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Mrs Cathie White  
Clerk to the Committee for Infrastructure  
Room 427  
Parliament Buildings  
BELFAST  
BT4 3XX

15 April 2021

Dear Cathie,

I am writing in response to the request from the chairperson of the Committee for Infrastructure dated 25 March 2021.

In her letter, Ms Michelle McIlveen asks a series of questions to illicit the views of the Department of Justice on Government's plans to prohibit the sale of new petrol and diesel cars from 2030 and plug-in hybrids from 2035.

The Department's fleet of vehicles substantially sits with NI Prison Service (NIPS) and it currently has a fleet of 98 vehicles (35 Specialist Custodial Vehicles together with a number of passenger cars, vans and minibuses primarily used to transport low risk prisoners to working out opportunities, attending funerals, hospitals and the like).

Some of these vehicles travel the length and breadth of the country while some carry out regular short journeys in and around each of the prison establishments. During the past 24 months NIPS has replaced over 80% of its road going fleet. This means that currently over 92% of the NIPS fleet is either Euro 6 Diesel, Hybrid or full Electric Vehicles (EV).

To be helpful, we put forward our submission for consideration by the Committee in the format of the questions as they were asked.

### **1. What are the main challenges to the uptake of ULEV?**

At present, the main challenge of moving the entire fleet to ULEV is around the distances that can be travelled on a single charge during the course of a working day. This is particularly limiting for the larger vehicles amongst the fleet (typically the

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Specialist Prison Court Vehicles), as manufacturers are unable to provide ULEV with sufficient range to allow them to be considered as viable options. At present NIPS currently deploys EV vehicles for local trips and for use within the prison complexes.

The primary challenge we would face if we were to increase the number of EV vehicles is the range that manufacturers are able to offer. We are currently looking into full EV custodial vehicle options but, unfortunately, none of the commercial manufacturers can provide a vehicle with a range greater than 80 miles. This, coupled with the added pressures of auxiliary heating, lighting and digital information systems, is not enough to provide secure transfers to even local courts.

For example, based on current market offerings, a return trip between Maghaberry and Magilligan would require the driver of our larger commercial vehicles to recharge en route. These vehicles are normally transporting prisoners and in the interests of driver security, this isn't always possible.

The purchase of full EV custodial (court) vehicles is something that NIPS continues to actively review. We are in ongoing discussions with the main manufacturers and commercial EV conversion companies. We are endeavouring to find solutions to the issues which we face and remain hopeful that progress can be made in the coming years to improve vehicle range and provide viable emergency backup power within those vehicles to allow them to be considered a viable option.

However, as these vehicles are transporting prisoners in a secure environment, recharging during the working day at public charging points isn't possible. An approach has been made to NI Courts about the possibility of installing charging points for Court vehicles at Laganside Court but it is recognised that, due to the present lack of physical parking opportunities for court vehicles at court premises, there may be limitations to re-charging at other Court buildings.

### **2. What are the main benefits to the uptake of ULEV?**

The primary benefit will be the reduction in carbon emissions and the consequential reduction on fuel costs. Based on current vehicle offerings this can be readily achieved for the majority of our non-custodial vehicles which are often used on short trips.

The regular use of short duration trips does not lend itself to modern diesel engines, so ULEV would be a positive move for NIPS non-custodial vehicle fleet. In addition, we have also found that drivers adopt a more responsible driving style when in the EV or Hybrid vehicles, as they become range conscious and consequently adopt a more efficient driving manner.

### **3. What support to assist a move to ULEV would you like to see from the NI Executive?**

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We have been able to avail of the government grant aids for both the vehicles and charging points, so continued financial support would be welcomed. The active adoption of charging points for EV vehicles in other government establishments would be beneficial, for example, charging points in local police stations for custodial vehicles and charging points in other government premises for crown vehicles to avail of should they be required.

**4. Do you believe there should be official targets for your sector and have you any views on the potential timescale this could take?**

Targets should be set out but these should be specific, realistic and relevant to each sector. When establishing targets, consideration should be given to a range of factors such as the category of vehicle, the roles that each vehicle carries out and if they are governed by time and security.

**5. Have you begun to plan for decarbonising your fleet and if so could you provide some detail on this?**

NIPS has already commenced a plan to decarbonise its fleet. At present we have 6 ULEV vehicles. There are currently 3 EV vehicles for internal use within each of the prison complexes, 2 EV 7 seat MPVs for two of our establishments and a Hybrid vehicle for use by staff in Headquarters.

During the past 24 months NIPS has renewed almost its entire fleet and, before each of these vehicles were procured, the possibilities of alternative power sources were explored. We continue to looking into full EV custodial vehicle options but unfortunately at present none of the commercial manufacturers can provide a vehicle with a range further than 80 miles. This coupled with the added pressures of auxiliary heating, lighting and digital information systems, is not enough to provide secure transfers to even local courts.

NIPS has also explored the possibilities of using EV conversion companies who will convert a standard commercial vehicle into a full EV or Hybrid vehicle. Again, they cannot supply a system that has the range required but are very confident that a solution can be found in the near future.

Another avenue that NIPS are investigating, is alternative power sources for the auxiliary fixtures in the custodial vehicles. This would include solar panels on the roof of the vehicles to power the heating, lighting and information systems. We are also investigating weight reduction of the cellular bodies. Currently, the only solution to increase range is to add more batteries which then puts the vehicles over the legal weight so a reduction in body weight is necessary. This has to be achieved without compromising safety or security.

**FROM THE OFFICE OF THE JUSTICE MINISTER**

NIPS are committed to decarbonising their fleet and it is something that is being continually investigated and developed. Currently, the only limitation to the plans to reduce our carbon output is the lack of suitable vehicles on the market and the less than adequate range that battery manufacturers can offer.

**6. Have you estimated the cost of decarbonising your fleet?**

At this present moment in time, a significant proportion of the commercial vehicle manufacturers are unable to offer vehicles with suitable ranges in ULEV form. New offerings will need to come to market which makes it difficult to forecast with any certainty. However, taking into account the present costs of the non-custodial vehicles and having obtained advice from manufacturers, it is believed that that the cost of decarbonising all the fleet will be between £6- £7 Million.

I trust you find this helpful.



**CLAIRE MCCORMICK  
DALO**