

INFRASTRUCTURE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL

TUESDAY, 8 JUNE 2021

PRESENT: Councillors Sayonara Luxton (Chairman), Christine Bateson (Vice-Chairman), Phil Haseler, Neil Knowles and Gurch Singh

Also in attendance: Councillor John Baldwin, Councillor Gurpreet Bhangra, Councillor Gerry Clark, Councillor Samantha Rayner, Councillor Donna Stimson and Councillor Ewan Larcombe

Officers: Fatima Rehman, Chris Joyce, Andrew Durrant, Shilpa Manek and Tim Golabek

APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN AND VICE-CHAIRMAN

Councillor Bateson nominated Councillor Luxton to be Chairman, which was seconded by Councillor Haseler. A named vote was taken.

Appointment of Councillor Luxton as Chairman (Motion)	
Councillor Sayonara Luxton	For
Councillor Christine Bateson	For
Councillor Phil Haseler	For
Councillor Neil Knowles	Against
Councillor Gurch Singh	Against
Carried	

RESOLVED; That Councillor Luxton be Chairman of the Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the municipal year 2021/22.

Councillor Haseler nominated Councillor Bateson to be Vice Chairman, which was seconded by Councillor Luxton. A named vote was taken.

Appointment of Councillor Bateson as Vice Chairman (Motion)	
Councillor Sayonara Luxton	For
Councillor Christine Bateson	For
Councillor Phil Haseler	For
Councillor Neil Knowles	Against
Councillor Gurch Singh	Against
Carried	

RESOLVED; That Councillor Bateson be Vice Chairman of the Infrastructure Overview and Scrutiny Panel for the municipal year 2021/22.

WELCOME FROM THE NEW CHAIRMAN

The Chairman welcomed the Panel.

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor Davey and Councillor Knowles substituted.

DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

None.

MINUTES

RESOLVED UNANIMOUSLY: That the minutes of the meeting held on 6 April 2021 be approved.

The Chairman informed Members of progress on actions arising from the previous minutes:

Actions from the previous meeting	Update
Councillor Davey to be informed of the estimated number of evictions likely to be made, and the Crucial Conversations training for Councillors to be explored offline.	<p>ACTION: Tracy Hendren to provide an update offline.</p> <p>Regarding Crucial Conversations, Emma Duncan, Monitoring Officer and Deputy Director of Law and Strategy, said offline that this would be picked up as part of the wider training that would be provided to Members in the new Code of Conduct. This included interactions between Members and staff and was likely to feature in the AGS action plan for next year, to form part of the work around governance resilience.</p>
Town Managers to provide future reports of activities in outlier shopping centres and high streets, such as Ascot and Eton.	David Scott said offline that the request was raised with the Town Centre Manager, however there was currently no provision for a footfall counter in the out of town centre areas, and no obvious place to locate ones that would act with a reliable basis as there is in Windsor and Maidenhead main shopping high street areas, where pedestrians are channelled into a narrow count zone. Car parking information was also not collected in parishes, as they were free of charge.
Chris Joyce to advise Councillor Baldwin of the timeliness of Project Centre offline.	See below.
Councillor Baldwin to be included in the Wraysbury Drain meeting.	Councillor Baldwin was invited and did not attend the call.

Councillor Baldwin said phase two of the active transport plans were emailed by Chris Joyce in August 2020, but the visual plan was published by the Project Centre in January 2021. A decision was to be made shortly after the publication, but it was difficult for councillors to visualise what was being proposed and the impact on the local communities before then. Chris Joyce said the delay between the bid and the schemes coming forward was because the Department for Transport (DfT) did not decide on funding until November 2020. Once funds were announced, initial concepts were developed into more detailed schemes.

Councillor Baldwin said evaluating whether outsourcing to Project Centre was a good contract had not been progressed. Chris Joyce said the borough had a contract with Project Centre until March 2022 and would then come for renewal, where the options for the contract would be reviewed.

Q4 PERFORMANCE UPDATE REPORT

Andrew Durrant, Executive Director of Place Services, said the report had been aligned to the Interim Council Strategy. Ascot footfall was included in the report following the Vice Chairman's comment in the last meeting. Whilst it was a challenging year, the council ensured vulnerable residents were supported and their needs were met where possible. Some service programs' delivery models were adapted to ensure there was continued service provision

where possible during the pandemic. Partners and the community played an essential role throughout the pandemic.

At close of 2020/21, six out of eight performance metrics met or exceeded targets, with one metric within the accepted tolerance threshold in relation to the percentage of other planning applications. In response to the pandemic, homeless households in temporary accommodation was untargeted in 2020/21 due to central government's Everyone In campaign. Highway contractor's responsiveness to urgent safety hazards in relation to the percentage of two-hour orders had improved from last year and was 99.8% in 2020/21. Footfall trends fluctuated in response to the lockdown restrictions, but the trends were broadly followed with lower volumes. The strong Shop Local sentiment and the RBWM Recovery Strategy continued to promote commercial centres of the borough as a safe place to visit and focused on retaining local spend.

Councillor Baldwin said he was concerned that the two mandatory consultees did not respond to the report, and Andrew Durrant said Adrien Waite was unwell and therefore unable to respond, and he was unable to respond on Tracy Hendren's behalf. The report had contributions from all teams. Councillor Knowles said a note from the mandatory consultees or those covering would be useful for completeness.

Councillor Haseler said it was positive that many homelessness incidents had been prevented given the current climate. Councillor Knowles asked if the 98% target throughout the year for emergency two-hour orders responded on time was an auto response to a report made through an emergency problem. Andrew Durrant said once the report was made, the response rate was triggered. The Vice Chairman asked how residents in the south of the borough and rural areas would access lateral flow tests if they did not have child support for instance. Andrew Durrant said Braywick and Windsor Leisure Centres were the initial lateral flow tests sites, but there were other methods such as home kits. This would be picked up offline.

ACTION: David Scott to update how residents in the south of the borough and rural areas would have access to lateral flow tests offline.

The Panel noted the item.

BUS ROUTES UPDATE

Chris Joyce, Head of Infrastructure, Sustainability and Economic Growth, said bus services outside of London had been deregulated since the 1980s, which withdrew local authorities' powers to control and direct where bus services were placed. This allowed private companies to operate on a commercial basis, setting routes, timetables, and fares. Where a commercial service was not viable, the council had powers to secure provision of any further public transport services it considered necessary through contracts and supported services.

There were national discussions about the drop in demand of bus services during the pandemic, which was supported through grants by central government. The national bus strategy, Bus Back Better, set out a new vision to increase bus service usage up to pre-pandemic levels and delivered new models of delivery. The strategy asked local authorities to either commit to enhanced partnerships, which was a new form of partnership with private organisations, or a franchising model by June 2021. The strategy also sought to implement bus service improvement plans by October 2021, and the government offered £100,000 in grants to support local authorities to undertake the work.

Councillor Haseler asked if the bus services decided what was commercially viable. Chris Joyce said a bus operator could put forward any route on a commercial basis, and if it did not recoup its costs, it would withdraw the service. The borough would be able to operate supported services; however, it could not compete with commercial services such as providing

subsidised routes. The borough could identify areas where there were no bus routes and put out a tender and bus companies would set out how much money they would need to operate.

Councillor Haseler asked how ward councillors should address representations made on changing and adding bus routes and Chris Joyce said his team should be contacted. As part of the bus service improvement plan, views on improving existing and additional routes would be explored and assessed. The purpose of enhanced partnerships was for a greater focus on service quality rather than a commercial approach.

The Vice Chairman asked if there would be funds for electric buses (e-buses) and Chris Joyce said e-buses were more expensive than diesel buses and central government had not yet announced the use of funding. The Vice Chairman said with cars transitioning to electric, would buses also be changing, and Chris Joyce said there was a transition to hybrid and e-buses. High demand routes were able to justify high investments, and the government had funding opportunities to upgrade fleets from diesel to hybrid and electric models. Councillor Knowles said having hybrid or e-buses could be part of the contracting basis for companies to bid and suggested options such as making town centres a low emission zone. Councillor Stimson, Cabinet Member - Climate Change, Sustainability, Parks and Countryside, said the borough would do everything in its capacity to decarbonise and electrify services where possible and seek funding availability.

The Vice Chairman asked how bus routes through multiple boroughs were managed and Chris Joyce said if it was a commercial service, bus operators decided the bus stops, fares, and routes, though they would often liaise with the borough. If it was supported services, neighbouring authorities could work in partnership to deliver the bus routes.

Councillor Knowles said there were bespoke taxi services for less mobile residents in Old Windsor to travel to GP practices because there were no direct transport links. The engagement with ward councillors in the bus service improvement plan would allow local intelligence such as this to be considered and could be an opportunity to have a demand and needs based analysis.

Councillor Singh said it was surprising to see the number of supported services in Maidenhead, which was a considerable cost to the borough. Councillor Singh asked if there were options to incentivise bus contractors to increase demand of buses, and Chris Joyce said the current model made it difficult to work in partnership with bus operators. Enhanced partnerships would allow the borough to work closely with bus operators and encourage usage and service quality rather than having a commercial focus. This was because once the contract was secured, it was in the operators' best interest to increase demand.

Councillor Singh said the borough had one of the lowest bus usage and highest car park usage in the country. With the regeneration of Maidenhead town centre, it was likely that the town centre car park would not be accessible for at least five years, and therefore supported services could be used to drive footfall and traffic into the town centre. Chris Joyce said the local borough was polycentric, with three town centres rather than one, therefore it made it more difficult for traditional bus services to increase demand. However, bus services and demand could be improved, as it was a cyclical process where the better quality the services were, the greater the demand would be, and therefore greater revenue would be generated. Councillor Singh suggested inviting Courtney Buses to the meeting.

Councillor Hilton asked what an enhanced partnership was, as from July 2021, only local transport authorities who are engaged in advanced partnerships would continue to receive any new sources of bus funding from central government. Tim Golabek, Service Lead – Transport and Infrastructure, said franchising was only available to certain authorities with combined mayoral powers and therefore this was not an option for the borough, unless the borough applied for additional powers from the DfT. Through franchising, an authority would own the bus services and would be franchised to a bus operator. Enhanced partnerships were a negotiation between the bus operator and authority, where they were contractually obliged to

benefit to bus operators and the borough. For instance, the authority may need to commit to improving aspects of the borough such as bus priority measures in certain locations, and bus operators may provide more buses or reduced fares.

Councillor Hilton asked if enhanced partnerships gave scope to working with all bus operators across the borough to change the way bus operators collectively worked. Chris Joyce said this was intended, and the bus strategy was looking into better integration between services, such as fares and ticketing. The national bus strategy advocated lower and simpler fares, simpler structures, and better integration.

WORK PROGRAMME

Councillor Haseler asked for clarification on the '21 mph speed limit in borough' suggested item, and Chris Joyce said this was not legal, as traffic signs could only be in tens. Councillors Singh and Knowles requested the Council Transport Strategy report to be considered by the Panel, and Councillor Singh suggested an update on traffic light works on Oldfield Road/A4 roundabout.

The meeting, which began at 6.15 pm, finished at 7.37 pm

CHAIRMAN.....

DATE.....