repeat the message to their respective parents.

Councillor Lines suggested that there was potential for legislation and commented that he felt that the balance was currently shifting in favour of cars.

Councillor B Coult commented that she was supportive of Active Travel but queried whether work was undertaken to educate cyclists and gave the example of cyclists riding three abreast on the road. She then referred to the issues with cars parking outside of schools and asked about the level of engagement with schools to encourage more pupils to walk to school and with funding, could this be encouraged more. The Strategic Traffic Manager advised that the Road Safety Team engage with all schools in the county to provide cycle and pedestrian training to educate young people at an early age. He agreed that school parking was an issue for all 280 schools across the County and unfortunately targeted enforcement was limited. Children were asked to pass the message onto parents to park further away from schools and it was hoped that the information would be retained as they get older and become parents themselves. He added that they were constantly looking at new initiatives, the latest targeting years 12 and 13 where the Police and road safety partners engage and educate young drivers. He concluded by reassuring members that the service was doing all it could and that it was a county priority.

Councillor A Batey referred to the role of NECA in relation to cross border issues and raised concerns regarding work being undertaken on the A1M causing diversions through small communities in her division. She asked for clarification as to what strategic level discussions were taking place regarding works being undertaken on major roads that would impact on the road network within County Durham. She commented on the £37.5m funding for town and villages and advised that she was desperately trying to deliver a traffic calming scheme in the Pelton area which would alleviate some of the problems with the volume of traffic caused by the diversions. She acknowledged there were staffing issues within the service team but was concerned about the lack of progress. With regards to dialogue at a regional level, the Head of Transport and Contract Services advised that he chaired the North East Traffic Managers Working Group which shared information and looked at the forward planning of schemes, however, he explained that it was difficult to plan for certain circumstances. Issues on the network would have to be diverted into towns and villages as there were no other options however this would be managed and coordinated with partner agencies to provide diversion information to the public and bus operators.

Responding to a query from the Chair regarding plans for safer cycling routes for rural areas such as Teesdale as we move into the Summer months as these areas become more popular with cyclists. The Strategic Traffic Manager advised that there was no specific funding for this area, however, they had tried to engage with groups in Barnard Castle but the proposed moves were rejected. However, work was currently being undertaken with projects being developed and the point raised by the Chair could be picked up in ongoing pieces of work.

Councillor A Surtees was concerned about the capacity in the team to be able to deliver on the influx of schemes they would be receiving from Members who were approaching the end of their term and requiring local community schemes signed off by December 2024. She advised that she would discuss the issue with the Corporate Director outside the meeting.

The Strategic Traffic Manager advised that the service team were processing and delivering what they could.

Councillor D Nicholls asked whether Members would be notified if the service were unable to deliver schemes put forward making reference to a further 30 MPH scheme identified for his local village. The Strategic Traffic Manager advised that there was a process to go through and the Service would be working through the requests in due course.

Councillor M Stead sought clarification regarding the size of the team as he recollected that the department/team was made larger. The Strategic Traffic Manager advised that there had been vacancies within the team and that they had now been filled however the team had not been made larger.

The Integrated Passenger Transport Manager then provided details on the local bus provision advising that over 90% of local bus services operated without financial support. However, the bus network, patronage and fares income used to support bus service had been negatively impacted by the pandemic. Bus passengers were around 80% of pre pandemic levels, and the bus operators had been struggling to retain local services as well as staff, as bus revenues had been reduced and fuel costs increased.

In April 2022 DfT announced that bus services in the area covered by the JTC would receive a funding allocation of £163m as part of the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). This would allow NECA and the constituent authorities to invest in the bus network between 2022 and 2025. The BSIP funding was to be made-up of £73m capital and £89m revenue. The new funding would be used to create new services, increase the frequencies, extend operating hours and reduce daily fees. Fares remain at a reasonable price with a daily cap of £4 for County Durham residents, under 21 fares, kids for free and care experience travel pass.

It was reported that there were currently 114 local bus contracts managed by Durham County Council at a gross cost before fares income of £11m and a net cost of £7.8m. In total these carry 3m passengers per year, 17% of all bus passenger journeys per year within County Durham. The contracts provided whole services offering unique links, supplementing the core of commercial services, Park and Ride, demand responsive services, Cathedral Bus tourism services and registered school services.

The Bus Service Improvement Plan funding covers working with operators to enhance services and in demand responsive transport with the aim for them to be financial stable once the funding ends. Funding also covers the customer experience, encouraging more people to use bus services and capital works.

The national bus network (outside London) was deregulated in the 1980s. NECA's commitment was for the regional bus network to be taken back under public control. In October 2014 there was a proposal for a Quality Contract Scheme in the Tyne and Wear area which did not progress and the Bus Back Better policy was published in March 2021 which included a requirement to establish or process franchising or an Enhanced Partnership and publish a Bus Service Improvement Plan. Consideration was given to what NECA may consider in the event of taking control of buses, as there were a number of different ways this could happen, such as how Manchester has approached this by taking the lead in franchising; or Jersey's approach by the operator retaining fares or the approach taken by Nottingham and Lothian where they operate their own buses as a company, which was successful. The Mayor and her Cabinet would look at the options, funding available, priorities regarding coverage, growing passenger numbers or somewhere in the middle. The Integrated Passenger Transport Manager advised there was a lot to be considered and that the size of the region and it's differing geography were important.

Councillor C Lines raised concerns regarding the reduced bus services in his local area which were representative of issues throughout the County. He acknowledged the hard work that the team were doing to find ways to improve service provision in the current challenging situation, both through what Durham County Council do directly, and in lobbying and working with other regional stakeholders and bus companies. He welcomed the introduction of the Link2Work extension to the on-demand offer, however, recognised that it was a very distinct and limited service that did not re-connect the vast majority of residents to communities they used to be able to access easily and often on buses.

Referring to discussions with residents who were unable or no longer wanted to drive, he emphasised how much they relied on the previous bus service to get to places for a variety of reasons as well as reference being made in these discussions to the limited services for younger people attending college or meeting up with friends. During exam season and because of exam timings, parents were providing

transport, resulting in more traffic, more pollution, and more challenges for residents in managing their time.

He added that the direct service from Sedgefield to Darlington had been withdrawn and Arriva were currently consulting on plans to remove the Teesside Park bus stop which would affect a small number of people in the grand scheme of things, but the losses are nevertheless harmful and contrary to any ambition to sustain connectivity to communities. He referred to the impact on mental health that isolation caused and advised that the residents he had spoken to were visibly distressed about the current state of play and very worried about the future status of bus services.

He continued that with regards to confidence in bus services, he added that this was at an all-time low and raised the following points:-

- The timescale for real and substantial action through the Bus Service Improvement Plan was a real concern. By the time improvements were made, there would need to be an enormous amount of work done to regain trust and patronage of bus services which would put a strain on the viability of whatever services existed in the future. During the recent Mayoral election, he wrote to all candidates to ask for their thoughts on the issue and received a response from Kim McGuinness, who outlined her intentions, which she subsequently reiterated after she became Mayor. It was clear that acting on a commitment to bring bus services back into public ownership would not be a quick process, potentially leaving communities disconnected for a long period of time.
- Referring to the Sedgefield area, he asked whether any initiatives could be implemented or led by Durham County Council, to reinstate some connections and suggested that the on-demand Link2 service could be enhanced to help. The maximum journey distance was five miles, which was limited and asked if it could be extended from Fishburn via Sedgefield to Newton Aycliffe. Traditionally, residents in those communities enjoyed a strong connection and travelled for education, work and leisure on a regular basis. There were services to Darlington from Newton Aycliffe, noting that changing buses was not ideal, but would be a much better situation than residents have now.
- The condition of bus stops were far from ideal, and abysmal in some cases. People should not be expected to wait in shelters that did not provide shelter due to damage that had not been addressed. To encourage residents to use current and future bus services bus travel needed to be a more appealing prospect, both in the short term and longer term.

The Integrated Passenger Transport Manager agreed that to bring bus services back into public ownership would be a long process and explained that if the chosen option was later discovered not to be the right path, it would be almost impossible to

step back from that process and commented that bus operators would leave the area, therefore it was necessary for the required due diligence to be carried out.

With regards to connections, she advised that County Durham continued to work on issues, noting that services had not been removed entirely and that certain aspects had been replaced elsewhere. She highlighted the difficulties in putting solutions in place that would not then disrupt other parts of the County and was keen for timetabled routed services to be back in operation. She acknowledged that a definitive response was not given, however she hoped that reassurance was provided.

Referring to bus service appeal and waiting areas, she agreed that enhancements were required and commented that the reliability of bus services were improving, however recognised that further work was required with bus operators to push for further improvements. In relation to the safety and accessibility of bus shelters she commented that BSIP funding could be used however it could not be used for new bus shelters. She advised that if Members were aware of shelters that had safety or accessibility issues, they should contact the team for them to be put forward as part of the bus service improvement plan works. She concluded by requesting that Councillor Lines sends the detail of his concerns regarding bus shelters in his locality through to her.

Councillor D Nicholls commented that bus services were the number one concern of residents that he represented and highlighted that the service timetable was insufficient before the pandemic and that currently reliability was at an all-time low. He noted the poor conditions of some of the buses that were currently in service and found it unacceptable that residents were paying for services that were non-existent. He then asked what could be done about bus services not keeping to timetables or not arriving at all and asked whether contracts could be withdrawn to address the issue of buses not turning up, highlighting that residents are losing employment as a result of not turning up at work on time. He concluded by asking what DCC can do now to improve provision.

The Integrated Passenger Transport Manager explained how the deregulation environment worked noting that any operator that was correctly licenced could operate services when and where they chose to operate. She confirmed that contracts cannot be removed, services were deregulated and therefore this was not an option. The Councils role was to financially support services that were not commercially viable. She added that they worked in partnership with operators and encouraged changes to networks, however they had no control on when and where they operated or the fares they charged. With regards to unreliability, she understood frustrations and the impact on mental health, job security and social care. She asked that details of services that were not operating correctly be provided to the Passenger Transport Team so they could look at patterns and work with bus operators on possible solutions.

Councillor M Stead agreed with Councillor D Nicholls comments regarding the condition of some buses. He commented that minimum wage salaries was a contributing factor towards the shortage of bus drivers and queried whether there was anything that could be done to increase the number of drivers, making the job more attractive. The Integrated Passenger Transport Manager advised that there were resource issues with drivers and engineers and the real issue was retention as there was a high turnover of drivers nationally. She accepted that salaries may be a factor and suggested there may be other contributing factors such as working hours. Durham County Council were very limited in what they could do, however the Team were active in breaking down barriers and encouraged operators to work together with regards to recruitment.

The Transport and Infrastructure Manager then provided an overview of current and future major transport infrastructure projects. In 2023/24, Durham County Council had completed the delivery of the new Durham bus station, junction improvements in Durham City and West Rainton as well as new active mode improvements between Newton Hall and Rivergreen. In addition, the Authority had delivered over £70m worth of transport projects around the County including new active mode routes at Newton Aycliffe and capacity improvements in Bishop Auckland. In 2024/2025, there was the potential for Durham County Council to hold a public consultation on the Toft Hill Bypass, construction of the junction at Jade Enterprise Zone and junction improvements on the A19 corridor at the Seaton Lane was under construction, Stockton and Darlington active mode and locomotion car park was near completion and the surface level car park was under construction at Bishop Auckland Bus Station.

With regards to Transport Infrastructure future funding, the Bus Service Improvement Plan to be contracted by March 2025 included bus lanes, bus priority, pop up park and rides, bus shelter improvements and bus station improvements at Consett, Stanley and Peterlee. The Local Transport fund had been announced in February 2024 and Durham received £72m for Transport projects to be delivered between April 2025 and March 2027. The Safer Roads Fund would deliver road safety improvements on the A690 between Crook and Nevilles Cross with particular emphasis on pedestrian and cyclist safety. The Transforming Cities Fund would deliver active mode improvements around Durham City Centre, linking residential, education, employment and tourism locations with improved active travel infrastructure at South Bailey, Sidegate, Whinney Hill, Stockton Road, Quarryheads Lane, Freemans Place and Framwellgate Waterside.

Members were informed that County Durham were invited to bid for funding to restore railways and draft strategic business cases had been provided for a new unmanned station at Ferryhill, Consett to Newcastle feasibility study and a passenger service on private railways connecting the Bishop Auckland line to Weardale.

Work was continuing to lobby government regarding the reinstatement of the Leamside line which would enable extra passenger and freight services as an alternative to the East Coast Main Line (ECML).

Responding to a query from Councillor A Surtees regarding lobbying for more carriages on the East Coast main line, the Head of Transport and Contract Services advised that work was ongoing, noting the introduction of a further service linked to the Horden scheme and confirmed that Horden Railway had 'smashed' its projected passenger targets. He continued by commenting that it was hoped that Sedgefield could link with Ferryhill using Sedgefield Station. He added that Durham does not have any influence with regards to rail lines, however they continued to lobby and apply pressure on rail operators highlighting fundamental changes to Durham and Northumberland rail networks and successfully pushing back proposals to reduce the frequency of services.

Councillor B Coult commented on the work carried out on the A690 which had made a huge improvement and thanked the Team for their hard work.

The Senior Electric Vehicle Project Officer provided an overview of various projects that had been delivered noting that Durham had been successful in being awarded significant funding to deliver the Local Electric Vehicle Infrastructure project. The Council had installed over 200 new charging points and that the success of this project had led to further significant funding being awarded. This funding would support the location of new charging points at another 250 sites across the County with a further 16 points to be installed at rural locations. Another funding submission will be made later this year under LEVI for an additional £3m to install 200 charging points on housing association land in the coming years. Members were also informed that once surveys were complete there are plans to install slow and rapid charge points for private and fleet charging at strategic fleet sites.

Responding to queries from Mrs R Morris regarding difficulties supplying certain areas in the County and whether working with external parties effected installation targets, the Senior Electric Vehicle Project Officer advised that installations were currently restricted to DCC owned land and dedicated parking areas and confirmed that the identification of suitable land in rural areas is being looked at. It was noted that they were experiencing issues with the Northern Power Grid supply in rural areas with increased costs to upgrade the network, he added that a number of installations were delayed by 4 – 10 weeks and advised that regular meetings take place with NPG to overcome obstacles with regards to staff retention and substantial price increases. The Head of Transport and Contract Services added that working with utility services was difficult and had caused a lot of problems across all the different projects throughout the service and relationships and working in partnership was an area that required improving.

With regards to a query from Councillor C Lines regarding network maps and the potential use of lampposts as a possible solution for residents who have no other

parking/charging options, the Senior Electric Vehicle Project Officer advised that this was an area of discussion, however this would create problems as the majority of lampposts were house side rather than kerbside and modifications would add to the street furniture and narrow footpaths. It was noted that other options were still being explored. He added that network maps were available and he would circulate this information to Members, that would show both DCC and private network charging points and added that the information was available on the Climate County Durham website.

Councillor B Coult commented that delays with installation were frustrating for residents. She referred to the funding submission that would be made later in the year to install charging points on housing association land and asked whether there was a timetable for delivery. Senior Electric Vehicle Project Officer advised that between now and December 2024, work would be undertaken by Corporate Land and Property and the Legal Team to provide lease agreements and delivery would be expected to commence at the beginning of the 2025 once a charge point operator had been appointed.

The Head of Transport and Contract Services summed up by highlighting that a lot of good work had been carried out during the last 12 months and the project programme for 2025/26 would be just as big providing many challenges and hopefully just as rewarding. The Team would continue to be part of shaping the Combined Authority. He acknowledged that not everything was perfect and there were some areas that needed to be looked at with regards to resources and more focus on engagement. He thanked all the Officers who took part in the presentation and Officers who were involved in the development of the report and presentation considered by members.

Resolved:

That the information contained in the report and presentation be noted.