

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Cabinet **DATE:** 9th March 2015
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PART I **NON-KEY DECISION**

REFERENCES FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY – REAL TIME PASSENGER INFORMATION (RTPI) AND STREET CLEANING

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to ask Cabinet to consider the comments made by the Neighbourhoods and Community Services (NCS) Scrutiny Panel on RTPI for the bus service and street cleaning.

2. Recommendations

That the Cabinet approve the following points in relation to RTPI:

- That the Panel recommend Cabinet reviews the current level of accuracy of RTPI in order to set a target for RTPI accuracy and a suitable timeframe.
- That the responsible Cabinet member is recommended to report back to the NCS Scrutiny Panel in six months (summer / early autumn 2015).
- That the Panel recommends that no further capital expenditure on RTPI be made until the Cabinet is satisfied that worthwhile levels of RTPI will be achieved.

That the Cabinet approve the following points in relation to street cleaning:

- That the Panel recommends that, if financially viable, housing land be included in the next contract.
- That the Panel recommends that, to ensure improved monitoring of contractors' work, SBC monitor street cleanliness on
 - a) The day of the contractor inspection; and
 - b) The day of cleaning.This is in preference to the present system of random locations which has lacked sufficient focus.

3. Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities

These recommendations relate to the following priority:

- Regeneration and Environment

4 **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

The second recommendation regarding street cleaning may involve the allocation of staff resources. Officers at Slough Borough Council have suggested this may involve the addition of 1 FTE member of staff, although the NCS Scrutiny Panel have suggested that the matter could be resolved by a more restricted amount of time being dedicated by an existing employee.

(b) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no human rights act or other legal implications arising as a direct result of this report.

5 **Supporting Information**

- 5.1 The NCS Scrutiny Panel raised concerns regarding the accuracy and usefulness of the RTPI system. Some routes were noted as particularly problematic, with the area around Langley Leisure Centre having only approximately 30% of buses providing RTPI. Whilst this had been improved by resolving technical issues, the costs of installing RTPI machinery precluded against their installation on all buses. Other developments had caused delays in the implementation of RTPI, such as software upgrades on ticket machines, the replacement of other machines and the replacement of some of First Bus' fleet.
- 5.2 Routes which were not yet covered by RTPI would be integrated into the system. Whilst other developments such as the Mass Rapid Transit Scheme would also have an impact, it was intended that mobile phone technology and a native app would help boost the impact of RTPI. The final decisions on Mass Rapid Transit would be made by the summer of 2015.
- 5.3 The rate of bus journeys covered by RTPI was rarely above 30% in the period April – September 2014. In the rest of the cases, the electronic display boards at stops displayed bus timetable information which may, or may not, reflect the reality of bus travel on that day. Equally, local residents were not aware of the difference between RTPI and timetable information displayed at bus stops, and were thus confused when buses were not present at the times displayed and were losing confidence in the system.
- 5.4 Since September 2014 there had been some improvement in RTPI rates, which had risen to around 50%. However, the fact that the fitting of RTPI equipment had often been taking place at the smaller Bracknell depot had proved a further impediment to progress. The fact that other councils and bus companies used other equipment could also prove problematic. The fact that not all buses in the fleet would be running at any given time and substitute buses would be used when repair work was being undertaken could make a rate of 90% hard to achieve.
- 5.5 SBC was adopting a gradual approach to applying RTPI on its various bus routes, given the expenses involved and the issues faced by those areas who were first to adopt the technology. By the spring of 2015, it was anticipated that 50% should be the minimum rate for bus journeys providing RTPI. The Service Level Agreement between SBC and

First Buses included the fixing of RTPPI machinery; however, members questioned whether a rate of 50% would significantly bolster confidence in the system amongst local residents.

- 5.6 In relation to the first recommendation, SBC officers have stated that they expect a 70% rate of accuracy by the end of May 2015. This was agreed with the service provider for RTPPI (JMW). The detection rate during the final week of September 2014 was averaging at 26%, whilst for the last few weeks the average detection rate has been 42%.
- 5.7 The second recommendation is for the Cabinet to decide.
- 5.8 In relation to the third recommendation (no further expenditure until Cabinet satisfied on progress), SBC officers have responded that there will be an impact on major schemes including improvements at the Curve and Slough, Burnham & Langley stations amongst other developments currently contributing to RTPPI.
- 5.9 On street cleaning, the current contract has always been run on an output basis. This meant, in essence, that Amey would identify the streets in need of cleaning and then complete the required work (rather than implementing a predetermined cleaning plan). The basis of Amey's decision was the Environmental Protection Act 1990; should the street have fallen below 'grade B' as defined in the Act, it would be cleaned to 'grade A' standard.
- 5.10 Initially the contract had specified that all streets would be visited once per week. However, street cleaning had been integrated with other services (e.g. park cleaning) to make efficiency savings, resulting in the termination of the weekly visit policy. Existing information had been used to target key areas, with some areas visited weekly and some once every four weeks. SBC officers, ward Councillors and members of the public could all supply intelligence which would assist in the selection process.
- 5.11 Housing land had not been included in the original contract. Amey covered part and SBC's neighbourhoods team another part; this had led to some confusion amongst residents. The contract would be retendered in 2017 and would need to review whether this should be integrated to simplify the situation; however, this might potentially raise the cost.
- 5.12 To monitor Amey's work, SBC undertook weekly tours of random locations. However, the ability of this to challenge Amey's work could be limited as it did not necessarily take place on the day of cleaning. The town centre was of particular interest in this process. However, the arrangement was not explicit in the current contract and was a point under consideration for the 2017 retender.
- 5.13 On the first recommendation regarding street cleaning (inclusion of housing land in next contract) the Environmental Services team and the Waste & Environment team agree with this in principle. It is imperative that this recommendation is understood and recognised at a commissioning level for the re-provision of the 'Housing Maintenance' contract currently delivered through Interserve. Currently the scope of the re-provision of the 'Housing Maintenance' contract might consider grounds maintenance currently delivered through the Environmental Services contract which if delivered would split housing land into a separate contract. As such, this recommendation would be formally advised to Neighbourhood Services. This financial viability element is also understood.

- 5.14 On the second recommendation (monitoring of contractor's work) SBC officers have stated that the additional costs may be the appointment of one additional monitoring officer. However, the Chair of the NCS Scrutiny Panel has indicated that he suspects this could be covered without any additional recruitment, but through dedicating (at most) one day per week from an existing member of staff to the task. This difference of opinion is based on differing estimates for the time spent travelling to find a crew actually working to be able to assess what the standard is after cleaning. SBC officers felt this would be an issue, whilst the Chair of the NCS Scrutiny Panel argued that this could be minimised by co-ordinating the work with the schedule. SBC officers will investigate option for systems where the driver messages that a street has been completed and the Monitoring Officer goes to check.
- 5.15 The recommendation would be included in the compilation of the new specification for crews reporting in real time that streets had been visited and either cleaned or not. The Monitoring Officer can then make a decision as to whether they are going to monitor the cleaning of a street that has been cleaned or monitor the decision as to whether a street should have been cleaned or not if the contractor has decided not to do so.

6 **Conclusion**

- 6.1 On the basis of the supporting information in section 5, the NCS Scrutiny Panel concluded that there were major concerns in relation to the RTPi service. The current level of accuracy, as well as the fact that residents were unclear as to which information they were given was RTPi and which simply an electronic display of generic timetable information, was causing local residents to lose confidence in the system. As a result, targets need to be set to ensure that there is a measurable improvement in performance and until such time as that is forthcoming expenditure should be suspended and reviewed.
- 6.2 In terms of street cleaning, the NCS Scrutiny Panel were satisfied regarding the use of the output system having been unclear of its implications beforehand. However, they concluded that some of the current ambiguities about responsibility for tasks needed to be resolved, and also that a more regimented approach to monitoring work would benefit the local community.

7 **Background Papers**

- '1' - Agenda papers, NCS Scrutiny Panel (2nd December 2014)