

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Cabinet **DATE:** 19th October 2015

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WARD(S): All

PORTFOLIO: Cllr Munawar –
Commissioner for Social and Economic Inclusion

PART I **NON-KEY DECISION**

REFERENCES FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY – A4 BRANDS HILL AND REAL TIME PASSENGER INFORMATION

1. Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to ask Cabinet to consider the recommendations of the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel from their meeting held on 3rd September 2015.

2. Recommendations/Proposed Action

The Cabinet is requested to consider the following references from scrutiny and resolve accordingly:

- (a) The Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel has referred the matter of the road design of the A4 at Brands Hill to Cabinet. The wording of the resolution is as follows:
- The Panel wished to refer their dissatisfaction on the road lay out for the A4 Brands Hill area to Cabinet, on the grounds of planning, design and implementation. This had led to outstanding safety issues, which rendered the highway as not fit for purpose.
- (b) The reference from the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel with regards to real time passenger information (RTPI) was as follows:
- That that the matter should be referred to Cabinet, with specific reference to the issue of 'ghost buses'.

3. The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan

3a. Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities

These recommendations relate to the following priority:

- Economy and Skills
- Regeneration and Environment

3b. **Five Year Plan Outcomes**

These recommendations relate to the following priority:

1. The centre of Slough will be vibrant, providing business, living, and cultural opportunities

4 **Other Implications**

(a) Financial

Improvements to the transport infrastructure of Slough will increase productivity and the appeal of the area to external investors.

(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**

A4 Brands Hill

- 5.1 The Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel have discussed this issue at their last three meetings (March, June and September 2015). During these discussions, members have raised the following concerns:
- 5.2 With regards to planning, members questioned the decision to opt for a three lane layout, with bus lay bys to be filled in where appropriate. Members asked whether this policy was originally only to be applied to areas with a limit of 30mph but was now being applied in 40mph speed limit zones.
- 5.3 On the design of the road, members reported concerns that vehicles were being forced to use the middle lane, and thus heading in the opposite direction to oncoming traffic. This had been caused by issues such as HGVs using their allowed time to park and buses which now had no lay by. They also raised questions over the absence of a solid white line to differentiate directions of traffic, and the non-installation of a 'no right turn' sign for the BP garage on the grounds of problems with enforcement. The Panel argued that a 'no right turn' sign should be put in place, as the safety issue was paramount rather than considerations regarding the enforcement of the policy. In addition, the use of double yellow lines rather than an outright loading ban had led to safety concerns, whilst the potential for the design to confuse road users who were arriving from outside Slough and were not used to the system was also raised.
- 5.4 The implementation of the road lay out had been associated with delays in the placement of arrow road markings. Whilst it was reported to the Panel on 3rd September that this had been caused by rain, concerns remained that Slough Borough Council was not doing enough to ensure contractors were being chased on the matter. It was also the case that there were concerns that the proposed loading ban was not being enacted sufficiently quickly. Whilst members are aware of the need for consultation and notification of proposals, they still felt that this could be completed more quickly. As part of this, members raised the possibility that the proposals were not being given sufficiently high priority. Members are aware of the presence of numerous priorities for transport, but felt that the safety issues on the A4 required urgent action. Finally,

members were concerned about the impact of the scheme on local motorists in some parts of Slough (e.g. Colnbrook) and whether this was being evaluated with sufficient rigour as part of analysis.

Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI)

- 5.5 The issue of RTPI has been considered at the last two meetings of the Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel. This was on the basis that Cabinet decided to defer the matter to the Panel in April 2015, with RTPI to be referred back to Cabinet should there be issues with meeting performance targets. Given the recent lack of progress between the last report in June 2015 and the meeting in September, the Panel have referred it back to Cabinet.
- 5.6 The statistics reported to the meeting in June 2015 gave detection rates of 67%, 68%, 69% and 68% for the four weeks featured in the report. However, these now stood at 65%, 62%, 64% and 72% in the report taken on 3rd September 2015. Given that the average figure indicated by these statistics had fallen in the interim period, the Panel stated that the progress noted between December 2014 and June 2015 had stalled and that the explanations given for this decrease (staffing issues, problems with installation of equipment) had remained similar and thus not being resolved. As a result, the matter was referred back to Cabinet for decision on the future viability of the system.
- 5.7 In particular, members have raised concerns about so-called 'Ghost buses'. These are cases where buses are reported as approaching the bus stop, only not to materialise and for the information to then disappear from the display. Members noted the public's disappointment and confusion in such cases, and its impact on the overall perception of the system.
- 5.8 These references from Scrutiny have been reviewed by officers and reported below:
1. *The Panel wished to refer their dissatisfaction on the road lay out for the A4 Brands Hill area to Cabinet, on the grounds of planning, design and implementation. This had led to outstanding safety issues, which rendered the highway as not fit for purpose.*

Officers' comments

Officers have been through the same rigorous process of assessing this scheme against potential safety issues. A stage 3 safety audit has been carried out which identified various concerns. The majority of the issues raised in report have been agreed and actioned. Officers disagreed with some of the recommendations and responded accordingly. The recommendation over the bus lay-by's reinstatement was rejected however, the bus stop was moved to mitigate against congestion. Other recommendations and concerns related to the parking and banning the right turn into the petrol garage. Parking restrictions were upgraded but the introduction of a banned right turn was not supported by Thames Valley Police and so this has not been taken further, other issues not raised by the audit report such as additional road markings have been implemented to assist some residents.

Officers are satisfied that the risk to the public and to the council has been minimised to an acceptable level in line with other traffic engineering schemes and therefore it is proposed that no further action is required.

2. *That RTPI should be referred to Cabinet, with specific reference to the issue of 'ghost buses'.*

Officers' comments

Since April Cabinet officers together with First Bus and JMW have actively been working on upgrading the real time detection systems and have made significant improvements. However, since April the bus depot at Bracknell has closed resulting in delays to the upgrade programme, this together with new buses being introduced has contributed to an overall delay. First have recognised the importance of real time to bus users and have now assigned an experienced engineer to work with the council's contractor to accelerate the programme and restore reliability. The issue of "ghost buses" has been identified by scrutiny as a problem, officers at a previous panel made reference to the real time displays showing a service which then disappeared from the screen. There are two factors that could be contributing to this problem. The first being a Communications drop which results in the link being broken temporarily, this is most likely issue but the second factor could be a punctuality problem where some services maybe delayed (e.g. traffic), if the service goes beyond the scheduled timetable it is possible that the specific service will be removed from the display. This is not an error but a punctuality issue and therefore cannot be addressed by the real time system but is monitored at the bus partnership meetings. Officers are confident that detection rates will continue to climb following the new fleet upgrade and the new software upgrades and therefore recommend that no further action is required at this stage. Officers will continue to supply information to scrutiny panel on a monthly basis to ensure that members are aware of the progress that is being made.

6 Conclusion

- 6.1 The Cabinet is requested to decide upon recommendations outlined in section 2 and discussed in sections 5.1 – 5.8 of this report.

7 Appendices

None

8 Background Papers

- '1' - Agenda papers, Neighbourhoods and Community Services Scrutiny Panel (3rd September 2015)