

West Lothian Council will rely on diesel and petrol fleet for best value over next five year

West Lothian Council has said it cannot afford to replace any of its existing vehicle fleet with electric vehicles over the next five years.

Officials said a £34 million replacement scheme would instead look to buy “the most efficient diesel or petrol equivalent”, and admitted the cost of electric vehicles and the investment needed in charging infrastructure was unaffordable.

West Lothian is one of many Scottish council to have declared a climate, and the decision was branded ‘deplorable’.

Only 10% of the council fleet is currently electric, a meeting of the Environment and Sustainability Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel heard.

Transport officer Douglas West outlined the council’s plans to slim down the current fleet of 966 vehicles to 850 by 2027/28. The replacement programme will cost £34m.

A report to the PDSP said: “We have worked extensively with services to develop a Vehicle Replacement Programme involving 850 vehicles over five years from 2024/25. This programme has been created in conjunction with services – discussing vehicle

types, utilisation, and opportunities for vehicle sharing.

"The programme aims to deliver an overall reduced fleet size made up of the most efficient and operationally effective vehicles that can be delivered within budget."

Pippa Plevin representing the Joint Forum of Community Councils asked: "You mentioned that you want to replace in a sustainable way, but it would be more useful if you gave some details of how that can be achieved. How many EVs for instance?"

Mr West said: "We are always considering alternative fuel vehicles, but we also have to consider budgetary availability and in this case we felt, with the five-year replacement programme that we have planned, the best use of that budget would be to replace with the most efficient diesel or petrol equivalent at this stage.

"The budget constraints are not limited to the purchase of the vehicle. We have to consider the installation of electric charging infrastructure which is a massive outlay as well.

"The vehicles that we are bringing on are now utilising the most up to date engine technology and the overall reduction of vehicles will also contribute to lowering our carbon output."

Ms Plevin said: "So you have no plans to replace them with EVs. That goes against other parts of the council that are trying to move to net zero. I think it's pretty deplorable"

Mr West replied: "At this stage there are no plans to replace with EV. However, we are always exploring alternative fuelled vehicles to see if they could become a realistic option with the budget constraints that we have."

Mr West said that hydrogen fuelled vehicles cost three to four times what diesel fuelled vehicles do. The electric vehicles which council currently has were funded through grant streams

which are no longer available to support the difference between an electric vehicle and a petrol or diesel equivalent.

Chair of the panel Councillor Tom Conn said the officer's comments "puts my point of view into perspective."

He added: "It's okay having national targets but if the financial resources are not given to local authorities, then we are not going to meet those national targets. The Scottish Government isn't even meeting its own targets."

"We can only move forward with the resources that we actually have."

The projection is that within five years the council will operate 87 large commercial vehicles, over 3,500 kg, including refuse lorries, and lorries, 583 small commercial vehicles under 3,500kg, in vans, flat-beds and tippers and 36 buses and minibuses. All vehicles are leased but maintained by mechanics employed by the council.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter