

Overview & Scrutiny Committee – Meeting held on Thursday, 10th September, 2015.

Present:- Councillors Nazir (Chair), Strutton (Vice-Chair), Ajaib, Bains, N Holledge, Malik, Rana and Usmani

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Coad, Dar, M.Holledge, Morris, Munawar, Smith, Swindlehurst and Wright

Apologies for Absence:- Councillor Bal

PART I

17. Declarations of Interest

Agenda Item 4 - Call In: Burnham Train Station and Road Network Improvements. Councillor Strutton declared that as he had requested that the Significant Officer Decision be referred to Committee for consideration, he would not participate in the Committee discussion or vote on the matter. However, Councillor Strutton remained in the meeting and addressed the Committee, prior to the Committee debate on the issue.

18. Minutes of the Last Meeting held on 9th July 2015

Resolved – That the minutes of the last meeting held on 9th July 2015 be approved as a correct record.

19. Member Questions

None were received.

20. Significant Officer Decision Call In - Burnham Train Station and Road Network Improvements

Mr DeCruz, Acting Head of Transport, reminded the Committee that a Member Call In had been received from Councillors Strutton, Chahal, Morris and Smith, regarding an Officer Significant Decision relating to Burnham Train Station and Road Network Improvements.

Burnham station is located between Burnham Lane and Station Road and the area was subject to considerable congestion in the morning and afternoon peaks due to not only the number of schools in the area, but also the commuter traffic from South Bucks heading for the station, trading estate and M4. Traffic had steadily increased over the past decade and as a consequence has resulted in the peak time delays starting sooner and ending later leading, now, to congestion being present for large parts of the day.

Following the assessment of a wide range of options, the scheme involved the closure of Station Road, Burnham under an experimental traffic regulation

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order along with a range of other traffic measures as part of a scheme to improve Burnham Station ahead of the arrival of Crossrail services.

The Committee were informed that the Council had submitted in November 2014, two bids as part of the Local Growth Fund 2 (LGF2) to the LEP for improvements to Burnham Station and Langley Station. These bids focussed on improving accessibility to the stations (including the road layout) and constructing new buildings on the station forecourt. It was noted that the successful bids had secured approximately £2m to deliver the improvements in and around Burnham Station.

Referring to the details contained within the Call In, specifically that “due diligence” had not taken place, it was explained that the following work was undertaken before the recommendation was signed off:

- Modelling assessment on 12 different scenarios;
- Widening the scheme limits as a result of the assessment to capture Huntercombe Lane North, Burnham Lane, and Dover Road;
- Consultation with the statutory stakeholders i.e. emergency services and bus operators;
- Alterations to the traffic signals to mitigate against congestion;
- Air Quality impact reviewed;
- Briefing ward and lead Members

Councillor Strutton, one of the signatories to the Call-in, addressed the meeting to explain his concerns about the proposed closure which included the lack of prior consultation; failure to take into account the impacts on home care visits and on other health and education provision; the difficulties caused by previous closures of the bridge due to adverse weather and repairs; flood risks; and the fact improvements to the Five Points junction would not take place until or unless a permanent scheme was introduced.

Councillor Strutton informed the Committee that a petition containing over 5,000 signatures, opposing the proposed scheme, had been submitted to the Council; and that this would be debated at a meeting of full Council on 22 September.

In conclusion, Councillor Strutton reiterated that proceeding with the decision to close Station Road would have a significant detrimental impact on both local residents and businesses in the area.

With respect to social care provision, Members were informed that Officers were liaising with the social care teams and would assist where necessary in minimising the impact on those who are affected. It was anticipated that some re-routing will be needed as part of a closure or a northbound option therefore dialogue would continue throughout the experimental period.

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A number of local residents, including the Chairman of Burnham Parish Council, were given the opportunity to address the Committee and raised the following points:

- Option 4 - closure of Station Road – was not the Officers preferred Scheme.
- Difficulty in accessing residential properties.
- The proposed scheme would increase traffic congestion in the area and what measures, if any, would be taken to address the anticipated increase in traffic on other routes.
- Lack of transparency by the Council as no consultation had taken place with residents or affected businesses.
- How the effectiveness of the scheme would be monitored to assess the traffic impacts of the scheme?
- What guarantees were in place to ensure that the scheme would be reversed if unsuccessful?

Councillors Munawar and Swindlehurst, Commissioners with portfolio responsibility for the scheme, responded to the comments raised. In relation to the recommendation to trial a one way system, it was highlighted that the benefits of the wider redevelopment of the station could not be achieved by adopting this option as it would not release the land required for development and closure would therefore have to be trialled at a later stage. A one way scheme would also not enable additional car parking spaces to be delivered which risked adding to parking pressures on residential streets when demand rose when Crossrail services were introduced.

It was noted that data would be collected before the experiment was introduced to establish a clear baseline and arrangements were in place to collect and monitor traffic data at appropriate locations in the locality to measure the impacts of the scheme.

Regarding the anticipated increase in traffic on surrounding routes/vicinity of the area, the Committee was informed that the experiment would not begin until both the Leigh Road and Stoke Poges Lane bridges reopened; that traffic signals at the likely diversion routes would be altered and the direction of traffic flow under the Burnham Lane bridge be reversed to allow southbound access to the A4 with a mini-roundabout at the Burnham Lane / Buckingham Avenue junction to improve access. Further measures included adjustments to bus stops and parking restrictions to assist traffic flow and avoid additional parking pressure on residential streets.

It was explained that the experimental order would also include a one way option so that if the full closure did not work after an appropriate period of the trial, the other options could be trialled. It was emphasised that the measures would be trialled as an experiment with sufficient flexibility to react depending on how the scheme worked in reality.

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Councillors Coad, Morris, Smith and Wright also addressed the Committee under Rule 30. Concern was expressed relating to the lack of consultation with residents and businesses and that the scheme would have a detrimental impact on the businesses in the vicinity. It was submitted that experimental orders were too often being used by the Council to circumvent proper consultations being carried out.

A number of points were raised in the ensuing Committee discussion, including how the decision had been made to proceed with the closure of Station Road. Mr DeCruz informed the Committee that a working group had been established, consisting of Network Rail, Crossrail, Rail for London, First Great Western and Segro to discuss the options and the outputs from the assessment and to also understand how the area including the station could be improved. The working group collectively agreed that if Station Road could be closed, then this would help realise wider benefits including regeneration of the sites surrounding the station.

A Member queried what measures would be taken should the proposed scheme result in a significant detrimental impact on residents and businesses in the area. It was explained that the scheme would be implemented as an experimental order, which allowed officers the flexibility to make changes and adapt as necessary.

Whilst it was acknowledged that there had been no prior consultation, the Committee were informed that the experimental process would be utilised as the consultation period, which would allow individuals to submit experiences and views on the real rather than perceived impacts. Consultation leaflets and information on the council webpage would also be made available to allow comments on the scheme to be made.

Clarification was sought regarding the criteria that would be used to monitor the scheme and to whom the information collated would be available to. Officers stated that various methods would be adopted to monitor the scheme, including undertaking queue length surveys and volume of traffic in the area and surrounding roads in comparison to prior to the scheme having been implemented. Members were informed that analysis of data that had been collected would be an on-going process and that this could be made available to any Member upon request on a bi-monthly basis.

Officers were asked to explain why they had made a decision to proceed with the closure of Station Road rather than opting for a one way system, as details contained within the significant officer decision highlighted that officers initial preference was for the one way system to be trialled. The Committee were informed that following discussions with SEGRO and other relevant stakeholders it was recognised that this was a potential opportunity for a regeneration of the area that would also include improvements to the train station.

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The options available to the Committee were outlined and having taken into account all the submissions made during discussion of this item, the Committee were of the view that the one way system be trialled and the effectiveness of the scheme be reported to the Committee after a three month period.

Recommended to Cabinet:

1. "That Option 1 – implementation of a one way system – as outlined in the Significant Decision (attached at Appendix A to the report), be trialled as an Experimental Order for a period of 6 months."
2. "That monitoring data regarding the effectiveness of the scheme and its impact on the road network, local residents and businesses be reported to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee after a three month period."

21. Financial and Performance Report Quarter 1

Details of the Financial and Performance Report Quarter 1 were outlined for Members consideration. The Council was forecasting an overspend of £2.803m for month 3, which was a better position compared to month 2, when a £4.4m potential overspend was reported. The main service areas showing variation from budget were Children and Families, Adult Social Care and Health Partnerships and Estates and Regeneration. Draft action plans were in place to address the overspend and it was anticipated that the overspend would be offset by corporate under spends and contained within the current financial year.

It was noted that this was the first quarter review of the Five Year Plan (5YP) Balanced Scorecard. There were 91 indicators in total across the eight main outcomes, of which the following eight indicators were rated 'red' – being more than 5% adrift of their currently defined targets.

- Business Rate debit increase each year
- Number of tenant verification site visits completed
- Prevalence of childhood 'healthy weight' at end of Primary School
- Cumulative percentage of the eligible population aged 40-74 offered an NHS Health check
- Rate of mortality from all cardiovascular diseases in persons less than 75 years per 100,000 population
- Social Isolation: percentage of adult social care users who have as much social contact as they would like
- Number of adults managing their care and support via a direct payment

An update on the Council's Gold Projects was provided. Of the eight gold projects, seven were assessed to have an overall status of 'amber' and one at 'green.' Referring to the Council's Gold Project for The Curve, further details were requested regarding the capacity of the Council and arvato's ICT support to meet deadlines and complete work on schedule, as it was showing

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as red. Officers agreed that details in relation to the project including factors for the delay in completing works and what was being undertaken to address the issue would be circulated to Committee Members.

Further details were requested regarding land ownership issues within the School Places Programme Gold Project. The Chief Executive explained that there was a shortage of school places, specifically secondary school places, and sites for schools within the Borough were very limited. Various sites were discussed by the Committee and their suitability as a school, including the site used by the former Haybrook College. It was explained that the site would be unable to accommodate a secondary school.

Members were informed that discussions were ongoing for the transition of Children's Services over to the Trust, which were anticipated to transfer from 1 October 2015. It was explained that although the service would be provided by the Trust, the Council would retain a statutory responsibility for the service and be held accountable should the Trust not perform satisfactorily. It was noted that monitoring of the Trust was vital and work was on going to develop Key Performance Indicators which would allow an effective assessment of the service.

Resolved – That details of the Financial and Performance Report Quarter 1 be noted.

22. Local Authority Partnership Purchase

Details of the Local Authority Partnership Purchase (LAPP) scheme, which would provide targeted help to potential home-buyers on a shared ownership basis and deliver a good return on the Council's financial investment, were outlined for Members consideration.

The scheme was an extension of the shared ownership model with mechanisms to overcome the negatives of current such schemes, for example LAPP allowed open market purchases and was not restricted to certain shared ownership properties. The basic model was a 70/30 percentage ownership split between the property occupier and the Council, with the Council receiving a revenue income stream and capital appreciation from its investment. It was anticipated that the scheme would both support local housing need and deliver strong returns on investment.

Whilst welcoming the principle of the scheme, the Committee were of the view that provisions be made within the scheme for prior consideration to be given to key workers and people with local connections, similar to the local eligibility criteria in the Housing Allocations Scheme. In the ensuing discussion Members also recommended that the scheme not be made available to buy to let landlords.

Resolved - That the Local Authority Partnership Purchase Scheme be noted and Cabinet be recommended to give consideration to the following points as part of the LAPP Scheme:

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- Key Workers to be given prior consideration within the Scheme
- The Scheme to exclude Landlords/Buy to Lets
- Local Eligibility Criteria to be implemented similar to that contained within the Housing Policy ie local residents for a minimum of five years.

23. Casework Task and Finish Group - Terms of Reference

Members were reminded that at its meeting in June 2015 the Committee had requested that a Task and Finish Group be established, to examine the procedure in relation to Members casework and the existing system's functionality. It was noted that the Task and Finish Group met in July 2015 to formulate its draft terms of reference, which were being presented to the Committee for approval.

A Member requested details of members of the working group and it was agreed that these would be emailed to Committee Members.

Resolved – That the Casework Task and Finish Group Terms of Reference, as attached in Appendix A of the report, be approved.

24. Abandoned Vehicles Procedure

The Committee noted details of the procedures to deal with abandoned and untaxed vehicles. A Member queried the process for obtaining information about vehicles from the DVLA. It was noted that officers were required to submit a request to the DVLA following which the relevant information would be disclosed.

Resolved - That the Abandoned Vehicles Procedure be noted.

25. Forward Work Programme

Members considered details of the Committee's work programme.

Resolved - That details of the Forward Work Programme be noted, subject to the following additions:

- Council Houses: Rents and Service Charges: 12 January 2016
- Casework Task and Finish Group: 12 January 2016

26. Attendance Record

Resolved – That details of the Members Attendance Record be noted.

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27. Date of Next Meeting - 12 November 2015

The date of the next meeting was confirmed as 12th November, 2015.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 9.37 pm)