

TITLE	Bus Network Review
FOR CONSIDERATION BY	Community and Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2 September 2019
WARD	None Specific;
LEAD OFFICER	Director of Locality and Customer Services - Sarah Hollamby

OUTCOME / BENEFITS TO THE COMMUNITY

For the committee to consider the work being undertaken for the Wokingham Town bus network review and the implementation of the South of M4 bus strategy, in order to provide feedback to officers for the benefit of Local Transport Plan 4.

RECOMMENDATION

That the Committee considers:

1. the progress related to the Wokingham Town bus network review;
2. the difference in approach to the SoM4 strategy and delivery;
3. the issues for buses in the borough.

SUMMARY OF REPORT

Overview and Scrutiny Committee have requested that information is provided in relation to the Wokingham Town Bus Network Review which was commissioned in June 2019 and in relation to the implementation of the South of M4 Bus Strategy. It is understood that the Committee wish to provide feedback on their thoughts around these two strategies for the purpose of developing Local Transport Plan 4.

The Wokingham Town Bus Network Review has been commissioned to the Council's Highway Consultants, WSP, for completion by December 2019. The South of M4 is a live bus strategy currently being delivered to serve new communities in the Shinfield area. The South of M4 bus strategy is delivered in partnership with Reading University and Reading Buses and subject to regular monitoring meetings to ensure the viability of a longer term bus service for the area.

The report concludes by highlighting some of the common problems associated with the delivery of bus services in the borough.

Background

Overview and Scrutiny committee have requested that information on the Wokingham Town Bus Network Review and information on the implementation of the South of M4 Bus Strategy be provided. It is understood that it is the intention of the committee to feedback their thoughts on the bus network review and the implementation of the South of M4 bus strategy to assist in the implementation of Local Transport Plan 4.

The timescales for Local Transport Plan 4 are attached as an Appendix A to this document.

In addition to the above, common problems for bus services in the area are included to explain some of the issues officers often have to consider when discussing routes with service providers and stakeholders.

Analysis of Issues

1. The Wokingham Town Bus Network Review

WSP have been commissioned to review the provision of bus services in and around Wokingham Town, which are currently operated under contract to Wokingham Borough Council by Courtney Buses until June 2021. It is envisaged that the Wokingham Town Bus Services will be retendered during 2020 for commencement in June 2021. The retender of bus services will be informed by the outcome of the Bus Network Review; it is anticipated that the new bus service contract would be for a period of 5 years with an options to extend for a further 2+1 years.

Bus services included within this review are detailed in the table below and shown on the attached Wokingham Borough Public Transport Map and Guide:

Bus Service	Route	Days / Times of Operation
121	Mulberry Grove – Norreys Avenue – Wokingham Town – Tesco	Every 30 minutes Mon-Fri 3 journeys Saturday
122	Woosehill – Emmbrook – Wokingham Town	6 off-peak journeys Mon-Fri. 3 journeys Saturday
123	Woosehill – Wokingham	4 morning and 4 evening journeys Mon-Fri
124	Wokingham – Waterloo Road	2 journeys Mon-Fri
125	Wokingham – Tesco – Finchampstead – Crowthorne	3 off-peak journeys Mon-Fri.
125 A/B	Wokingham – Tesco – Finchampstead – Crowthorne	2 morning and 2 evening journeys Mon-Fri
125 (Saturday)	Wokingham - The Meadows	2 journeys Saturday only
127	Reading – Sonning – Charvil – Twyford – Knowl Hill – Maidenhead	3 journeys Saturday
128/9	Reading – Woodley – Sonning – Charvil – Twyford – Hurst – Winnersh – Wokingham	Hourly service Mon-Fri 6 journeys Saturday

The scope of the bus network review includes the following:

- An assessment of local, regional and national policy relating to public transport
- Analysis of data relating to the current contracted local bus services, considering customers who pay a standard fare as well as those who use a concessionary pass
- Consideration to the integration of school transport movements/services with any future contracted public bus services
- To assess the extent and planned build out of new developments in the Wokingham Town area including an assessment of projected public transport trip potential in order to:
 - a. Identify a number of options for the provision of future subsidised bus services, having regard to the assessment of how well existing services meet social need in terms of coverage, accessibility and destinations served;
 - b. Assess the likely future demand/usage (in so far as this can be accurately determined);
 - c. Identify the potential for alternatives to conventional fixed route type services (e.g. Demand Responsive Transport, 'Uber' type taxi operations – it is not considered that autonomous buses will be fully practicable within the given timescale);
 - d. Identify any potential for reducing (or eliminating) subsidy over a period of time, due to increased commercial opportunities;
 - e. Consider the potential to improve the town service network using new development as a potential catalyst;
 - f. Meet the requirement to reduce vehicle emissions and improve air quality and identify the most effective and/or affordable means of achieving this through vehicle specification in tenders.
- Each scenario will identify its approximate cost, ensuring one option is minimum cost. The consultants will also identify any known reliability/congestion locations for local bus services along with potential solutions.

A first draft of the report is expected in late September 2019.

2. The South of M4 Bus Strategy

The South of M4 Bus Strategy was secured as part of the planning permissions associated with the South of M4 development area. The bus strategy was initially produced by RPS, who represent the consortium of developers in this area. The planning permission and associated bus strategy were awarded on appeal. As a result of the appeal decision, Reading University (as the applicant) were to make available up to £2 million, as and when required, for the implementation of the bus strategy, for up to 10 years following first occupation.

The bus strategy is formed of 4 phases:

Phase 1 – one bus an hour to Croft Gardens and Thames Valley Science Park (TVSP)

Phase 2a – one bus an hour to Croft Gardens and two buses an hour to TVSP

Phase 2b – as per Phase 2a, but with the addition of the sustainable link road

Phase 3 – two buses an hour to Croft Gardens and two buses an hour to TVSP

Phase 4 – two circular routes with half hourly frequencies serving the new housing and TVSP

Maps of Phase 2b and Phase 4 are attached to this report as an Appendix B.

Implementation of the South of M4 bus strategy commenced in September 2016 based on the zero value contract Wokingham Borough Council held with Reading Buses for the Leopard service. Quarterly monitoring meetings are held with the bus operator, the developer's consultants (Abbey Letchworth) and the Council. Each quarter, ticket data is reviewed for the development zone. Revenue is compared to forecast revenue, and any shortfall between the cost of operating the service and revenue achieved is requested from Reading University on a six monthly basis.

Discussions at the quarterly meetings also include the progress of housing completions, progress of development at TVSP, progress of the delivery of on-site infrastructure and a review of any implications for the overall strategy. The meetings also provide a forum for the bus company to raise any operational issues they are experiencing.

The strategy is currently slightly behind forecast due to:

- Delays to the buildout and occupation of new dwellings in the area,
- A lower mode share and delayed occupancies at the science park resulting in less revenue being generated than originally forecast
- Delays to the delivery of the sustainable link road

At the June 2019 monitoring meeting it was confirmed that the strategy would continue to use 3 vehicles to ensure that it can continue to deliver a viable service in the longer term. The strategy is currently at Phase 2a and is expected to progress to Phase 2b between September and Christmas 2019. The strategy and its progress will be reviewed again in September 2019.

3. Common Problems for Bus Services in the Borough

The primary problem for bus services in the Borough is congestion which causes variability to journey times on a day to day basis. The 128 service between Reading, Twyford and Wokingham regularly suffers from the effects of congestion, particularly around on the approach to Twyford Cross Roads in the morning peak. The daily variation can be as much as 15 minutes. One possible solution would be the provision of bus priority linked to the operation of the traffic signals, using the GPS tracking and real time operation system of the bus service could help resolve this issue, albeit to the detriment of queuing on other arms of the junction.

Similarly the Lion 4/X4 service running along the A329 Reading / Wokingham Road, the 3/3B running along the A327, the Tiger 7 running along the A33 and Orange services running along the A4 all appeared to experience a reduction in punctuality when annual

monitoring was undertaken. Bus priority infrastructure which provides bus only access on key corridors or through an alternative alignment in some cases can offer a solution.

Resident requests for additional bus services or an increase in the frequency of bus services is common place, with a common example being an improved service between Arborfield Green and Wokingham Town including the provision of a Sunday service. Wherever possible the Council secures funding for the provision of bus services as part of planning applications. The traditional S106 triggers mean that funding is dependent upon the occupation of a certain number of dwellings and any delay to the delivery of homes/occupations places the Council at risk of a funding gap and potentially a funding shortfall. In areas where new development is not planned to come forward, any enhancements are reliant on Council funds to support the on-going provision of enhancement to these services.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE RECOMMENDATION

The Council continues to face severe financial challenges over the coming years as a result of reductions to public sector funding and growing pressures in our statutory services. It is estimated that Wokingham Borough Council will be required to make budget reductions of approximately £20m over the next three years and all Executive decisions should be made in this context

	How much will it Cost/ (Save)	Is there sufficient funding – if not quantify the Shortfall	Revenue or Capital?
Current Financial Year (Year 1)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Next Financial Year (Year 2)	£0	Yes	Revenue
Following Financial Year (Year 3)	£0	Yes	Revenue

Other financial information relevant to the Recommendation/Decision
None

Cross-Council Implications
Bus services cross Borough boundaries, both to and from neighbouring Authorities.

Public Sector Equality Duty
When a bus service is procured via tender, an equality impact assessment is undertaken at that stage.

Reasons for considering the report in Part 2
N/A

List of Background Papers
Wokingham Borough Public Transport Map & Guide Appendix A – LTP4 Timescales Appendix B – South of M4 Strategy Maps

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