

HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
PANEL

THURSDAY, 16 NOVEMBER 2017

PRESENT: Councillors Hari Sharma (Chairman), Jesse Grey (Vice-Chairman), Maureen Hunt, Paul Lion, Julian Sharpe, Malcolm Beer and Shamsul Shelim

Also in attendance: Councillor Phillip Bicknell

Officers: Andy Jeffs, Mark Lampard, Darren Gotch, Tony Carr and Karen Shepherd

APOLOGIES

An apology for absence was received from Councillor Da Costa.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor Sharma declared a personal interest in the item 'Arriva Click Demand Response' as he worked for First Group.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 21 September 2017 be approved, subject to the addition of the following wording to the item 'Cycle Strategy':

'The Chairman agreed to open the membership of the Task and Finish Group to members of the public.'

ARRIVA CLICK DEMAND RESPONSE

Members received a presentation on Arriva Click Demand Responsive 'Corner to Corner' transport from Simon Mathieson, Business Development Manager at Arriva.

Mr Mathieson explained that Arriva had been piloting a 'corner to corner' demand responsive bus service in Sittingbourne, Kent since March 2017. The pilot had been successful and popular. Arriva had big ambitions to develop the service elsewhere and had recently ordered 35 more vehicles to enable this to happen. Members noted that Arriva was a pan-European transport company owned by Deutsche Bahn since 2010. Arriva was aware that local authorities were facing cuts to budgets, increased demand for social transport, falling passenger numbers, increased congestion and concerns over air quality.

The demand responsive bus scheme helped to address some of the issues as it aggregated people travelling from multiple origins to multiple destinations in an efficient and convenient way. The automated system matched journeys and adjusted routes. There was no manual intervention required, but back office back up was available if needed. Algorithms were used to ensure optimal routes were chosen within built-in parameters. In Sittingbourne routes were never more than 20% away from the direct route. The 16-seater vehicles were high specification and could be configured in various ways. The vehicles used in Sittingbourne were 10 seater plus

space for one wheelchair. The technology was able to teach itself demand patterns so an unbooked bus would be sent to the position nearest the next likely booking. The offer was a 20 minute window for collection; in Sittingbourne average waits were 10-11 minutes. Customers were able to book a ride via an app or by telephone or website. Journeys could be purchased via credit, on a pay as you go basis, or via a season ticket. Once booked, customers received details of the vehicle and driver who would pick them up, including a direct telephone number, along with journey details. Customers could cancel bookings before pick up at no cost. Mr Mathieson highlighted elements of the customer proposition including convenience, quality, accessibility, safety, shareability and excellent customer service.

Members noted that demand responsive services could be used in a number of environments including urban areas and also where services had traditionally been subsidised because of low demand. Members noted the growth in the Sittingbourne pilot, which was now achieving over 2000 rides per week. Via the usage of the app, Arriva was able to obtain instantaneous and very detailed data, which was used to improve the service and manage driver and vehicle resourcing. It was noted that the proportion of people using the service in Sittingbourne for their daily commute had reduced over time, with increased use for leisure, shopping and visiting friends and family. The data also showed that 30% of respondents had shifted from using their car. Therefore people previously not willing or able to use public transport were using the service.

Councillor Bicknell joined the meeting at 7.02pm.

Councillor Sharma commented that he had asked about on-demand buses at the UK Bus Summit four years previously, but the idea had not been taken seriously. He was pleased that the Managing Director of Arriva was supportive and wanted to drive the bus market into a revolutionary area. Mr Mathieson confirmed that current legislation allowed for on-demand services to operate without additional licences. As a bus service rather than a private hire operator, the service could take concessionary passes and receive the fuel subsidy.

Hugh Wilding, Headteacher at Claires Court School asked whether a service for Maidenhead could be extended out to Cippenham where a number of his staff lived.

Mr Mathieson responded that the model and zone used would be informed by stakeholders; if demand was clear then it could be included in the zone. The service was not restricted by, for example, borough boundaries. Darren Gotch, Traffic Engineer commented that the borough was already discussing options with Slough. Mr Mathieson confirmed that there was no issue with the buses going onto private land, such as a school property. Detours at certain times of day could be considered to meet specific demand. Trips could be pre-booked up to one month in advance and employers could bulk book for staff. If there was sufficient demand, a vehicle could be block booked for one destination.

Olu Odeniyi, President of Maidenhead Chamber of Commerce, asked whether a business or organisation such as an industrial estate could buy passes for staff. Mr Mathieson explained that this was straightforward. A company could set up a direct debit or buy long-term passes and give staff or visitors a promo-code to use. The 20 minute wait window could be flexed by the level of demand. 15 minute slots could be pre-booked to minimise latency. Some services may require a subsidy, for example to

a business park until patronage increased and the service became commercially viable. Borough traffic models would be used to identify travel demands.

Hugh Wilding explained that he had held discussions over the summer with another operator about a bespoke schools service. In discussions relating to safeguarding it had become clear that although drivers were CRB checked, back office staff were not and this would be an issue.

Mr Mathieson commented that it was too early to determine if the service in Sittingbourne had had a significant impact on traffic flows, but it was not necessarily the ideal place to model the service. Key factors for an ideal model would be more leisure services and a major hospital within the zone. He explained that the Sittingbourne service was on the right trajectory to break even within 12 months. The average fare was slightly lower than hoped however this was likely a result of free rides, flat rates and credit sharing that had been given to encourage demand at the start. The fare was pitched between a bus and a taxi at approximately £1 per mile. The fare price did not change based on number of users; yield management was not allowed under the regulations. If demand increased beyond the 16 seater vehicle for a route, the preference would be for more vehicles rather than larger vehicle.

Councillor Bicknell commented that traditionally bus providers were reluctant to share data about commercial routes, particularly if they were deemed unviable. Mr Mathieson stated that Arriva was committed to open data and would be prepared to share data with borough traffic engineers. A potential zone for Maidenhead would be larger than the current zone in Sittingbourne, therefore would require more vehicles. He confirmed that the app complied with GDPR regulations. Arriva took customer data very seriously and worked with the app developer Via in this respect. All data was stored on an Amazon server.

The Chairman thanked Mr Mathieson for his presentation.

The clerk was asked to add the presentation slides to the agenda page on the borough website.

2018/19 BUDGET PREPARATION

Members considered the Budget Preparation 2018/19 report that would be presented to Cabinet on 23 November 2017.

Mark Lampard, Finance Partner, explained that details of the budget were being presented earlier than usual to enable full scrutiny before the final Council approval in February. The September 2017 RPI figure of 3.9% had been utilised in most cases to increase fees and charges. There were a few exceptions when market benchmarks were higher or lower. The budget proposals included £4.1m of efficiencies and increased income. Council tax would increase by 1.95% alongside an Adult Social Care levy of 3%. £700,000 of revenues would be used to balance the budget. Significant capital investment of £54m was planned including funding for regeneration-related projects such as £10m for temporary parking. The road resurfacing programme totalled just under £2m.

Councillor Beer commented that to keep people coming into the town centres, parking charges needed to be as low as possible. He asked if comparisons had been undertaken with other towns including tourist attractions. The Executive Director

confirmed that Windsor had been benchmarked with York and Bath; Maidenhead had been benchmarked with Reading, Bracknell, Slough and Wokingham. Councillor Hunt commented that Reading had the Oracle and Bracknell had a new shopping centre. Maidenhead did not have this yet and therefore she felt parking prices should only be increased once the regeneration was complete. The Executive Director explained the benchmarking had been undertaken before the new centre in Bracknell had opened. Slough and Wokingham did not have large shopping centres compared to Reading.

The Chairman highlighted that charges had not been increased for a few years. 1 hour and 2 hour tickets were still free for residents with an Advantage Card. The council was also spending £1.3m on CCTV to ensure cars were safe and there were new parking machines in Windsor. The rate of inflation had been increasing and operating costs had risen. The Executive Director highlighted that eleven car parks in Windsor would have increased charges, compared to six in Maidenhead. 61% of the increases were in Windsor compared to 29% in Maidenhead.

Councillor Shelim commented that Windsor was in the main used by tourists coming by coach therefore they did not use the car parks. He received lots of emails from business complaining their staff could not afford the parking charges. Windsor charges were already high compared to the rest of the borough. He understood the concessions for Advantage Card users but it was not fair for workers in Windsor and this could affect businesses.

The Executive Director commented that if the tariffs for both towns had been matched to the benchmarked figures, the increase would have been £3.1m. If the 3.9% figure was removed from the £750,000, the parking tariffs were still good in comparison. It was confirmed that the only factor considered in the benchmarking was parking tariffs, for example local house prices were not taken into account. Olu Odeniyi highlighted that Maidenhead had to compete with free parking at Taplow.

Councillor Bicknell highlighted that residents with an Advantage Card would see no increase in prices. On-street parking in Maidenhead was still free. Maidenhead had a number of attractions including a large M&S, an undercover shopping centre and a popular fruit market. Councillor Grey commented that the new charges should be embedded now with regeneration in mind.

Olu Odeniyi highlighted that a retail study undertaken in 2015 which showed the independent shops in Maidenhead town centre were kept alive by officers workers during the week. Councillor Bicknell commented that any town relied on office workers. He saw the main competition going forward to be internet shopping.

Councillor Shelim asked officers to discuss the proposals for increased parking charges in Windsor with the Windsor Town Manager and the Windsor Town Partnership Board.

Councillor Sharma commented that free parking could lead to problems when people left their car all day. Sensible charges would mean a space was used multiple times. Councillor Bicknell commented that he had received complaints from bus companies that charges were not high enough so people were not using buses; it was a difficult balancing act. Olu Odeniyi commented that buses running once an hour were not conducive to encouraging people into the town. The borough had a higher than average demographic for families with children compared to the south east. It was not

feasible for people to travel with young children on buses that only came once an hour.

The Executive Director confirmed that the redevelopment element had been outside the benchmarking for Broadway car park. The council was investing in both temporary and permanent car parking therefore realistic tariffs were required. Councillor Beer commented that low parking charges could act as a pump primer to encourage businesses and shops into the town centre. Park and Ride services were a key attraction for other towns. Councillor Hunt highlighted that business rates had once again increased this year.

Councillor Grey was pleased with the way officers had approached the issue; instead of a blanket increase, selective tariffs had been increased in comparison to other boroughs. Olu Odeniyi commented that some independent shops were just breaking even and were fearful that a reduction in footfall during regeneration could put them out of business. It was confirmed that certain car parks were at peak times full, therefore the 1 and 2 hour tariffs had been targeted.

Councillor Sharpe commented that it would be important to be clear when charges were last increased. When prices had not been raised for some time and there was a need to increase by round amounts, a balance needed to be struck. Councillor Bicknell commented that the technology had not yet fully caught up; contactless would resolve this issue.

Members noted the details of the capital programme for the relevant service areas.

Councillor Hunt raised an issue with traffic backing up at the Burchetts Green roundabout. Councillor Bicknell responded that officers were aware of the issue and he would be happy to ask officer to look at possible solutions and come back to Councillor Hunt outside the meeting. Tony Carr, Traffic Engineer, commented that a number of locations had been highlighted including the Burchetts Green roundabout. The proposed budget of £120,000 may not be enough to cover all the locations. Councillor Lion commented that traffic lights could be an option at Burchetts Green. Councillor Bicknell explained that the council had term contractors for such works; checks were in place to ensure contract prices were competitive.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That The Panel noted the report and the appendices relevant to highways, transport and environment service areas.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 8.35 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....