

Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Thursday, 8th September, 2016.

Present:- Councillors Plenty (Chair), Morris (Vice-Chair), Anderson, Davis, N Holledge, Rana, Swindlehurst and Wright

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Brooker, Coad, Amarpreet Dhaliwal, Matloob, Nazir, Sohal and Strutton

PART 1

11. Declarations of Interest

Cllr Plenty declared that he had submitted a letter to the local press regarding Hollow Hill Lane.

12. Minutes of the last meeting held on 21st July 2016

Resolved:

1. That the minutes of the meeting held on 21st July 2016 be approved as an accurate record.
2. That for subsequent meetings of the Panel, an actions arising sheet be added to the agenda.
3. That the proposed membership from the Residents' Board be amended to include 3 tenants and 1 leaseholder.

13. Slough Real Time Passenger Information

The members had received an update on detection rates for the 7 series routes, with rates remaining in the range of 56 – 65%. As a result, the Panel wished to move towards a resolution of the issue given the amount of discussion it had generated in previous meetings.

First Bus shared many of the Panel's reservations. It also ran a similar service in Hampshire and Dorset, where detection rates were far higher; however, it had encountered a similar pattern in Southampton. The cause of this was assigned to the supplier (JMW), whose system did not offer the reporting or remote access available in Hampshire and Dorset. In addition, the system used in these areas held historical data, which allowed for analysis on punctuality.

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- Given the relatively recent decision to adopt Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI), members questioned the value it represented. Officers replied that, whilst at the time of the decision (2010) the system may have been adequate, there were questions as to whether the supplier had upgraded to mirror the IT which was currently available.

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- JMW acknowledged the issue with real time systems. Software and equipment would be upgraded in September 2016, which was expected to have a swift impact on detection rates; this would be evaluated in the autumn of 2016. However, JMW used different technology to that it employed in Southampton, with the issue centring on bus equipment. They would be discussing the situation with First Bus and report back to the Panel.
- The various iterations of systems also had an impact on detection rates. The service in Portsmouth had received a significant outlay of capital but saw little improvement. However, once they adopted the system used in the rest of Hampshire a significant increase in detection rates occurred. The Hampshire system had been constructed on the basis of a one-off grant, and was now run by First Bus which allowed local authorities to save money.
- As an example of the expenditure to be expected, in Hampshire 240 buses used the system. It cost £900,000 in 2014, and as well as offering RTPI it provided on-bus WiFi and announcements on the next stop. Slough would be looking to install any system in a fleet of 57 buses.
- Once installed, the local authority would manage the infrastructure and First Bus the equipment on buses.
- The current contract with JMW was due to end in March 2017. SBC was looking at the next action after this; for example, retrofitting could be requirement of any retendering exercise. However, there could be a significant cost regarding information boards at bus stops, as these cost approximately £1,500 per unit.
- Prior to any retendering process, SBC would review the cost of hosting the system. They would also undertake a visit to Hampshire to review their system and evaluate retrofitting options.
- 80% was the target for detection rates by the end of September 2016 once the upgrade had been completed. However, members expressed concerns that improvement may not be enough to justify the system; even a rate of 80% would leave a typical commuter in possession of erroneous information twice a week.
- RTPI was not showing on display boards because of the interaction with ticket machines on buses. It was an automatic system, so could not be blamed on drivers failing to operate it.

Resolved: that the Panel receive an update on RTPI on 3rd November 2016, to include actions taken by the supplier, possible protection for SBC in any future retendering and information on the visit to evaluate the system used in Hampshire.

14. Member Questions

The written answers to questions submitted by members were circulated to the Panel. In addition, the following points were made:

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- Regarding the safety of bus routes, each route had an analysis undertaken on its impact on both safety and traffic. This analysis included known 'hot spots'. However, on occasions encroachment of buses over road markings was inevitable. At present, there were no major concerns although the situation was continually monitored.
- A question was raised regarding a sharp turn at a 'hot spot'. This had raised concerns over its impact on the route used by emergency services to access Wexham Park Hospital and the potential for road blocking. The member raising this question was minded to refer this to the Traffic Commissioner for the region.

Resolved: that the formal risk assessment regarding the turn out of Haymill Road onto Lower Britwell Road be shared with the Panel.

15. Hollow Hill Lane - Experimental Scheme

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

- The 18 months referred to in the experimental scheme did not dictate that the road closure would last 18 months. Instead, the scheme would see the first 6 months used for gathering information on the closure, followed by 12 months to consult and formulate a future plan. By the end of the 18 months a final decision would need to be made; however, it could be made sooner.
- Members asked if the closure could be terminated after 3 months. SBC was not looking to assess the closure itself, but rather the wider impact on traffic across neighbouring areas. This would take time to become clear as road users adapted to the closure. Ultimately, SBC did not have a range of options; the bridge would either remain open or close. Discussions with partners had been ongoing and mitigation had been assessed, and the public had been asked to identify areas subject to traffic pressure since the closure.
- 2017 may see Western Rail submitting an application for works. As a result, in the long term closure may prove to be inevitable, regardless of residents' views.
- SBC was committed to engagement with residents throughout the process. As a result, traffic surveys had been designed to be open ended to allow for full information to be gathered on the wider impact on traffic.
- Other closures had a duration of 3 months. Officers agreed that we could review the closure similar to other closures.
- Royal Assent for the HS2 rail link was due to be given by the end of 2016. Subsequent to this, a contractor for the related work could well be appointed in the spring of 2017. This would involve the commencement of work on the Heathrow Express depot, and this site should be operational before the end of 2019. Network Rail was likely to submit an application in 2017, with a decision possible in early 2018. Once this was approved, work could commence in 2019 – 2020; at this stage, the road was likely to be closed permanently.

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- A replacement road under the bridge would involve a significant amount of expenditure. The figure of £20 million was just to cover the road work for HS2 and the movement of their equipment. Given the fact that Western Rail was also undertaking excavation work, any such replacement road would have to start beyond the canal in the area. As a result, it was impossible to give a precise estimate on the cost but it was likely to prove extremely expensive.
- Members raised concerns over the size of the area affected by the closure. SBC had made it clear in the consultation document that it wanted residents to share their experience of the closure, and was simultaneously collecting data and using Western Rail's information to analyse the impact. The recent re-opening of schools after the summer holidays was also now a factor.
- SBC was committed to clarity and transparency. However, given the nature of this initiative, negotiations with third parties which were not disclosable were involved. At present, a number of partners were contributing to the compilation of a mitigation package. The area under discussion included the Colnbrook bypass and the Langley High Street. However, not all areas may be possible to cover in the final package, hence the need to prioritise work based on the analysis currently being undertaken. Members would also be involved in the selection of these priorities.
- Members also raised concerns over the other impacts which could be felt by Langley residents. Given that gravel extraction would be required during the future construction work, questions were raised as to whether this would also be routed through Langley, and whether cost considerations would see the area seen as the cheapest option for any infrastructure work. There were concerns that road safety was being compromised as drivers became aggressive to exit side streets.
- Western Rail would receive funding from the Department for Transport, meaning that there was likely to be £600 – 700 million of public money to help deliver the scheme. As a result, SBC would need to react as soon as possible, plan and negotiate the best package; if it left planning later, its position with Western Rail would be weaker. Given that this was a national project, it could also become less of a priority in planning if SBC did not clarify its position in the near future.
- Members also raised concerns as to whether Local Neighbourhood Action Groups had been made aware of this meeting, and whether the scheme had an impact on local residents' health, the local economy, safety or the image of Slough.
- Members also raised concerns over the possibility of mitigation schemes, given the limited potential for road widening in Langley. The closure would end a route used for 50 years and impact on road users across the area. In response, SBC and South Bucks District Council had explored options on a new bridge and also involved HS2 and Network Rail. A location had been identified and the work assessed to be possible; however, it was also extremely expensive. Given the future work, it would require 5 metres of clearance for the embankment, another 3 for the trains and an additional 2 metres for electrification equipment. Land in the area would also require

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sterilisation, and neighbouring local authorities withdrew support when the size of work needed became clear.

- Members also raised concerns regarding the use of the bridge by a local farmer whilst it remained closed to emergency services. Regarding this matter, the farmer had not been notified of the closure by the neighbouring local authorities. The issue was raised with SBC when the farmer's need to harvest his land was brought to officers' attention; the possibility of using alternative machinery was discussed but the timescales involved did not allow for this. Access for the farmer has been granted to enable the harvesting of the fields; this means that a second visit will be granted. The arrangement was strictly one-off in exceptional circumstances; however, members did raise the potential image this could portray to local residents.
- SBC officers requested that local residents contact them to help shape the mitigation. At the time of the meeting, SBC had received over 100 responses although this figure did not include social media. There would also be a series of public meetings throughout the autumn of 2016, and sessions with the Stakeholders Working Group and ward members. Issues caused by the closure would be clear before discussions with Network Rail took place.
- Members could scrutinise the proposed mitigation package once it was compiled; officers had delegated authority with regards to completing the arrangement.
- Members raised concerns over communications regarding the closure; were they given sufficient notice or only informed 48 hours beforehand, and were they made aware prior to this that closure was likely at some stage?
- A local resident had noted blocked traffic from Junction 5 of the M4 to Langley High Street on 7th September 2016, and Harrow Market to St Bernard's School on 8th September. In addition, the area from the Red Lion to Harrow Market was blocked. Local residents were concerned that this did not need to continue for the whole period; would SBC have gathered enough information by the end of 3 months?
- Information gathered by local residents before the closure also suggested that there would now be an extra 1,000 vehicles using other roads in Langley between 7am and 8.30am. This additional pressure on a system already prone to traffic problems was causing major hold ups, with many in the area feeling that the impact on their lives was not acceptable. Equally, a letter had been sent to SBC on 3rd August 2016 but no response had yet been received.

Resolved: The Panel recommend that Cabinet review the experimental scheme within the first 3 months and assess whether Slough Borough Council will have compiled sufficient information by this date to make an informed decision on the matter.

16. Neighbourhood Services Garage Licence Review

The Panel raised the following points in discussion:

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- 960 letters regarding parking bays had been sent; of these, 601 had been returned and 297 approved.
- The Panel wished to conduct an inquiry into a fraud audit; this would be taken later in the Municipal Year.

Resolved:

1. That the Panel take an item on garages on 3rd November 2016, to scrutinise a model licence and discuss which party is liable for the upkeep of garages.
2. That the Panel scrutinise a Fraud Audit on 4th April 2017.

17. Forward Work Programme

In addition to the points made earlier regarding the Panel's work programme, the following decisions were made:

Resolved:

1. That the item on Service Charges be taken on 17th January 2017.
2. That the Scrutiny Officer arrange a date for the item on RMI with officers.
3. That the item on the HRA Business Plan be taken on 3rd November 2016.
4. That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would decide how to allocate scrutiny of the Local Plan on 17th November 2016.

18. Attendance Record

Resolved: that the attendance record be noted.

19. Date of Next Meeting - 3rd November 2016

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 7.01 pm and closed at 9.24 pm)