

ASSESSMENT OF A SELECT COMMITTEE TOPIC REVIEW

* - sections to be filled in by the proposer of the topic

***Subject of Proposed Review:-**

Bus Transport in Kent and its Public Subsidy

***Reason for the Review:-**

(see Note 1 below)

Commercial operators will only run services that are profitable, which means that many communities in Kent would have no services unless subsidised by the public transport authority, Kent County Council. The Council has an obligation in law to "consider" services that are "handed back" by operators to the Traffic Commissioners as unprofitable, but no obligation to adopt or support them. Relations between operators and the Authority are good, and it has been possible in the past to enhance subsidised services at no cost to the public purse, but the efficient use of diminishing funds requires careful monitoring and it is often sometimes necessary to remove funding from a service. When this happens, young and older people who have no alternatives can become isolated from employment, education, healthcare and essential shopping.

Some public transport authorities have abandoned all subsidy of bus services. There is a debate to be had about this, about what constitutes an essential service, the capability of operators to absorb a greater degree of cost, and the criteria the authority should use in making decisions about what services should be supported. There are other means of providing transport to isolated communities and it would be a valuable exercise to examine how these are exercised by others.

There is a connection between supported bus services and getting young people to school, and a growing pressure to include rail travel in the concessionary passes. This might be considered an education issue, but I don't think consider it detached from the issue of public transport and bus services.

Finally, it might be of value to consider the "real" value of deregulation, and whether there might be a wider role for the public transport authority to play in commissioning all bus services to meet the needs of the county (I do not suggest that this is currently legal).

***Issues to be covered by the Terms of Reference:-**

Are services that have been "handed back" always unviable?
What are the criteria for subsidy in human terms?
How should the County Council use its funding for public transport?
How can subsidised services best be used to provide access to education.
Can subsidised bus services aid economic development?
What can be done to promote subsidised bus services?
What alternatives to bus transport are there and how well are these developed in Kent?

How has deregulation affected the provision of bus services and is there a case for the County Council to commission a range of services on a commercial basis?

***Scope of the review:-**

Interviews with operators and user groups about commercial and subsidised bus services, and investigations into the rationale for discontinuance of support deployed by other authorities. Understanding in depth the deregulation of the bus industry and whether this has been of benefit to users. Interviews with the community sector, and discovery of how alternatives to bus services can successfully be created.

***Purpose and objectives of the Review:-**

To understand how the bus market works and how operators, together with the County Council and other sectors, can provide a more comprehensive and convenient public transport coverage of the whole county, serving all users equally well.

Proposer of the review - (Please print name and sign)

David Brazier

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To be completed by the Directorate/Cabinet Member(s)

Are there any reasons why this review should not be put forward for inclusion in the work programme for 2016/17? (see Note 2 below)

There are no on-going projects which the review would affect and therefore no reason why this review should not take place.

Will the review support the Strategic Statement ('Increasing Opportunities, Improving Outcomes: Kent County Council's Strategic Statement 2015 – 2020'), and supporting outcomes of the council? If yes, please identify aim(s) and give details:-

The review will provide an opportunity for members to review the current KCC bus criteria against the current de-regulated bus market, with a view to determining whether the current criteria meets the strategic outcomes of KCC or if there is a need for a new criteria.

It will enable members to determine whether the current de-regulated bus market supports the strategic outcomes of KCC, could do so or if there is an alternative model required.

How will this review have an impact on KCC policy development and/or help to influence national policy?

This review would provide guidance on potential revised policy re;

The KCC bus criteria
The bus service priorities of KCC
Bus Market regulation
Bus Partnerships

It would enable officers to bring forward options for revised policies for member consideration.

How will this review add value to the County Council and residents of Kent?

Potentially it will identify new priorities for spending on supported bus services and enable the network to be focused accordingly, allowing resources to be released for new priorities.

It may identify new delivery models, which improve on the efficiency of the current bus market and enable more service provision to be delivered within current resources.

Does the review need to be completed within a specific timeframe? If yes, please give details:

No specific timetable required.

Any additional comments from the Portfolio Holder/Corporate Director:-

Portfolio Holder's Signature:-



Corporate Director's Signature:-



Contact Officer:-

Philip Lightowler

Date:-

26/05/16

Note 1 - Possible reasons for the review

1. Key public issue, identified by
 - Member contact with constituents/member surgeries
 - Contact with key representative bodies/forums
 - Media coverage – Public interest issue covered in local media
 - Focus groups/citizens panels
2. Issue highlighted via a previous review
3. Issue recommended to another body e.g. Cabinet, Scrutiny Committee, a Cabinet Committee, Directorate or an external body.
4. Poor performing service i.e.:-
 - High level of complaints/dissatisfaction with service
 - Performance standards poor/below target – (evidence from PI's or benchmarking)
 - Identified through external review/inspection (OFSTED/Audit etc)
 - Budgetary overspends
5. Key reports or new evidence published
6. County Council priority
7. Central Government priority/New Government guidance or legislation published

Note 2 - Possible reasons why a review should not be established and added to the work programme.

1. Issue being examined by
 - Cabinet
 - Scrutiny
 - Officer Group
 - another internal body
 - an external body
2. It has been the subject of a topic review by other Councils from which details of best practice can be obtained.
3. New legislation or guidance expected.
4. **NB:** Before suggesting that a review should not be included in the work programme the following should be considered:-

Could consideration of this issue 'add value' without causing unnecessary duplication, for instance by:

- i) Looking at this issue in conjunction with another group,
- ii) Through appropriate timing of the topic review,
- iii) Through considering another group's findings rather than duplicating the same/or similar activity.

