



Report on Minehead Town Council Vehicles

Background

Minehead Town Council currently operates six vehicles to support the Amenities Team in service delivery. Two of these vehicles are leased and four are owned outright by the Council.

The oldest vehicle in the fleet is a 2014 Vauxhall Vivaro. In recent years, this van has been used for toilet cleaning duties and small maintenance works. Its larger panelled design has made it particularly useful for carrying tools, equipment and replacement materials securely.

Due to its age, the Vivaro has required repeated repairs. Ongoing issues include an engine management warning light and a problematic particulate filter sensor, both of which have been difficult to diagnose. Most recently, the clutch has failed. With clutch repairs alone expected to exceed £2,000, alongside further diagnostic costs and the increasing frequency of faults, it is considered to have reached the point of uneconomic repair.

The Council also operates two Goupil G4 electric vehicles, known as “Eric and Ernie.” These compact and manoeuvrable vehicles have been an asset, allowing easy access to sites while still providing tipping flatbeds. Environmentally, they have offered some advantages; however, they are basic in design and better suited to enclosed estate environments than to regular highway use. Despite savings on fuel, their charging requirements increase electricity usage at the depots.

As the vehicles have aged and been used more intensively, battery and charging issues have worsened, particularly with one of the vans, which now frequently fails to charge fully, stops charging partway, or discharges too quickly. It increasingly cannot sustain a full working day, creating significant operational and scheduling pressures.

A 2021 Nissan panel electric van is also held on fleet and is managed through a hire arrangement.

Needs

With the Vivaro now undriveable, the current shortage of vehicles is impacting service delivery. A replacement vehicle capable of meeting the requirements of toilet cleaning and general maintenance is essential. Given its age, mileage and rising repair costs, further investment in the Vivaro is not considered financially sound. An urgent replacement is therefore required.

Reliability issues with the Goupil electric vehicles are also escalating. One of the Goupil’s in particular is experiencing ongoing and worsening charging problems, including failing to

charge fully, stopping partway through charging and rapid discharge during use. The manufacturer is based in France and the UK supplier operates from Peterborough and despite attempts it has been difficult to obtain clear technical guidance. A diagnostic visit is likely to incur a cost.

Most recently, while the vehicle was connected to the charger, a strong and concerning smell was detected coming from the vehicle. Staff immediately disconnected the charger. This incident raises significant safety concerns and strongly suggests that the battery may be failing. A local garage has assessed the vehicle and also suspects that the issue is battery-related, but specialist diagnostics would be required to confirm the exact cause and provide accurate repair and replacement costings.

Critically, the financial decision for the Goupil now centres on whether:

- the battery replacement/repair cost is economically viable,
OR
- the vehicle should be replaced entirely if repair proves uneconomical.

This assessment will require diagnostic evidence before a recommendation can be made.

The Council currently operates a mix of leased and owned vehicles. While leasing can provide access to newer models, it can also be costly and come with restrictions. At this stage, it is recommended that any new fleet vehicles are purchased outright rather than leased.

The Nissan panel van is one of the leased vehicles and plays a crucial role in service delivery. The current lease agreement has recently been extended by a further and final 12 months.

Financial and Legal Considerations

The Town Council currently holds £8,833.33 in its Vehicles Earmarked Reserve. From 1st April, this will increase to £18,833.33 with the addition of a further £10,000.

As an indicative guide, replacing the Vivaro like-for-like with a good-quality second hand model would cost approximately £10,000. The existing Vivaro may still have a residual sale value of around £1,000, which could contribute to the replacement cost.

At this stage it is not certain what the cost for a replacement Goupil battery will be. However, early indications suggest that this may be substantial and potentially high enough to make repair uneconomical. The Goupil vehicles should also have some resale value, although the amount is currently uncertain. A new Suzuki Carry typically costs around £15,000. Due to a gap in manufacturing, second-hand options are limited, meaning purchases are usually either older models or brand-new vehicles.

Based on these estimates, the £18,833.33 in the reserve is unlikely to cover the purchase of two replacement vehicles. The Devolution Earmarked Reserve currently holds £40,000.00,

and as devolution has increased demand on the fleet, particularly the Goupils, it would be reasonable to allocate additional funds from this reserve if councillors wish to do so. An additional amount of up to £10,000 is suggested if required.

This would provide a total budget of up to £28,833.33 for vehicle replacements, with sale income from existing vehicles helping to offset costs.

The lease agreement with the Nissan panel van has been built into the 2026/27 financial years budget. However, at the end of this agreement, councillors will need to decide whether to return the vehicle or complete the purchase. Both options will need to be built into the 2027/28 financial year budget.

The Council has the authority to purchase vehicles under Section 111 of the Local Government Act 1972, which permits actions necessary for the discharge of its functions.

Recommendations

That Council:

- Approves the immediate replacement of the Vauxhall Vivaro, due to uneconomic repair and delegates authority to the Clerk to procure and purchase a replacement van suitable for service needs.
- Authorises the Clerk to incur and pay any necessary diagnostic and assessment costs required to determine the condition of the Goupil and the likely cost of repair.
- Delegates authority to the Clerk to:
 - determine whether repair (including battery replacement) is economically viable; and
 - if repair is uneconomical, proceed with sourcing and procuring a suitable replacement vehicle.
- Approves a total budget of up to £28,833.33, with income from any vehicle sales used to offset costs where possible.
- Notes the extension of the lease of the Nissan panel van for a final 12 month agreement.

Ben Parker
Town Clerk
March 2026