

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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WARD(S): All

PART I

FOR COMMENT AND CONSIDERATION

BETTER AREA BUS FUND

1. **Purpose of Report**

To provide an update on the £1.4m Better Area Bus Fund allocation and how it is being spent and an update for members on the current tendered bus services.

2. **Recommendation**

The Committee is requested to note and comment on the progress the council is making on the service improvements associated with the No 78 service to Heathrow and to note the council's position on the existing tendered bus services.

3. **Community Strategy Priorities**

- Economy and skills – Providing better access to Heathrow and jobs for Slough residents
- Health and wellbeing – Enabling all residents especially the vulnerable in Slough to have access to facilities in and around the town.
- Housing – Giving greater choices for residents as to where they can live and access work and/or facilities.
- Regeneration and environment – Improving the environment by providing better services to encourage local residents to use the bus rather than the private car.
- Safer communities – Regular services including evening provisions which will enable the more vulnerable from society to have freedom to travel in a secure environment.

4. **Other Implications**

(a) **Financial**

The better area bus project, is entirely supported from funds allocated by the Dept. for Transport as part of a national scheme and this amounts to £1.415m of ring-fenced capital.

The council currently contributes approximately £391K/annum to supported bus services in the town with additional funding of £201K being also allocated to specific routes via S.106 contributions.

There are no further financial implications.

Risk Management

There are no reported risks associated with the recommendations stipulated in section 2.

(b) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no Human Rights Act Implications associated with the recommendations of this report.

Equalities Impact Assessment

There is no requirement for an EIA as this report is to provide members on an update on current services and projects within the passenger transport section.

5. Supporting Information

5.1 Better Area Bus

Route 78 currently suffers from the effects of unpredictable traffic congestion. This manifests itself in a need to schedule buses to accommodate the effects of longer and less reliable journey times at peak, and even at times poor punctuality. The target for the Better Bus Area Fund bid is to improve journey time in each direction during peak periods. First in Berkshire, who operate this route have undertaken to keep the same number of buses on the route, but to use the saving in journey time to make the service more regular at peak. It is predicted that these improvements in regularity, punctuality and journey time will in turn attract more people to use the bus service instead of cars.

5.2 Summary of the Measures

The measures being implemented are designed to reduce delays primarily on route 78(between Britwell and Heathrow), but will benefit other bus routes both within Slough and between Slough, Heathrow Airport and High Wycombe. They will benefit not just services provided by First in Berkshire but also by Transport for London and Arriva the Shires who also operate services along this corridor . Many measures will also benefit general traffic and these consist of the following:

- Bus priority measures on congested approaches to key junctions on the A355 and A4 including bus lanes;
- Widening to 2 lanes eastbound the section of the A4 between M4 Junction 5 and Brands Hill (this can be accommodated within existing highway boundaries);
- Building on the success of Split cycle offset optimisation technique (SCOOT) traffic signal control on the A4 Bath Road by introducing SCOOT on the A355 Farnham Road with signalised bus priority;
- Updating key signalised junctions on the A4 London Road and in Langley;
- Infilling specific bus stop laybys on roads with a speed limit of 30 mph or less; and
- Some general bus stop improvements such real time (budget permitting)

5.3 Status of projects

These schemes are at various stages of preparation and officers envisage a phased implementation through to March 2014 to make the best use of available resource.

5.4 Supported Bus Services

Slough Borough Council's Local Transport Plan 3 Supplementary Document: Public Transport Strategy (November 2011) sets out the Council's powers and statutory responsibilities in an environment where most bus services are provided on a commercial basis. It describes the coverage that bus services provide in Slough and analyses the opportunities and constraints to further improving bus services. It puts forward a virtuous scenario in which faster, more frequent and more punctual bus journeys attract more passengers from car and help to reduce congestion on Slough's highway network while contributing to the town's economic prosperity.

5.5 Patronage

Overall patronage on bus services has been growing. In 2004/5 3,941,000 passenger journeys per year started on buses in Slough. By 2011/12, this had grown 32% to 5,217,000.

5.6 Subsidy

Slough Borough Council currently provides subsidy on certain routes or services to:

- Maintain some services where accessibility would otherwise be judged to be unacceptable. In practice there are at present 2 areas – Goldsworthy Way, and The Rochfords;
- Maintain a level of service provision during evenings and Sundays at times when these services carry insufficient passengers to be profitable. This constitutes the vast majority of Slough Borough Council's spend on supported bus services. A review conducted in 2008, in which passengers were interviewed, found that these were heavily used by workers;
- A service procured by Bracknell Forest Borough Council that provides a good level of access between Britwell and Wexham Park Hospital as part of a longer route (Route 53).
- We also currently procure a service using 'section 106' developer funding from Eton College (routes 3 and 4 between Slough and Cippenham Green).

5.7 These routes have been tendered for, and are on a 3 year, annually renewable contract. The contracts are in their second year. Given the extensive changes to the network this year, including the Heart of Slough and Chalvey regeneration projects, we do not intend to retender these contracts until the end of 2013.

5.8 Heathrow Airport

Slough Borough Council has agreed a framework with First in Berkshire, Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead and Heathrow Airport Ltd (HAL) with respect to First's bus routes serving the Airport, starting in 2011/12. This aims to keep the total payments to First (concessions and supported services) from all three bodies constant in cash terms through to 2014/15. With an increasing contribution from HAL, this means that the support provided both by Slough Borough Council and RBWM reduces. If current trends continue, contract payments on Heathrow services can be expected to fall to zero by 2014/2015.

5.9 Plans for the future

We will consider how the 'non-Heathrow' services can be secured whilst maintaining the current benefits (including timetable publicity and common ticketing) that arise from their current operation by First.

Members may wish to note that all bus operators currently receive Bus Service Operators' Grant (BSOG). This is a partial rebate of duty paid on fuel.

Government intends to cease paying BSOG to operators for services procured by local transport authorities. Instead these funds will be paid directly to the local transport authority concerned. Government intends to do this from October 2013. This means that the cost of bus service contracts are likely to increase, while there is currently no clarity as to whether government funding to local authorities will increase in real terms.

6. **Comments of Other Committees**

No comments to be added.

7. **Conclusion**

Members are requested to note that progress is being made on service provision through the supported bus subsidies and improvements to bus service journey times through the investment of the Better Area Bus Fund.

8. **Background Papers**

'1' Better Area Bus Fund Bid