

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Place Scrutiny Panel **DATE:** 28<sup>th</sup> September 2021

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**WARD(S):** All

### **PART I** **FOR COMMENT & CONSIDERATION**

#### **BUS SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

##### 1. **Purpose of Report**

A Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) has been created in partnership between the Council and the bus operators of registered local services in Slough, along with a new Enhanced Partnership with the operators (EP). This is an essential development in the Council's response to the Government's National Bus Strategy (NBS). The BSIP is due to be submitted in its final form to the Department for Transport (DfT) by 31<sup>st</sup> October 2021. A cabinet report has been produced in support of this proposed BSIP plan. This, will be reviewed by cabinet on the 18<sup>th</sup> October. In order to present the most satisfactory version of both the cabinet report and BSIP, we are seeking comments from the Scrutiny panel first, as requested by the Lead Member, Cllr. Anderson. All comments and requests will be considered and applied to the cabinet report and BSIP as appropriate.

This is considered a matter of urgency due to the tight deadlines imposed by the DfT. There will be limited time available to apply any necessary changes following the panel meeting.

##### 2. **Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

*The Panel is requested:*

*a) to note the report for information regarding the BSIP and related Enhanced Partnership and*

*b) to make any comments and requests for possible amendment to the cabinet report to follow and the associated BSIP document.*

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

###### 3a. **Slough Wellbeing Strategy Priorities**

*The BSIP and Enhanced Partnership will contribute to meeting the needs of the Slough Wellbeing Strategy as follows:*

*Priorities:*

1. Starting Well

Increased availability and patronage of public transport is essential to all aspects of sustainability. The BSIP will help create a safer and more reliable network, which will be of benefit especially to young people, include school children, by meeting their transport needs in the first instance, and also forming part of a much wider behavioural change process that is needed in society, and which must cover all age groups.

#### 2. Integration (relating to Health & Social Care)

A better, more reliable bus network will lead to greater accessibility and mobility, particularly for those without private transport. The BSIP will help ensure that services will provide better access in particular to health care services and facilities, and all locations where people want and need to travel to. Improved connectivity across the borough is expected.

#### 3. Strong, healthy and attractive neighbourhoods

The BSIP includes measures to promote environmental sustainability, including better air quality and reduced carbon emissions. This includes proposals to support better quality fleets and zero emission buses. Furthermore, reduced congestion and better infrastructure, along with improved modal integration are all expected to be realised through the plan.

#### 4. Workplace health

As above, better environmental conditions will contribute to better workplace health, including a fitter workforce, for the bus companies and more widely throughout the borough.

### 3b. **Five Year Plan Outcomes**

The BSIP and the Enhanced Partnership will support all outcomes of the Five Year Plan, 2020-2025, noting, specifically:

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

The schemes that will be delivered through the Enhanced Partnership Plan will be designed to reduce congestion and improve safety at key locations, also to improve air quality, and will therefore lead to better public health across the borough.

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

Enhanced provision of public transport will improve social inclusion by making Slough more accessible and increasing mobility across the borough. This will provide better access to commercial / retail centres as well as access to jobs and education. Increased patronage of public transport will also contribute to the reduction in CO<sup>2</sup> and improved air quality.

#### **Outcome 4:** *Our residents will live in good quality homes*

The BSIP will focus on services and infrastructure which will provide high quality transportation links for both existing and new areas of housing development.

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

Better connectivity through improved services and links will contribute to economic growth. Greater priority for public transport and increased modal shift will reduce congestion and make journey times more reliable on the road network.

#### 4. Other Implications

##### (a) Financial

As proposed, the BSIP does not include any immediate financial commitments.

However, given the requirements of the Government and the DfT, in the absence of a satisfactory BSIP, a range of negative financial implications for the Council would be expected to arise.

From 2022, Local Authorities with BSIPs / EPPs in place will be invited to submit bids for EP / BSIP related schemes, for funding contributions from the overall £3bn pool. From Government guidance, it is not clear how much will be available in due course for scheme contributions. However, currently, the only way to have the opportunity to formally seek any such funding is to have an Enhanced Partnership in place.

An underlying principle applicable to all schemes and improvements proposed in the BSIP is that they are subject to availability of funding and that they are feasible in all relevant ways. Currently there is no funding available from the Council. There may be some consideration of the use of possible future Section 106 contributions as partial funding towards schemes, but this is not currently being proposed. Furthermore, the Council is currently seeking ways to reduce expenditure in any way legally and practically possible.

SBC officers will negotiate agreements with bus operators that are conditional on the level of funding that can be secured. This may lead to some efficiency savings in due course, but no such savings have been confirmed at this stage.

Bus operators will be expected to be equally committed to the BSIP (they will be joint owners of and legally bound to all commitments in the plan). This, in theory, would suggest financial investment and contribution. However, in addition to the need for all scheme delivery to be subject to available funding and feasibility, commercial interest will also be an inevitable factor affecting the likelihood of any such constraints.

The DfT has said that it will welcome bids to other funds / sources, e.g. Levelling Up, to contribute to the success of the EP.

Regarding services to Heathrow Airport, there is a possibility that funding opportunities may arise in the future, potentially to be provided by Heathrow Airport Limited, for improved services across the relevant authority areas. Noting the current economic circumstances and the impacts of COVID-19, no such funding sources have currently been made available.

Overall, subject to the successful establishment of the partnership, and ongoing effective provision of bus services and relations with the bus operators, no negative financial impacts are anticipated.

However, should the Council choose not to submit a satisfactory BSIP, this would immediately raise financial problems for the Council. This would include the cessation of COVID-19 related payments, which would reduce support for bus services and would therefore be detrimental to both the Council and the operators, who would then be obliged to provide funding for necessary measures from alternative sources.

A grant of £100K already has been received by SBC from the DfT from the Bus Capacity Grant. This was in response to the Council's provisional indication that it has

committed to an Enhanced Partnership arrangement and BSIP submission. A subsequent £50k has been received to further assist in the development of the BSIP.

The funding covers the following:

- Preparation of the formal statement committing to an Enhanced Partnership
- Development of the BSIP, including preparatory work with the bus operators
- Development of the subsequent specific scheme bids in the Enhanced Partnership Plan (EPP).

All of this expenditure is subject to satisfactory business cases being approved by the Expenditure Control Panel.

Consideration is already being given to the suspension of subsidies by the Council to support a number of services that are not commercially viable. The lack of a satisfactory BSIP would virtually guarantee that there is no scope to engage with the operators to try to maintain these services on any basis. It would also prevent the ability to bid for DfT funding for schemes in the lifetime of the National Bus Strategy, placing both the Council and bus operators at a disadvantage compared to other authorities where partnerships or franchises are in place.

The budget for the Council's contribution to the Enhanced Partnership will be managed by the Transport team in the Strategy and Infrastructure division of the Place directorate.

*(b) Risk Management*

A risk assessment has not been conducted specifically to accompany the preparation and submission of the BSIP to the DfT. However, when it comes to progressing proposed schemes, the risk assessments, notably including financial risks, will be considered and prepared as appropriate.

In broad terms, there is no financial risk associated with the preparation and submission of the BSIP and the Enhanced Partnership. Conversely, there would be a significant risk should the Council decide not to proceed with its BSIP commitments already made. This relates to the comments in the Finance section above.

Similarly, there are no policy related risks associated with the preparation and submission of the BSIP and the Enhanced Partnership. Given the options made available by Government to local transport authorities, the BSIP and EP route is considered the best way to deliver on policy commitments already made by the Council. Conversely, again, there would be a significant risk of failing to meet targets and commitments should the Council not continue with the BSIP and the Enhanced Partnership.

Recommendation from section 2 above	Risks/Threats/Opportunities	Current Controls	Using the Risk Management Matrix Score the risk	Future Controls
<i>To note the report for information regarding the BSIP</i>	<i>No risks. This is an opportunity to gain knowledge of the upcoming</i>	<i>Transport team engaging with the DfT and responding to all guidance.</i>		<i>The BSIP will be presented along with a report to the cabinet meeting on October 18<sup>th</sup></i>

	<p><i>implications of the NBS at local level. Also to ensure that the Council's BSIP is as well designed as possible to meet the needs of bus users and the wider community throughout the borough.</i></p>	<p><i>Professional consultants with detailed knowledge of Public Transport have been engaged to assist in the preparation of the BSIP and EP.</i></p> <p><i>Engagement with the bus operators is ongoing.</i></p>		<p>2021.</p> <p><i>All proposals for BSIP schemes and measures are subject to feasibility, funding and consultation.</i></p>
<p><i>To make any comments and requests for possible amendment to the cabinet report</i></p>	<p>No risks.</p> <p>As above, this is an opportunity for the BSIP to be fine-tuned as well as possible, to ensure that it is ultimately results in the successful further development of the Enhanced Partnership, as well as success in securing funding from the DfT to facilitate the delivery of schemes and measures proposed in the BSIP.</p>			<p>Any responses from this panel meeting will be collated and considered by the Transport team, and applied as appropriate, in the first instance to the cabinet report.</p> <p>Cabinet members will have will be asked to approve the draft BSIP presented and to make any further comments and requests. Ultimately, any final amendments to the BSIP will be subject to approval by Cllr. Anderson with support from the AD for Place, Operations and team.</p>

				<i>All proposals for BSIP schemes and measures are subject to feasibility, funding and consultation.</i>
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(c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

The associated cabinet report and BSIP document have been reviewed by Harrow Public Law.

There are no Humans Rights Act implications in this proposal.

(d) Equalities Impact Assessment

This section should include an assessment as to the impact of the proposal/policy on race, gender and disability groups. The council also requires assessments to take into consideration the possible impact for age, religion and sexual orientation and mitigate against any adverse impact. Please ensure that an Equalities Impact Assessment Initial Screening is undertaken.

(e) Workforce

Three SBC staff are currently engaged in overseeing public transport operations and delivery, but all three have a wide range of duties of which public transport is only one. The team has been supplemented by specialist support from Atkins Ltd. Hence there is limited officer capacity to engage with bus operators and to provide proactive policy and operational direction. This situation will require ongoing review and potentially additional resources to ensure the optimum success of the BSIP and the EP.

5. **Supporting Information**

The overarching objective in establishing the BSIP and Enhanced Partnership is to deliver significant improvements in bus services in the borough. This is designed to result in more frequent services, more reliable journey times, increased bus patronage, lower fares, better and easier ticketing systems, and a raft of associated benefits.

5.1. The structure and main contents of the BSIP are as follows:

- Review of the current bus services ‘offer’ in Slough
- The headline targets for improvement, specifying journey time, journey reliability, passenger numbers and passenger satisfaction as the main features to be addressed.
- Proposed measures and how they can be delivered, including (but not limited to) bus priority, service frequency, fares, ticketing, modal integration and so forth.

- A proposed reporting mechanism.
- Reference to DfT guidance throughout.

5.2. The following general principals apply to the BSIP:

- The DfT has instructed local authorities and bus operators to be ambitious in their plans.
- All the measures proposed in this plan are subject to feasibility and availability of funding, and also to satisfactory consultation outcomes.
- The proposals also depend upon thorough cooperation between the Council as Local Transport Authority and the bus operators in Slough.
- The BSIP is the first phase of the overall plan. Subsequently, as the second phase, an Enhanced Partnership Plan (EPP) will be prepared, again in partnership with the bus operators, for submission to the DfT. This will include more detailed, scheme specific content for the purpose of requesting funding.

5.3. The priorities to be addressed in the establishment of the Enhanced Partnership will also be in line with the overarching Council policies, notably the Carbon Strategy. The Council has committed to challenging targets, with a net zero carbon target by 2040 for the borough, and a stretch target of 2030 for the Council's own organisation operations. Increased public transport will make a significant contribution to meeting these targets.

5.4. In Transport terms, specifically, and the links with Planning, the Council's Transport policy is focused on providing a sustainable, integrated travel solution at local level. At the heart of this is the need for modal shift, with public transport and mass movement of people playing an essential role here. Multi-modal and linked journeys involving public transport and active travel especially, are also crucial. The BSIP will also support the following specific related policies:

- The Strategic Transport Infrastructure Plan (STIP)
- The Network Management Plan
- The Local Transport Plan.
- The Low Emission Strategy.
- The Slough Local Plan and Spatial Strategy.

5.5. The requirement is now to submit the final version of the BSIP to the DfT by the end of October 2021. No exceptions are being allowed by the DfT for late submission. Should the BSIP not be submitted on time, it is unknown exactly what the implications would be for the Council, but there is a possibility that any initial allocation of funding, and any future funding opportunities would be either lost or delayed.

## 6. **Comments of Other Committees**

The BSIP and Enhanced Partnership have not been considered by any other Council committees.

## 7. **Conclusion**

The key purpose of this review by the panel is to ensure that there is wider awareness amongst members of the main features and proposals contained within the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). The BSIP is a new plan in response to the national bus strategy, with far reaching implications relating to the success of public transport at local level.

The key action required is for panel members to make any comments or requests in this review in order to make any necessary amendments. This is largely expected to be a fine tuning process, although all comments will be considered and addressed as appropriate. The overall purpose of this scrutiny review, then, is to ensure that the BSIP and the associated cabinet report are in the best state possible prior to the October cabinet meeting. Ultimately, the recommendations to cabinet are to approve the BSIP in principle, request any final amendments, approve the submission of the BSIP to the DfT, and authorise the commencement of the preparation of the subsequent Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme (EPP), which will also be presented to Cabinet for review, once ready, for approval in principle.

## 8. **Appendices Attached**

- 'A' BSIP v0.3 The Bus Service Improvement Plan – in draft
- 'B' BSIP Prioritisation and Summary Scoring Matrix
- 'C' BSIP Equality Impact Assessment

## 9. **Background Papers**

- Slough Baseline: Technical Note
- Significant Decision: Place – Strategy and Infrastructure: Response to the National Bus Strategy. Dated 12<sup>th</sup> July 2021.
- DfT: Bus Back Better: National Bus Strategy
- DfT: National Bus Strategy: Bus Service Improvement Plans Guidance to local authorities and bus operators