

POLICY & MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE – 30 OCTOBER 2025

AMENDMENT TO AGENDA ITEM 9: PURCHASE OF SECOND ABTE TRANSPORTER VEHICLE – FACILITIES OPERATIONS

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Purpose of Report

To update Members on the technical and operational issues experienced with the Council's existing ABTe (VW Transporter) electric vehicle, to withdraw the previous recommendation to purchase a second ABTe Transporter, and to seek authority for further limited expenditure to explore repair options for the existing vehicle while ensuring service delivery continuity.

Background

Agenda Item 9 in the Policy & Management Committee papers issued on 24 October 2025 set out a proposal for the purchase of a second-hand ABTe (VW Transporter) electric vehicle for Facilities & Grounds Operations. The purpose of that proposal was to provide operational resilience and mitigate the risk of service disruption caused by mechanical issues with the existing vehicle.

Following further detailed investigation into the drivetrain fault affecting the Council's existing ABTe, it has become clear that this particular model presents significant maintenance and diagnostic challenges that call into question the practicality of acquiring another of the same type.

The vehicle was jointly developed by Volkswagen (VW) and ABT, a German motorsport engineering firm. This joint manufacturing arrangement means the vehicle is effectively *half VW, half ABT*, with each manufacturer responsible for different subsystems. Consequently:

- standard VW diagnostic tools and service databases cannot access or identify ABT components; even VW technicians have requested that GTC physically provide part numbers from the vehicle before confirming availability or compatibility;
- ABT technical data relating to their components is limited or non-existent, leaving the vehicle effectively “off-grid” in maintenance terms; and
- as a result, any repair attempt must proceed on a best-efforts basis without manufacturer support.

This level of technical opacity is unusual for a commercial fleet vehicle and creates unacceptable uncertainty around repairability, parts supply and long-term operational reliability.

Technical Position

Current diagnostic work indicates a steering angle sensor fault within the VW systems. This component provides input data to multiple subsystems, including the ABS, and may be preventing the vehicle from entering “Ready” (operational) mode.

There is no evidence that the ABT-modified systems are at fault, although it remains unclear whether the steering sensor fault is a genuine hardware issue or an artefact of the hybrid control architecture.

Further diagnostic work requires recovery of the vehicle to a specialist workshop with access to VW software and diagnostic tools and to extract the part number from the steering rack (which houses the sensor).

The vehicle's estimated value is approximately £10,000+VAT, with around £400 + VAT already spent on diagnosis. Estimated recovery costs are £170+VAT. Should the steering rack require replacement, parts and labour are expected to total approximately £3,100+VAT.

Given these uncertainties, there is a clear risk that the vehicle could become a disproportionate drain on resources without a guaranteed repair outcome.

Revised Proposal

In view of these findings, Officers no longer recommend the purchase of a second ABTe vehicle. Instead, the following actions are proposed:

1. continue diagnostic and repair efforts for the existing ABTe (VW Transporter) up to a maximum total expenditure of £4,500 (inclusive of diagnostic, recovery, parts, and labour);
2. utilise the tractor as a towing vehicle for essential grounds and maintenance operations while the ABTe is under repair or assessment;
3. authorise Officers to identify and acquire a suitable second electric vehicle (EV) that provides greater flexibility for the Facilities Team — prioritising reliability, operational versatility, and ease of maintenance; and
4. ensure that all expenditure remains within the existing 2025/26 Facilities budgets under Cost Centre 301 (Vehicle Costs – 4205; Equipment – 4301).

Financial Implications

All proposed actions can be accommodated within the existing approved budgets for the 2025/26 financial year. No reserves or supplementary funding are required.

Operational Implications

Using the tractor as a towing vehicle will maintain essential service capability and avoid hire or outsourcing costs. The acquisition of a new, more supportable EV will improve fleet flexibility and resilience while supporting GTC's environmental objectives.

Recommendation

Members are asked to:

1. withdraw the previous recommendation for the purchase of a second ABTe (VW Transporter) vehicle;
2. approve continued exploration and repair of the existing ABTe up to a maximum expenditure of £4,500; and
3. authorise Officers to identify and procure a suitable alternative second electric vehicle, with all costs contained within Cost Centre 301 – Vehicle Costs (4205) and Equipment (4301). Vehicle purchase and on road costs not to exceed £15,000.

NEW PROJECT/INITIATIVE ASSESSMENT FORM

Proposal Name/Title	Fleet Operations: Electric Vehicle and Towing Capability (Revised Proposal)
Aim/Objective	<p>To maintain and strengthen operational resilience within the Council's Facilities & Grounds Team by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> continuing repair and diagnostic work on the existing ABTe (VW Transporter) up to a capped cost of £4,500; utilising the Council's tractor as a interim towing vehicle for grounds maintenance and equipment movements; and acquiring a suitable second electric vehicle (EV) that provides reliable, flexible operational capacity for staff to deliver services efficiently. <p>This approach withdraws the previous proposal to purchase a second ABTe vehicle due to significant manufacturer support and maintenance issues and replaces it with a more sustainable and cost-controlled solution.</p> <p>However, it maintains the objective to enable a reduction in mileage and car user payments by allowing officers to use a GTC fleet vehicle instead of personal cars.</p>
Corporate Plan Reference	<p>Part 1, Section 4 – Expansion of in-house operational capability</p> <p>Part 2, Section 2 – Management and maintenance of expanding estate</p> <p>Part 2, Section 3 – Build operational capacity to support Community Asset Transfer</p>
Recommendation(s)	<p>Members are asked to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> withdraw the previous recommendation to purchase a second ABTe (VW Transporter); authorise continued diagnostic and repair work on the existing ABTe up to a maximum of £4,500 (inclusive of VAT); and authorise the procurement of a suitable second electric vehicle (EV) to support operational flexibility, with all costs met from Cost Centre 301 – Vehicle Costs (4205) and Equipment (4301). Vehicle purchase and on road costs not to exceed £15,000.
Proposal	
<p>Godalming Town Council currently operates a single ABTe Transporter which is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The only vehicle in the fleet with towing capability for the 1,000L water bowser and ride-on mower trailer. <p>Recent unexpected downtime with the ABTe due to a drive train failure resulted in a significant loss of major operational capability, demonstrating a serious single point of failure.</p> <p>Although the repair options for the existing vehicle are still being explored, continued reliance on a single heavy-capacity vehicle is operationally unsound, especially with:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The expansion of GTC land and buildings under the Community Asset Transfer programme Increased workload across open spaces and community facilities 	

Following extensive investigation into the drivetrain failure of the existing ABTe, it has been confirmed that the vehicle's unique joint manufacture between Volkswagen and ABT renders it effectively unsupported in standard diagnostic and repair systems.

Key issues identified include:

- VW's diagnostic tools are unable to identify or interrogate ABT-modified systems.
- ABT technical data is limited or non-existent, leaving the vehicle effectively "off-grid" for servicing.
- Replacement parts cannot be confirmed without manual identification and verification.

Repairs will therefore continue on a best-efforts basis up to a financial ceiling of £4,500.

The tractor will be deployed for towing duties to maintain operational continuity, and a more conventional EV will be procured to enhance overall fleet flexibility and reduce dependency on a single specialist vehicle.

Strategic & Operational Justification

- Maintains essential service capacity while addressing vehicle unreliability.
- Avoids disproportionate further investment in technically unsupported equipment.
- Provides flexibility and resilience within the Facilities fleet.
- Reduces reliance on staff using personal vehicles.
- Supports GTC's environmental objectives by maintaining an electric fleet strategy.

Financial Implications

Cost Component	Estimate (excl. VAT)	Notes
Diagnostic and repair of existing ABTe	Up to £4,500	Includes recovery, parts, labour, and diagnostics
Procurement of second EV	Within existing budgets	Up to £15,000 on the road costs. Cost to be contained within 2025/26 allocation
Interim towing via tractor	Minimal additional cost	Existing fuel and maintenance budgets sufficient

Funding Source:

Cost Centre 301 – Vehicle Costs (4205) and Equipment (4301).

All expenditure contained within approved 2025/26 budgets. No reserves required.

Key Identified Risks & Mitigation

Strategic Risk: Long-term adverse impacts from poor decision-making or poor implementation. Risks damage to the reputation of the Council, loss of public confidence, in a worst-case scenario Government intervention.

Decision unlawful	Decision is within the power provided under the General Power of Competence.
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Service Delivery - Fleet capacity inadequate for expansion	Future-proofing operations
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Compliance Risk: Failure to comply with legislation, laid down procedures or the lack of documentation to prove compliance. Risks exposure to prosecution, judicial review, employment tribunals and the inability to enforce contracts.

Decision improperly made	Proposal placed on a published agenda. Decision to be made by the Council, or a Committee of the Council. Decision of the Council recorded on the record minutes.
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Financial Risk: Fraud and corruption, waste, excess demand for services, bad debts. Risk of additional audit investigation, objection to accounts, reduced service delivery, dramatically increased Council Tax levels/impact on Council reserves.

Compliance - Procurement process challenge	Procurement authorised by decision of the council and implemented i.a.w financial regulations.
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Affordability	This initiative to be funded from within the 2025/26 Equipment Budget (Cost Centre 301) Ongoing maintenance to be contained within Cemeteries and Open Spaces cost centre.
Operational, Staffing and Health & Safety Risks: Failure to deliver services effectively, malfunctioning equipment, hazards to service users, the general public or staff, damage to property. Risk of insurance claims, higher insurance premiums, lengthy recovery processes.	
Risk Description	Mitigation
Prolonged ABTe downtime may affect service delivery.	Temporary use of tractor for towing and procurement of second EV to maintain capability.
Further costs arising from unresolvable ABTe issues.	Expenditure capped at £4,500. No commitment beyond authorisation limit.
Delay in sourcing suitable EV replacement.	Flexible procurement specification to ensure timely acquisition.
Flexible procurement specification to ensure timely acquisition.	Transparent reporting to Members and clear cost controls in place.
Use of alternative towing methods introduces risk.	All operators trained and authorised for use of tractor and EVs
Replacement vehicle selection could affect emissions goals.	Only electric or ultra-low-emission vehicles to be considered.
GTC Asset Register	The ABTe (VW Transporter) and any replacement or additional EV will remain registered Council assets and insured accordingly.
Environmental Risk; Effect on Climate and Ecology, sustainability of development	
Sustainability	Environmental Impact The proposal maintains GTC's commitment to low-emission fleet operations, minimises waste through attempted repair of existing assets, and supports continued transition towards sustainable service delivery.. The proposal supports GTC's net-zero objectives by avoiding need for diesel or petrol fleet options and replacing personal car use.