Cheshire West and Chester Council - Electric Vehicle Enquiry Response

1. Why you are – or are not – interested in promoting electric vehicles

1.1 Cheshire West and Chester Council (the Council) is committed to improving air quality across the borough in order improve the health of its residents by tackling the role of vehicles and transport, which are major contributors of carbon dioxide (CO_2), nitrogen oxides (NOx) and particulate matter (PM) emissions.

1.2 Earlier this year, the Council commissioned a feasibility study to explore the opportunity of providing a network of public and other charging points for electric vehicles across the borough as this is considered critical to delivering improved air quality. The study covers the following areas:

- Council fleet and depots
  - Workplace charging - Council staff access
  - Charging in Council car parks - public access
  - Taxi charging infrastructure
  - On-street charging points, initially as a pilot around Chester city

Moving forward, the Council is keen to install an initial public network of EV chargers towards the end of 2018 to support the transition to electric vehicles aimed at increasing air quality.

2. Details of any obstacles you have faced in developing associated infrastructure

2.1 We have experienced the following principal challenges:

Competitive application/bidding process: the bidding process is competitive and so a lot of time and resource can be spent on developing and submitting bids that are ultimately not successful; a non-competitive, more supportive process would really assist us to focus on planning and delivery/implementation. The competitive nature of various rounds of grant funding has resulted in 'hotspots' of charging infrastructure/ultra-low emission buses in certain parts of the country and 'EV deserts' in others. A more supportive, equitable approach to funding provision across the country would help to fill in those gaps.

Feedback on applications: the reasons given in those cases where we have not been successful have not helped us to understand how we can improve future bids. In some cases they have actually appeared to contradict the facts e.g. inaccurate statements about comparative air quality between our area and a successful bidder

Expertise: working in collaboration with a private sector partner, we have developed *some* technical expertise on EV within the Council as a consequence of preparing bids and overseeing the feasibility study referred to above, but this has taken time and we are aware that other local authorities have had the same experience and have been working through similar challenges. It would be very helpful if central government could provide technical support to local authorities and facilitate information sharing. As this is a fast evolving market that is not 'core business' for a local authority, we need mechanisms to be able to update knowledge and knowhow in order to navigate the market effectively.

Budgetary pressures: although central government has made capital funding available, the ongoing revenue costs, for which there is no support, are an issue. This means that, for many local authorities, the only viable option for ongoing contract management of EV infrastructure is by means of a sub-contracting arrangement with a private sector provider.

Fast evolving market: it is really difficult for local authorities to plan for 15-20 years in a fast evolving market with rapid technology changes, leading to concerns that Councils may invest in technology that soon becomes obsolete. This concern also affects private sector providers, particularly in respect of investment in expensive rapid charge points that risk becoming redundant once the EV market develops and home, work and destination charging become the norm.

Grid connections: With EV market share growing, concerns have been raised about the readiness of the local grid and the enhancement costs that may be required. A number of sites have been removed from our feasibility study by our prospective private sector provider because there is simply no suitable power source close by. In addition, parts of the borough are already at 'grid capacity' and therefore will need major upgrades. As technology develops, such as vehicle-to-grid technology and battery storage, it is essential that we continue to work with our local DNO (SP Energy Networks) to ensure charge points installed today are 'smart' enough to protect the grid from any detrimental impact of mass EV adoption in the future.

3. What the Government could do to better support you in developing the electric vehicle agenda.

In addition to addressing the challenges outlined above, the following would assist:

Rapid Charge Network: greater clarity and coordination nationally is important to assist in developing the electric vehicle agenda. For example, a lack of rapid charging opportunities while on the move presents a significant barrier to the uptake of EVs, whereas drivers of conventional vehicles have the reassurance of being able to pull into a petrol station when required and, generally, to fill up without hindrance. EV drivers should be able to enjoy that level of convenience without having to hunt out a rapid charger which, on arrival, may not be operational /in use by other EVs/blocked by ICE vehicles. We are aware of the Vehicle Technology and Aviation Bill whereby motorway services and large fuel retailers could be required to provide electric charge points but it is uncertain and when and where any installations will be undertaken. Such uncertainty does not this Council in planning to support the development of a rapid network across our borough.

Tax incentives: there is a need for clear guidelines on how/when Benefit in Kind rules apply (or don't apply) for workplace charging, and van benefit charge discounts should be maintained beyond 2022 to stimulate uptake

Grant review: The plug-in grant should include those least able to afford a premium. Even with the plug-in vehicle grant, the purchase price of new EVs is significant (and much higher than an equivalent ICE model). Consideration should be given to offering grant-aided support to consumers wishing to purchase second-hand EVs.

Financial incentives: the introduction of an interest free loan scheme to support the purchase of low and ultra-low emission vehicles with repayment terms of up to 6 years for the private EV owner would be beneficial; in addition, we would encourage central government to consider interest free loans of up to £100,000 for Hackney cab owners and operators to replace existing cabs that are more than 8 years old with electric vehicles

Publicity: There is currently very little publicly available consumer advice on charging – for example, whether to use a dedicated charge point, what specification charge point and cable to use, whether to join a public charging network and the factors to take into account when choosing between offers. In our role as scheme operator for government, we receive frequent anecdotal evidence of consumer confusion and of a lack of independent and impartial advice on this key topic. Provision of clear information on the benefits and whole-life costs of operating an EV may persuade more people to adopt.