

Place Scrutiny Panel – Meeting held on Tuesday, 28th June, 2022.

Present:- Councillors Mohammad (Chair), Wright (Vice-Chair), Begum, Cheema, Gill, Grewal, M. Malik, Minhas and Sandhu

Also present under Rule 30:- Councillors Nazir and Gahir

PART 1

1. Declarations of Interest

No declarations were made.

2. Minutes of the Meeting held on 12th January 2022

Minute Reference 17: A Member asked whether a further review of the eligibility criteria for the bulky waste discount, to support people on low incomes, had been carried out. It was explained that the relevant data was currently being collated and that the matter had been deferred for consideration at the September meeting.

Resolved – That the minutes of the meeting held on 12th January 2022 be approved as a correct record.

3. Member Questions

No Member Questions had been submitted.

4. Bus Enhanced Partnership

The Principal Transport Strategy Officer introduced a report on the Bus Enhanced Partnership. An Enhanced Partnership Plan and Scheme (EPPS) had been created in partnership between the Council and bus operators of registered local services in Slough. The Enhanced Partnership (EP) was the next stage in the development of the Council's response to the Government's National Bus Strategy (NBS). It was explained that the EP involved working with operators with a commitment to a formal, shared and legally enforceable plan for the delivery of bus services. The EPPS was due to be submitted to the Department of Transport (DfT) by the end of June 2022.

Panel Members were reminded that the overarching objective in establishing the EP was to deliver significant improvements in bus services in the borough. It was designed to result in more frequent services, more reliable journey times, increased bus patronage, lower fares and better and easier ticketing systems. It was noted that the EP was approved by Cabinet on 20th June and was due to be submitted to the DfT imminently.

The Panel's views were sought on the EPPS, to help inform the ongoing development of the EP and the following comments were made:

- A Panel Member expressed concern that the report had already been approved by Cabinet and therefore could not be amended by the Panel's comments. It was explained that the process was controlled by the DfT with a specific timetable by which submissions had to be made. Although initial consultation was held with stakeholders and operators in establishing the Partnership and scheme, the Panel's views would be sought on proposals for development on specific schemes; which provide an opportunity for ward members and members of the public to provide their input.
- Referring to funding for the scheme, it was noted that £150k had been received from DfT of which £80k had been spent to date on consultancy fees and additional temporary staff in the transport team. A Member queried the financial implications as set out in the report, which referred to no financial implications to the Council yet additional staffing resources had been engaged. The Panel were informed that the work required would be carried out by existing staff members except for when specialist input was required and that this cost would be met from the £150k DfT funding that had been awarded to the Council. It was explained that as schemes developed additional engineering or technical administration resource may be needed which was not necessarily available at the moment, and the scope and scale of projects would determine what was needed in the future.
- In response to a question on behaviour change and specifically increasing the number of people using the bus service, the Officer explained that the Council was working on sustainable transport as one of its core priorities. It was acknowledged that this was one of the more challenging aspects of the strategy and various initiatives were being put in place including promoting active travel, working in partnership with schools and encouraging multi-modal travel.
- In relation to bus use specifically, the Officer stated that the Council had developed a plan to make changes but did not have funding at current to deliver them and that they were still unable to return to pre-covid levels due to the issue of cost to providers.
- A Panel member shared their concern about the lack of funding for further services. It was explained that there was no Council funding for any additional services due to the unsuccessful bid for funding from the BSIP. However, having an EP in place was necessary in order for Slough to continue to apply for funding in any further rounds that become available, and that having the partnership and plan in place would potentially increase the chances of being successful in securing any future funding.

- Speaking under Rule 30, Councillor Gahir asked about representation on the EP and referred specifically to a number of routes that had been discontinued by operators. Membership details of the EP Forum and EP Executive Board were highlighted as set out in the report. Panel Members were reminded that bus operators were private companies and that they ran services that were commercially viable.
- A Panel Member asked about the enforceability of partnership decisions and was informed that EP Executive Board meetings would require a unanimous decision on approval of proposals.

Councillor Nazir, Lead Member for Transport and the Local Environment, addressed the Panel, explaining that it was a strategic partnership which promoted greater coordination between the Council and operators themselves in delivering a better more reliable bus network. All operators had agreed to the strategy and the purpose of the EP was to ask questions and put forward what the needs of residents were. It was noted that whilst there should be a mechanism to hold operators accountable, this was not the purpose of the EP. It was envisaged that proposals would be developed in conjunction with operators and concerns relating to poor performance could be addressed by the EP.

A Member asked if there had been any surveys conducted to establish what percentage of the Slough population did not have access to private transport. The Officer responded that no specific assessments had been carried out but through census information they could ascertain that the figure was approximately 24%.

Concern was expressed that the partnership was not legally enforceable. The Officer explained that priority lists had been created collaboratively and if an operator was not supporting services to Slough over a period of time, the Council could refer the matter to the Traffic Commissioner, who had the authority to de-register operators.

The Panel asked why there was not a full risk assessment associated with the report. It was explained that there was a greater risk in not preparing the EPPS in accordance with the requirements and to meet the necessary government deadlines for submission. Members were informed that when it came to progressing proposed schemes, the risk assessments would be prepared and considered as appropriate. Responding to comments that the absence of a full risk assessment contributed to Slough not securing Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) funding in the DfT's announcement in April 2022, it was noted that a number of local authorities were unsuccessful in their bids and that further opportunities to secure funds would be explored with the DfT.

Questions were asked about the financial risks associated with having a number of people working on this project if Slough were unsuccessful with further funding applications. It was clarified that the Council as the local transport authority was obliged to oversee delivery of public transport in the

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borough and the EP work contributed to this. Updates to the plan could be made using existing resources.

A Member queried how service performance would be measured and was informed that a number of targets were included in the BSIP including data regarding reducing waiting times, increasing passenger numbers and decreasing journey times. It was reiterated by Panel Members that views of service users were essential and that the strategy be revised to incorporate the Panel's comments and views. It was noted that any future specific schemes include consultation with residents and ward members.

Resolved – That details of the report be noted.

5. Date of Next Meeting - 8th September 2022

The date of the next scheduled meeting was confirmed as 8th September 2022.

Chair

(Note: The Meeting opened at 6.30 pm and closed at 8.11 pm)