



Cabinet – 7 February 2013

7. Scrutiny Report: Street Lighting

Response of the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Transport

I would like at the outset to thank Cllr Dr Pollock and his colleagues of the Scrutiny Task Group for a considered and well researched report. I believe it adds to the body of knowledge on street lighting and "shines a light" on the complexities of the issues faced by the County Council.

The energy costs for the County Council's street lighting stock have increased over the last few years as a result of above inflation increases in energy costs. This upward trend is projected to continue, particularly given the current financial climate. This poses a real challenge for the County Council.

As the report outlines, street lighting also accounts for 21% of the County Council's current CO2 emissions and the Council, as part of the Carbon Management Plan, is committed to reducing this figure.

As a highway authority, the County Council has a power, not a duty under the Highways Act 1980, to provide and maintain road lighting. Where it is provided, it must be provided to the standard set in the County Council street lighting policy. In exercising its powers in respect of the extent, operation and maintenance of lighting, a highway authority should act reasonably. Street lighting is provided for the safe movement of pedestrians and vehicles using the highway after the hours of darkness. Lighting does though provide a secondary community benefit in its potential to assist in reducing crime and the fear of crime

In exercising its powers, a highway authority has a duty under Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998 to exercise its functions with due regard to their effect on crime and disorder in its area.

Public opinion appears, is split on the issue. Some see the benefits in reducing the amount of street lighting and associated financial savings. For others, lighting offers a sense of security and is greatly valued. It is clear to me that the issue requires a considered plan in taking forward changes to the current situation. The Scrutiny Task Group clearly acknowledges this point.

The report also recognises some of the potential risks existing when reducing street lighting:

- Tariff issues – changes by energy suppliers to the tariffs charged to the County Council as a result of changes in the energy profile, i.e. a reduction in overnight "cheaper" electricity
- Capital costs and reliability associated with the implementation of new technologies. However both the cost and reliability is expected to improve significantly in the near future

- Potential public response to significant turning off of street lights associated with perceptions of crime and disorder that may result
- Potential legal liabilities associated with a potential increase in accidents on the highway as a result of reduced street lighting.

All of these issues are significant.

Scrutiny Task Group Detailed Conclusions and Recommendations

1. *The scrutiny has found that energy tariffs would increase if the authority uses less base load electricity, but the increase should not outweigh the savings, so that some reductions in lighting will be financially worthwhile.*

This point is agreed and a plan of action should include the potential impact of changes to the current energy tariffs and loadings.

2. *Current policy is to light all night across the County, but complete switch off and disconnection is not sensible, due to eventual removal costs. However, savings can be made by switching off lights for part of the night, particularly given the on-going increase in energy prices and the need to reduce carbon emissions. The payback period for switching off half of the 30,000 street lights in residential areas between midnight and 6.00am is estimated to be less than 2 years*
3. *However, there is no blanket solution. There are many circumstances that need to be taken into account and appropriate levels of lighting need to be considered on a street by street basis.*
4. *Feedback needs to be sought from the local community and any switch off needs to be acceptable. We therefore welcome the switch off trials that are planned over the winter and look forward to seeing the outcomes.*

Conclusions 2, 3 and 4 go to the heart of the dilemma about public acceptability. The County Council is currently conducting a pilot project in Droitwich to determine both the practicalities of delivery and customer views, on a part-night switch off project. This pilot project, when completed in May, will be reviewed and form the basis of any next steps.

5. *Whilst the views of residents are important, they are unlikely to be unanimous, so the Council will need to take the final decision.*

Experience elsewhere, particularly in Gloucestershire as highlighted by the Scrutiny Task Group, demonstrates the value of this approach.

6. *We therefore recommend that Cabinet agrees a new policy on its approach to street lighting. This should include:*
 - *Clear criteria (similar to Gloucestershire) on which street lights should be kept on – agreed in consultation with residents*
 - *A commitment to consult with local communities on whether and what times lights should be switched off. This is likely to need some identified, dedicated officer support.*

For the reasons outlined above, I concur with this assessment.

7. *On traffic routes, the payback period for dimming 250w high pressure sodium lamps is now less than 5 years). We recommend investing approximately £150,000 capital to dim 250w high pressure sodium lamps from 7.30pm, achieving annual savings of approximately £34,000.*

In recent years the County Council has dimmed over 2000 high wattage lighting points and converted 6000 columns. This programme will continue subject to available capital investment.

8. *Low pressure sodium street lights are gradually being converted to dimmable, energy efficient white light (Cosmo Polis) where end of life replacement is needed (not just the bulb) at a rate of 200 lights p.a. In future, the most energy efficient light is likely to be LED and we recommend that the cost and savings of dimming these are calculated to see if dimming is worthwhile.*

In recent years the County Council has converted over 6000 lighting points to White Light. This programme will continue subject to available capital investment.

9. *LED lights may well be considered the best option in future, but it would be unwise to invest in these now, at a time of rapid technological advance and falling prices. However, we recommend that a business case for LED is developed using current figures.*

The business case for LED technology is changing rapidly and the County Council will continue to review the case for investment.

10. *Similarly, there is the risk that investing extensively in Cosmo Polis white lights now would prevent the Council taking advantage of possibly cheaper and more efficient lighting technology in future. At current replacement rates it would take around 100 years to convert all the existing residential street lights to energy saving lights. However, replacing large numbers of fully functioning lights with white lights or LED is not cost effective whilst payback periods are over 5 years.*

This is agreed but the County Council will continue to keep the business case under review.

11. *A Central Management System would be too expensive and should only be considered on large new estates.*

This is again accepted as a sensible way forward.

Mr J H Smith
January 2013