

SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Overview & Scrutiny **DATE:** 11th July 2019

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WARD(S): All

PART I **FOR COMMENT AND/OR CONSIDERATION**

BUS FARES AND ACCESSIBILITY

1 Purpose of Report

The purpose of the report is to provide the Overview and Scrutiny panel a summary of local authority powers and considerations related to setting bus fares and accessibility.

2 Recommendations/ Proposed Action

The Committee is requested to note the information provided in this report.

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

3a. Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy (SJWS) Priorities

Priorities:

- Health: Providing transport facilities that ensure residents can access the health services they need.
- Economy and Skills – Continue to provide residents with access to essential services by improving connections and journey times between work, home, leisure, school and making alternatives to the car more attractive.
- Regeneration and Environment; Improving facilities and access to bus services to increase the use of sustainable form of transport.
- Housing: Improved public transport links to the area, with quicker journey times for the bus routes serving the area and giving greater choices for residents as to where they can live and access work and facilities.
- Safer Communities: Reduced traffic congestion at the location to improve the environment for residents at the location. This should make a place where people feel safe to live and visit.

Bus fares and accessibility are relevant to each of the SJWS priorities and the cross-cutting themes and needs identified in the JSNA.

3b. **Five Year Plan Outcomes**

The report would not deliver any of the outcomes but is relevant across the theme. Any strategy taken forward would directly impact on the following priorities:

Outcome 1: Slough children will grow up to be happy, healthy and successful

Outcome 2: Our people will be healthier and manage their own care needs

Outcome 3: Slough will be an attractive place where people choose to live, work and stay

Outcome 5: Slough will attract, retain and grow businesses and investment to provide opportunities for our residents

4 **Other Implications**

a) Financial

None.

There are currently no quantifiable financial implications from the recommendations or proposed actions of the report

b) Risk Management

Risk	Mitigating action	Opportunities
None	None	There are no risks, threats or opportunities arising from the report.

c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

There are no legal or Human Rights Act implications relating to the content of this report.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

There is no identified need for the completion of EIA relating to this report.

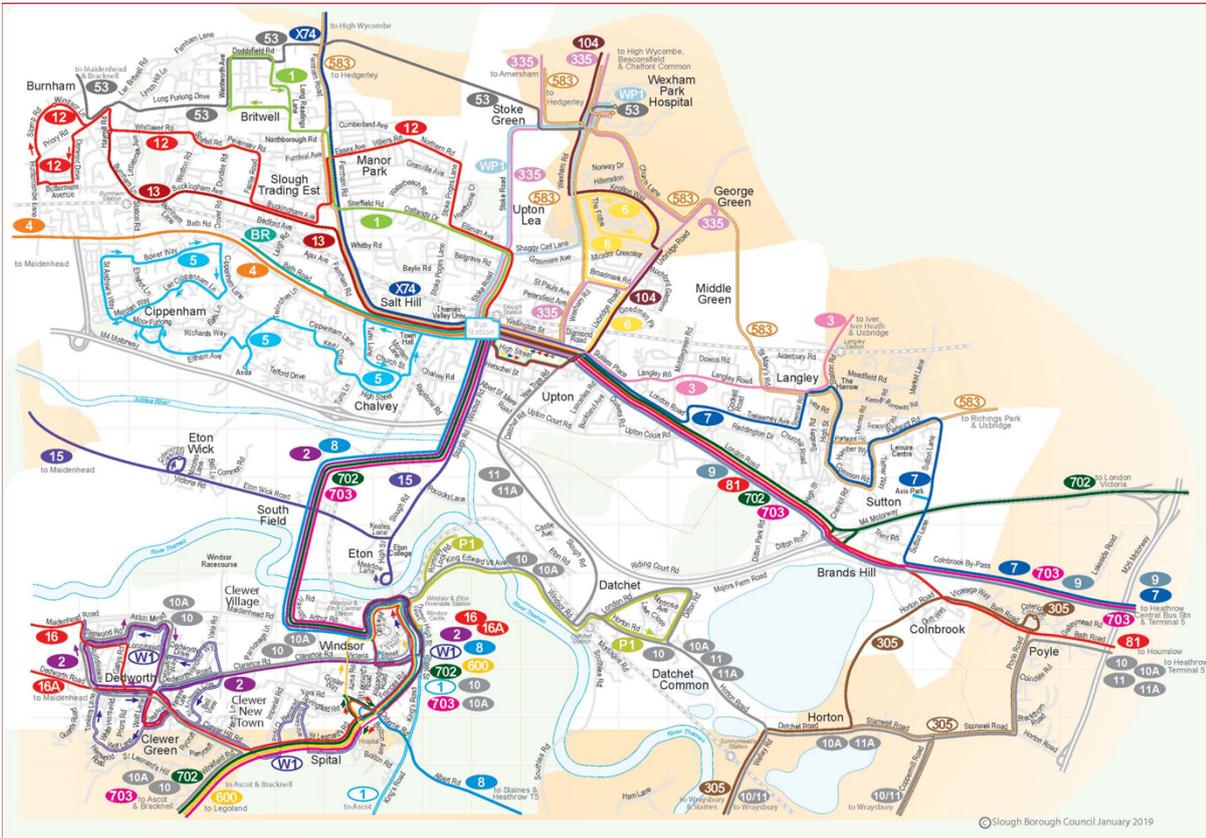
5 **Supporting Information**

1) **Comparative data on fares with neighbouring authorities.**

Regulatory Background

Slough bus services are provided by a number of bus operators. Most of these operate commercially, which means that there is no contract between the local authority and bus operator, and the bus operators operate the routes and charge the fares on which they believe they can make a commercial return. Slough Borough Council subsidises a limited number of services (see the next section), but the major exception is route 81 (Hounslow – Colnbrook – Slough) which is part of the London Bus Network and provided under contract to Transport for London. Therefore fares charged by Transport for London apply to this service.

The figure below shows the bus services currently provided in Slough.



Sample Adult Weekly Fares

Different bus operators charge different levels of fares within the same area. Some charge different fares according to whether a ticket is purchased electronically before travel (by mobile phone) or purchased from the bus driver at the time of travel. As an example, this can be seen in the charges for journeys made for travel in Slough for one week's travel for a sample of operators in Slough.

Operator	Ticket	Fare Charged
First in Berkshire	FirstWeek (mobile)	£22.00
	FirstWeek (on-bus)	£20.00
	10-Trip (mobile)	£24.00
Thames Valley Buses (route 5)	7-day ticket	£15.00
Transport for London	7-Day Bus and Tram Pass	£21.20
	Weekly Oyster or contactless fare cap	£21.20

There is significant variation in how the tickets can be used. FirstWeek, 7-day tickets and the 7-day bus and tram pass can be used for an unlimited number of journeys within the specified time period. The 10-trip mobile offered by First provides 10 individual bus trips – so if a user has to change bus, he or she has to use another ticket. The fare for each journey made on the 10-trip ticket - £2.40, compares with the £1.50 that Transport for London charges for a single journey.

Transport for London's fare cap means that a user is charged the single fare (£1.50) for each journey made until he or she reaches the value of cap (£21.20). From then no charge is made for travel.

Child Fares

The different operators in Slough have different policies on child fare availability:

- First charge around 2/3 the adult fare for children aged 5-15;
- Thames Valley Buses charge around ¾ the adult fare but extend the child discount to age 18, or 21 for those attending college in Slough; and
- Transport for London applies half-fare to children under 16 and around ¾ of the adult fare to children aged 17-18 (in both cases children outside London).

Concessionary Fares and Other Discounted Fares

Slough Borough Council operates the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme, and so people qualifying on grounds of age or disability travel for free on Mondays – Fridays between 09:30 and 23:00, and all-day on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays. In addition, there are the following schemes:

- Heathrow Airport Limited operates a discounted travel scheme for staff employed at the Airport. For workers living in Slough and travelling by bus this is £25 per month. This is valid on First in Berkshire, Courtney and Thames Valley buses;
- Slough Borough Council operates a discounted travel scheme with First Great Western and First in Berkshire for travel to full-time further education for pupils aged 16-18 whose parents receive maximum level of Working Tax Credit or Income Support; and
- Route BR started operation in January 2019 between Slough rail station and the Bath Road Trading Estate. This has a day ticket price of £6.00 to members of the public but Slough Borough Council has recently operated a trial to provide free off-peak travel to Slough residents.

Bus Fares in Other Local Authorities

The weekly prices in Slough of £15.00 - £22.00 can be compared to other fares:

- Windsor and Maidenhead – the main local operator, Courtney Buses' weekly ticket price for its Maidenhead and Windsor is £17.00 (£16.15 if bought on a mobile phone);
- Buckinghamshire – the illustration is High Wycombe. Arriva the Shires and Carousel Buses both provide services here. A weekly ticket for Arriva's High Wycombe Zone costs £17.00, Carousel Buses £15.00;
- Surrey – First in Berkshire operate route 8 (Slough – Windsor – Staines – Heathrow Terminal 5) with the same fares as shown above. Another illustration for Surrey in the same area is White Bus route 441 (Englefield Green – Staines). Here the weekly ticket prices vary by distance. From Egham to Staines a weekly ticket is £24.00, and from Englefield Green £30.00. Ten-trip carnet tickets are also available - £28.80 from Egham to Staines and £37.80 from Englefield Green. All these fares are significantly greater than those charged by First in Slough; and
- London – As noted above, the price of a 7-day bus or tram pass on the Transport for London network is £21.20. However, if one person makes one journey each way to and from work for five days then the 'pay as you go' fare will be £1.50 x 10 = £15.00.

2) Information on routes subsidised by SBC.

Currently the following services receive financial support from Slough Borough Council:

- Route 5 (Slough Bus Station - Cippenham) - the bulk of the route is operated commercially by Reading Buses, but the route west of Moor Furlong, certain journeys at the start and end of the day and the Sunday service receive financial support;
- Route 4 (Slough Bus Station – Maidenhead) – Monday to Sunday evening services (daytime services are commercial);
- Route 6 (Slough Bus Station - Wexham Court Estate) – Sunday daytime services (Monday to Saturday services are commercial; and
- Goldsworthy Way – SBC makes a financial contribution to Buckinghamshire County Council to divert a limited service (Maidenhead – Slough Bus Station via Dorney) to serve Goldsworthy Way.

SBC instituted the subsidy to elements of routes 4, 5 and 6 to protect services following First's withdrawal of certain services in January 2018.

3) Issues and options on how the Council can promote the improvement of bus services locally

Speed and punctuality

Whilst the Council has made significant investment in bus priority and other measures to improve bus speeds, buses are still subject to delays and slow speeds caused by traffic congestion. These not only put passengers off travelling by public transport but make it more expensive to operate, so the higher cost of providing the service is borne by fewer passengers.

To give an example, in the morning peak buses on route 7 (Slough – Langley – Heathrow) are scheduled to take 62 minutes in the AM peak, 50 minutes in the middle of the day and 41 minutes in the late evening. If buses could achieve the late evening journey times throughout the day, then it is estimated that the route would need around two fewer buses, saving an estimated £350,000 in annual operating cost which currently has to be met either by fares or subsidy.

Fares

Whilst the analysis in section 2 shows that fares in Slough generally are comparable with other areas, an issue in Slough is that one operator's tickets are not valid on another operator's bus. There are some exceptions – services procured by Slough Borough Council are required to accept other operators' tickets on the same sections of route, and First period tickets are valid on route WP1 to Wexham Park Hospital operated by Redline Buses.

The lack of ticket acceptance means that (for instance) a fare payer between Cippenham and Wexham Park Hospital has to pay two fares to complete their journey. Slough Borough Council has the powers to make a multi-operator ticketing scheme, such that the traveller could buy one ticket to travel from Cippenham to Wexham Park Hospital. This could not, however, replace bus operators' own tickets. Surrey County Council has recently introduced a similar scheme – Acorn – in North Surrey. SBC may wish to consider collaborating with other authorities to deliver a multi-operator ticketing scheme.

Coverage

Most areas of Slough are within a five-minute walk of a bus service. However, some routes do not have late evening or Sunday buses. For instance, the last bus from Slough Bus Station to Priory Estate on is at 18:51 on Mondays to Fridays and at 18:21 on Saturdays. There is no Sunday service to Priory Estate.

SBC could consider whether it should consider providing financial support to allow more services to be provided in the evenings and Sundays.

Connectivity

Slough has a number of services towards Heathrow Airport – a major employer – but from the west of the town centre it is generally necessary to change buses at Slough Bus Station. The current network operated by First – whereby buses start in the town centre – stems in part from the lack of reliability of the highway network (see ‘Speed and punctuality’ above).

SBC should consider working with the bus operators to try to re-connect these links so as to provide direct services from Cippenham and Britwell to Heathrow, for example. Other examples where SBC could consider means of improving connectivity include links with Uxbridge, where at present a bus runs every 30 minutes between Slough Bus Station and Uxbridge with a scheduled journey time in the AM peak of 45 minutes. First previously tried to operate a faster service and whilst this was commercially unsuccessful it could be re-considered.

Route BR (SMART phase 1) provides a fast and punctual link between Slough rail station and the Bath Road frontages. Crowding on the service is constraining the potential for more people to use it and SBC may wish to consider funding additional capacity at peak times.

Passenger Information

Passenger information is provided by a variety of means – by bus operators themselves, and through other media such as Traveline and Google maps. SBC’s website <http://www.slough.gov.uk/parking-travel-and-roads/planning-your-journey.aspx> signposts users to these sources of information, and SBC maintains a comprehensive map, but SBC may wish to consider opportunities to improve this and to work with operators to provide web-based information to a common standard.

SBC also seeks to ensure that comprehensive roadside information is provided. SBC may wish to consider how this could be further improved, particularly wayfinding so that passengers have re-assurance that they are at the correct stop.

SBC maintains a real-time passenger information system and may wish to consider how better to make this available to users – through apps for instance.

Bus Passenger Infrastructure

SBC also maintains bus stops and the bus station. There are a number of ongoing issues which could be addressed including ensuring that buses can deploy their wheelchair ramps consistently at all stops and where possible improving the maintenance and cleaning of passenger infrastructure.

Officers are currently conducting a survey of bus stop infrastructure to identify where gaps in accessibility exist.

4) How the Council was working with business/partners and with neighbouring authorities to develop and manage services.

SBC delivers bus services in conjunction with a variety of organisations:

- Heathrow Airport – SBC works closely with Heathrow Airport Limited to secure as far as possible bus services that meet the needs of its residents working at the Airport. An example of this includes the delivery of bus services to meet the needs of workers starting shifts at 04:00;
- SEGRO – SBC requires SEGRO to provide financial support to the bus service now branded as ‘The Trader’ to ensure that there is a link between the Buckingham Avenue section of the Trading Estate and Slough rail station;

- Wexham Park Hospital – SBC worked with the Hospital to secure a direct bus service between Slough rail and bus stations and the Hospital and subsequently made it a planning condition for Frimley Park Hospital trust to secure delivery of this service;
- Bath Road Trading Estate – SBC has worked intensively with landlord AEW and four of the businesses to secure delivery of route BR (the first phase of SMART) at no cost to itself; and
- SBC maintains regular dialogue with bus operators providing services in Slough and with neighbouring transport authorities.

6 **Comments of Other Committees**

- 6.1 This report has not been considered by any other committees.
- 6.2 The Committee is asked to note that a previous report presented to the O&S Panel on 11th April 2019, considered the legislative and regulatory framework related to bus services and fares and the challenges in implementing a uniform multi operator fare structure. The Panel then requested further information on fare comparisons, supported services and work undertaken with partners and neighbouring authorities to enhance services.
- 6.3 The Committee is asked to note that the Disability Task & Finish Group presented a report to the Health Scrutiny Panel on 25th March 2019, which includes detailed work on the accessibility of public transport in Slough. The Task & Finish Group will develop an implementation plan prior to submission of its recommendations to Cabinet in July 2019. The report is available here:
<http://www.slough.gov.uk/moderngov/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=140&MId=6194&Ver=4>

7 **Conclusion**

This report provides a comparison of fares across operators in the region, details on supported bus services, issue sand options on improvements of services locally and details on how the council have worked with partners and neighbouring authorities to enhance services.

The committee are asked to consider the details and information in the report, reflect on the content with the view to inform and or consider against any recommendations or strategies they may put forth.

8 **Appendices Attached**

None

9 **Background Papers**

None.