

HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
PANEL

MONDAY, 5 FEBRUARY 2018

PRESENT: Councillors Hari Sharma (Chairman), Wisdom Da Costa, Maureen Hunt, Paul Lion, Julian Sharpe, John Story and Shamsul Shelim.

Also Present: Councillors Phillip Bicknell and Ed Wilson.

Also in attendance: Martin Gilbert, Reading Buses

Officers: Wendy Binmore, Darren Gotch, Alison Knight, Mark Lampard and Ben Smith

APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Quick.

APPOINTMENT OF VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That Councillor Quick be appointed as Vice-Chairman.

The Chairman proposed Councillor Quick to be Vice-Chairman, Councillor Shelim seconded the proposal.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

The Chairman declared a personal interest as he was a full time employee of First Group as a bus driver. He confirmed that he attended Panel with an open mind.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 16 November 2017 be approved.

DEMAND RESPONSE SERVICE FROM READING BUSES

The Chairman stated he had been involved with transport for many years. Local Authorities were set targets to meet for clean air and good bus services were an integral part of the solution. Cities were grinding to a halt and challenging how people travelled was the way forward. He added there was a need to tackle UK air quality as currently, the UK's clean air zones were breaking European standards.

The Chairman explained that diesel cars accounted for 41% of air pollution and testing of Euro 6 buses and retro fitting equipment to standard buses meant the emissions produced were 95% cleaner than current buses which meant ultra clean solutions. Buses could provide the solution for tomorrow.

The Chairman stated companies needed to make a profit so collaborative working with the Council was the way forward; passengers wanted lower fares, convenience and comfort but, currently, train fares were cheaper than buses and patronage of buses

had decreased as buses were not competitive. This meant that buses would continue to lose passengers.

Martin Gilbert, Reading Buses gave the Panel a presentation on a possible Click and Demand Service that Reading Buses could provide to the Borough. The main points of his presentation were as follows:

- Martin Gilbert, Reading Buses wanted to introduce a new local bus operating partnership with the Borough.
- Reading Buses was a council owned company but, it was not run by Reading Borough Council. The bus company was apolitical.
- Reading Buses provided a comprehensive bus network
- Reading buses provided a service which supported economic growth of the region.
- They provided services which aligned to congestion busting initiatives
- Reading Buses had a long history and award winning service
- Lots of investment and growth as an organisation with 600 employees, 200 vehicles in their fleet and they also provided apprenticeships
- They ran a colour coded network and used corporate colours for their contract with Vodafone
- In November 2017, First Group left the 702 Greenline route and Reading Buses felt there was potential to run the service
- Reading Buses took on the Greenline Service which serves commuters and tourists
- 1 December 2017 The Royal Borough officers asked if Reading were interested in taking on other opportunities
- Reading Buses were active in Slough and Bracknell and wanted to work with RBWM
- Reading Buses had a micro-depot in Slough
- They wanted more people on buses and were actively trying to get more people on board
- They offered vibrantly coloured buses with bright coloured timetables
- They looked at taking on the No. 2 route and ran it at a slightly less than a half hourly service
- Reading Buses were the first operator to offer contactless payment for customer outside of London
- They were a large enough company to deliver a large service and small enough to still take on smaller routes
- Their mission was to connect people with places and people were a very important part of what they did.
- Air quality was very important and they were developing cleaner technology. They had launched gas powered vehicles and recently launched a Euro 6 vehicle and fully electric double decker bus; they had also developed a natural gas powered bus.
- Reading Buses were working with their local Chamber of Commerce and other partners to make sure all they keep their products at the forefront of all were underpinned by strong partnerships.
- Technology was changing as was transport, such as the introduction of Uber and the bus industry needed to wake up to be more of a dynamic demand bus service.
- Independent organisations could also deliver technological solutions

- Reading Buses launch an app that could book tickets and plan journeys. 76% of users gave positive feedback. It was a far more popular way of interacting with bus companies.
- Reading Buses still maintained traditional avenues as a large cohort of passengers still preferred traditional ways of using buses such as printed timetables
- Reading Buses worked with Ready Bus which was a Dial-a-Ride type bus service; the principals could be transferred over to a main bus route with the latest technology
- A technology laboratory had been installed in their bus depot to develop software to enable a click and demand service
- Reading Buses could offer a value and cost driven arrangement; they were a locally based organisation which focused on the region and they were setting out to do the right thing in the area
- Reading Buses would work with partners to provide technology to enable click and demand services. They were also happy to look into using different branding for the service.
- Reading Buses felt a smaller Mercedes Sprinter type vehicle would work in the Borough to access smaller streets. Wifi and USB charging would be built-in
- A click and demand style service could help with budget pressures and changing demand
- Funding was the number one challenge
- Reading Buses said they needed to run a service which did not impact negatively on other bus services and taxi operations in the area
- The click and demand service could be aligned with the end of existing contracts
- Customer accessibility – needed to address whether or not it would be a door to door service or, if there would be specific meeting points to meet the bus
- Any potential service would need to address how far the bus could deviate from the route to collect passengers
- There were currently only four operations of click and demand in the UK

The Chairman stated she believed in competition but, lower bus fares were needed with better terms of employment for workers. Councillor Lion enquired as to whether or not there would be wheelchair access. Martin Gilbert, Reading Buses, confirmed there would be wheelchair access.

Martin Gilbert, Reading Buses, confirmed that Reading was developing a click and demand service. However, the challenges for Reading were different to the royal Borough. There was higher density bus users, but they were give it serious thought and looking to develop the service in the evenings and at weekends.

Councillor Da Costa queried what were the experiences of other operators where the service would be implemented. Martin Gilbert responded that it was a new; where the service had been implemented in areas such as Kent, another operator saw their customer numbers decline so there needed to be a blend of services. There needed to be a genuine need for the service so that customers were not taken from an already existing service.

Councillor Shelim suggested a click and demand service could be used for school runs. Martin Gilbert stated it could be used as schools were a very important part of a cohort of users. There were a whole host of journeys that could be covered to stop

people using cars; there was no reason why buses could not incorporate home to school transport.

Councillor E. Wilson said one of the issues was the number two was run by two bus companies and residents thought the Council ran the buses. He thought there was still a gap around running to Legoland with connections to London and Bracknell. He wanted to know how Reading Buses were communicating that to residents and promoting the route. He also wanted to know what Reading Buses were going to do to encourage more people onto the buses. Martin Gilbert responded a change in opportunity for routes came round very quickly as he had only been approached on 1 December 2017. Due to negotiations the start of the service did not start until 1 January 2018, so there was more to come to the service. Reading Buses had vehicles brightly branded with full colour timetables and a dedicated website which were all separate from the app. Martin asked if there were any partnerships they could form with businesses, schools and the local authority.

Martin Gilbert explained that the extension to Legoland was a school days extension only but that was a short term solution. The route was about serving Dedworth and not Legoland. He was now at the listening phase to help routes progress and grow. If anything changed, they would run a consultation.

Councillor Hunt stated the A4 between Reading and Maidenhead in the evenings was very heavy with traffic. She wanted to know if Reading Buses were thinking of introducing a bus service there to reduce the traffic. With the addition of Crossrail, that could mean there would be even more traffic, a bus service could be an alternative way to get into London instead of the Train. Martin Gilbert responded Reading Buses did run a London Service every hour. Commuting to London was a tough area and difficult to compete with the train as the train service was reliable with greater capacity as well as having cheaper fares. Reading Buses did try and look after their bus passengers and they were looking to evolve the service and improve it.

Martin Gilbert stated in terms of traffic on the A4, he had not been previously aware as the Maidenhead corridor was usually rung by First Group, but Wokingham were looking at introducing a Park 'n' Ride scheme. He added that Reading Buses would work with anyone in any area under the right circumstances.

Councillor Sharpe said he was interested in the economics of the bus service. It seemed there were a lot of buses with fewer people on them and prices were very high. If the Borough moved to smaller buses, what would the difference in price be compared to a double decker or larger bus; could smaller buses reduce prices? Martin Gilbert stated he did not want to run empty buses. The single biggest cost was the driver and that cost did not change regardless of the size of the bus. There were some savings in running smaller buses and they were cheaper to buy and maintain.

Councillor Story asked if the 702 route could be rerouted to go through Ascot; a lot of people in Ascot worked at Heathrow, he had been enquiring about a service for that area to Heathrow for years. Martin Gilbert stated the 702 was a very long journey as it was approximately four services in one, so it would be difficult for a trunk route to serve that area. He may look to separate the service into two routes but, it was still unlikely to service that area. He added that he believed that Heathrow now had a service at key shift times which ran from Bracknell which might be able to service that area.

Martin Gilbert confirmed that Reading Buses drivers had full PCV licences. If a smaller vehicle was used, they could potentially go to a D1 licence but, that would incur a cost. He stated that pricing was flexible and in the first instance, the click and demand service would not operate 100% commercially, it would need partnership input. He would not commit to setting fares until all the facts around the service were known.

The Chairman stated the Royal Borough was a rural location with great opportunities due to the 7m visitors each year so it was a good place to run a bus service. Martin Gilbert stated in order to get more people onto buses, high quality vehicles were needed with excellent customer services and a lot of publicity.

Councillor Bicknell queried if a click and demand service could be used in getting children to and from school. Martin Gilbert explained that Reading Buses approach would be the same as any other operator. Realistically, one would have to be careful that the service didn't replace one large vehicle with several smaller vehicles. The Head of Commissioning/Communities said the click and demand service could be a market changer. Competition could spark positive changes with other groups already in the area that could mean a better service for residents and cheaper fares. He needed to look longer term at what the Borough introduced in order to be sustainable and meet demand.

The Chairman thanked Martin Gilbert from Reading Buses for attending Panel to give the presentation.

STREET LIGHTING

Ben Smith, Head of Commissioning/Communities explained to Members that the item had been added to the agenda as Councillor Da costa had raised some questions regarding the Borough's street lighting. He continued to provide Members with an update on the Borough's street lighting replacement programme which included the following main points:

- 14,000 streetlights in the Borough were being replaced as part of the scheme.
- AA Lighting were carrying out the installation and the maintenance of the lights
- The contract was awarded in July 2017 and 12,000 streetlights had already been replaced.
- The programme was due to be completed in February 2018
- A new management system allowed real-time notifications of broken lights
- There was a two day turn around to repair or replace broken lights
- SSE was not contracted by the Borough to repair cables or the electricity supply to the lights
- The management system picked up the repeat faults and a suite of indicators were in place to help manage those
- The contract with AA Lighting was managed by the commissioning team who held weekly meetings and monthly key indicator meetings to check performance
- Replacement of lights was light for light – remove one light and replace it with a new one.
- Moving forward, the AA Lighting contract was a long term co-terminus with warranty of equipment.

The Chairman stated he had received 25-30 complaints regarding lighting, he had found that the most complaints related to lights being too bright or too blue. He

explained that the lights could be adjusted by a management system and all complaints were resolved. He felt the contract was working well and he had received no complaints from farmers; AA Lighting provided an excellent service.

Councillor Da Costa said he had heard concerns from residents about the failure of lighting in certain areas and also, about the poor level of response from the call centre. There were lights that were said to have been repaired but, they had not been. He asked the Head of Commissioning/Communities once onto the new regime of lighting, had a safety audit been carried out and had the response from the call centre improved at all. The Head of Commissioning/Communities responded there was a strategy for where the lighting was placed. The contract was to change light for light which was done to British Safety Standard. He added there might need to be a revisit of where lighting columns were placed, once the light swap was finished. Then the Borough could move on to finding out where lighting could be improved.

Regarding the responsiveness of the call centre, the head of Commissioning/Communities stated there was a reporting function on the Council's website which sent request direct to AA Lighting for repair. There was no direct interaction with the call centre. If a resident called into Customer Services, they would log the incident in the same way as if a resident used the website. The contract management meetings took place monthly to check KPI's and ensure all lights were working. Fines were issued for bulbs not repaired within strict deadlines.

The Head of Commissioning/Communities stated all lights were easily adjustable to lower settings if too bright, it was dynamic lighting. Councillor E. Wilson said he had received very positive comments from residents regarding safety since the new lighting had been in place. He was waiting on six lights for his area but, he understood they were being swapped out that week.

Mark Lampard, Finance Partner Communities & Place directorates explained to Members that savings of £450,000 over the next two years were on target to be met. Councillor Bicknell stated he was at the sharp end of the scheme. He said the light was different and the beauty of the lighting programme was that the lights could be individually adjusted by a computer. AA Lighting had also added extra shrouding to certain lights to prevent light leaking into homes. There were many light columns and lights that went back decades so it had taken some time to find bulbs to fit them. The Borough also had to address issues of some columns having no power to them which was beyond the Council's control. He wanted to know where the issues raised by Councillor Da Costa was so that they could be rectified as soon as possible.

Councillor Hunt said she had received a complaint about a light shining straight into a residents bedroom. She rang the Council and got an exceptional service; officers went straight out and shrouded the light. The Chairman requested that Councillor Da Costa go directly to officers with his queries so that issues could be resolved at source and quickly as possible.

BUDGET 2018/19

Mark Lampard, Finance Partner Communities & Place directorates gave the Panel a presentation on the 2018/19 Budget. The main points of the presentation were as follows:

- Key messages:
 - Lowest council tax outside of London

- Resident parking remain free in contrast to neighbouring authorities
- Keeping all 14 libraries open, some with increased opening hours
- 86% of schools in the Borough were good or outstanding
- Maintained £330k grant funding to community organisations and increased support for the Citizens Advice Bureau
- Inflation of RPI 3.9%
- Indicative fees and charges increased by up to 3.9% or more where justified market benchmarks were higher
- Increase in core council tax of 1.95%
- Adult social care precept of 3% applied for the final year
- Major Capital investment of £65m – due to the regeneration in Maidenhead
- Ongoing programme of £5.4m savings and additional income
- Indicative fees and charges
 - Parking charges:
 - Benchmarking to relevant towns and cities showed the Royal Borough to be low
 - Intention to reach benchmark over a period of years
 - No change to all discounted rates for resident Advantage Card holders
 - General parking charge increases towards the benchmarks
 - Season ticket increases depending on the location
 - Resulting in savings of £1.5m
 - Advantage Card holders won't be impacted by price increases
- Efficiencies and income: £5.4m
 - Outcome based care commissioning efficiency £220k
 - Project management of homecare £200k
 - ICT optimization £320k
 - Bringing revenues and benefits enforcement in-house £300k
 - Parking income growth £325k
 - CCTV upgrade and optimization £202k
- Annual Capital programme £7m net
 - Replacement parking card equipment £775k
 - Commercial and operational estate repairs and maintenance £1.045m
 - Replacement equipment at Windsor Leisure Centre £540k
 - Dedworth Road £350k
 - New London Road roundabout £250k
 - Voluntary organisations grants maintained £200k
- Capital investment net £65m net
 - Braywick Leisure Centre £15.8m
 - Temporary parking facilities £10m
 - Schools expansions £4.9m

The Chairman stated borrow to invest was a good thing. He asked about the fair funding review and if there was any information on that. The Finance Partner Communities & Place directorates said he would get back to him with the answer to the fair funding review.

Councillor Da Costa stated the Highways budget made savings, he wanted more in depth detail on that and also the capital budget for projects in the next couple of weeks. The Finance Partner Communities & Place directorates confirmed all the information was in the full report in the agenda pack.

The Head of Commissioning/Communities stated the resurfacing budget was £1.65m worth of investment. The specific roads that were to be resurfaced would be announced later. He added with the money has been saved in the highways budget, it was because a lot of the functions had been outsourced so that meant there was a reduction in the rate. Councillor Da Costa asked if he could sit with officers and go through the budget in more detail. The Head of Commissioning/Communities and the Finance Partner, Communities & Place directorates confirmed they were happy to meet with Councillor Da Costa to go through the budget in greater detail and answer any queries he might have.

Councillor Hunt asked about replacement parking card equipment and what it was. The Finance Partner Communities & Place directorates confirmed it was for pay machines at car parks to accept cards including Advantage Cards.

Councillor Bicknell stated when one goes into partnership mode, the Borough was expecting to make savings without cutting quality or reducing vital services. Volkers were first class, diligent and on the front foot in ability to respond. He was always happy to listen to any problems as was the Head of Commissioning/Communities and his team. He added parking charges were not increasing for residents if they had an Advantage Card.

The Chairman stated the £7m in annual capital programme showed good governance of the Council. He endorsed the recommendations as the budget was for people, growth and investment; he congratulated officers on the work they had done.

Councillor Shelim stated that pothole repairing was much better under the new regime. The Head of Commissioning/Communities confirmed that it was a different contractor carrying out the works and quality standards had been written into the contract. They had provided good performance.

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the Highways, Transport & Environment Overview & Scrutiny Panel endorsed the recommendations to Cabinet.

The meeting, which began at 6.30 pm, finished at 8.25 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....