

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee held in the Darent Room, Sessions House, County Hall, Maidstone on Thursday, 5 October 2017.

PRESENT: Mr P W A Lake (Chairman), Mr A M Ridgers (Vice-Chairman), Mrs C Bell, Mr A Booth, Mr G Cooke, Mrs T Dean, MBE, Mr D Farrell, Mr R C Love, Mr J P McInroy, Dr L Sullivan, Mr B J Sweetland, Mr J Wright and Mr I S Chittenden (Substitute for Mr R H Bird)

ALSO PRESENT: Mr M A C Balfour

IN ATTENDANCE: Mrs B Cooper (Corporate Director of Growth, Environment and Transport), Mr P Lightowler (Head of Public Transport) and Mr J Cook (Scrutiny Research Officer)

UNRESTRICTED ITEMS

140. Minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2017

(Item A4)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held of 6 September were an accurate record and that they be signed by the Chairman.

141. Bus Transport and Public Subsidy Select Committee - 3 Months on

(Item B1)

1. Mr Balfour, Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste, provided an introduction and overview of the progress made with the Select Committee recommendations. He commented that the report represented an excellent piece of work and that he hoped the review of progress by the Scrutiny Committee would help increase Member involvement with some of the future plans, such as the development of a Member Panel for Bus Transport.
2. Mr Balfour confirmed that, as per recommendation 17 of the Select Committee report, he had written to Government regarding extending the option of Bus Franchising as part of the Bus Services Bill but he noted that the government had not made further progress with the bill.
3. Mr Balfour commented that, in relation to recommendation 4, Stagecoach had announced that all Young Persons Travel Pass holders would be allowed to use their passes outside the standard terms of use, meaning additional free transport available for young people at weekends and during school holidays. He commented that this was a very positive step and that it was hoped that other large bus providers would follow suit, in recognition of the significant benefit to the users.
4. Mr Balfour highlighted some of the positive work being done in relation to Community Transport, noting that this had been recognised within the Select

Committee's recommendations. He cited examples in Stockbury and Detling where the Community Transport Project had brought the community together, in addition to providing key transport provision. Assistance with local activities, such as transport for the football team, demonstrated the wider community benefit of these schemes. Mr Balfour advised the Committee that Phil Lightowler, Head of Public Transport at KCC, was due to have further meetings with providers and other organisations about progressing and expanding community transport.

5. Mr Lightowler advised the Committee that there were two workshops / events planned in November (2nd / 9th) around Community Transport. These offered an opportunity to showcase the benefits of Community Transport to potential users, as well as taking them through the practicalities to ensure the details of grant provision, costings etc. were fully understood by the relevant groups. He explained that a Community Transport Toolkit had been developed and was due to launch in support of these events. This toolkit would provide groups with all the information they would need to start the process of setting up a Community Transport scheme. Mr Lightowler explained that his colleague, Carol Valentine, would be taking the information to Parish Councils in the future to help promote the schemes.
6. A member highlighted the positive contribution that Community Bus Services had made around the county, referencing the historic support for this work from former County Councillor, Keith Ferrin. The Member noted the development of bus 'click & collect' services, which were demand led rather than scheduled.
7. Mr Lightowler provided an overview of 'click & collect' services, explaining that a trial was being run by Arriva. The scheme was responsive to demand, with flexible registration for the providers. He advised the service was not considered as private hire, for the purposes of licencing, as the buses could travel anywhere within a designated area but not beyond these boundaries. This maintained the scheme's status as a bus service. Mr Lightowler explained that Arriva had invested in technology from the USA to support this scheme, which he advised was positive so far but that further data was needed to fully assess usage and long term demand.
8. Mr Lightowler explained that demand led services were being considered by the industry and partners under the broad umbrella of Mass Mobility as a Service. This approach was aimed at bringing a huge range of transport options for non-drivers together into an easily accessible package. Use of Apps and online connectivity to enable the service was a key part of the larger project. Mr Lightowler advised that KCC had worked on a similar project for the Department for Transport called Total Transport, focusing on demand led services. He explained that this progressed past the study phase and was moving towards the pilot stage. Services such as non-emergency patient transport were being considered as part of the trial. He explained that there was still potential for upgrades with the software to further develop its capabilities, although it was already 'semi-intelligent', meaning that it had pattern recognition capacity to tailor the service to anticipated user demand.
9. Responding to Member questions and comments regarding rural bus services and transport provision for older people in relation to technology and demand led service development, Mr Lightowler advised that the needs of these users groups

were always a consideration and featured in discussions with providers. He also confirmed that appropriate contact methods and accessibility needs for older people were considered as part of ongoing service development. Mr Balfour commented that he recognised that ongoing engagement with Parishes, rural organisations and other relevant groups was important but advised that this had to be balanced against the need to develop and improve things for the wider user groups. Barbara Cooper, Corporate Director for Growth, Environment and Transport, advised the committee that GET had signed up to Government standards of accessibility in relation to the introduction of any new technology, which would minimise any negative impact as services developed. She also reassured the committee that the social isolation issues related to rural transport and provision for older people was recognised as a serious issue and that joint work with Adult Social Care was being undertaken in this area. Ms Cooper also noted that research showed that cars were being used only 6% of the day, which meant that there was significant scope for improved use of transport resources providing that innovative options were considered.

10. Members discussed further the implications of developments in technology and how this has great potential to positively influence the provision of public transport. It was emphasised by several members that it was important to maintain consideration of the particular needs of rural areas and vulnerable transport users.
11. Responding to questions, Mr Lightowler explained that his team were seeking further clarification regarding recommendation 6 of the Select Committee, which related to demand management around road use with a view to encouraging greater bus use where appropriate.
12. Mr Lightowler, in response to questions about recommendation 4, commented that it was positive that bus service operators were encouraging greater use of buses by young people as they represented the future customer base. He noted that it was important demonstrate the viability of these services to this customer group at an early stage.
13. A Member commented that as part of recommendation 5, they would like to see greater involvement of the Quality Bus Partnerships looking at how services could be made more efficient. The Member also highlighted the benefits of integrating bus and rail scheduling.
14. Responding to comments around recommendation 9, Mr Lightowler explained that s.106 contributions had been considered for 'clean vehicles' (Low CO2 emission vehicle). He advised that this was an ongoing piece of work and that viability of fully electric buses had yet to be evidenced and this meant a full transition could not yet be implemented. He explained that a showcase in Manchester around electric vehicles had recently been held in Manchester. The event had demonstrated positive progress but also showed that electric was not yet a viable option for big fleets of bus services. He cited a problem in that electricity supply would involve large substations at every depot which would not be practical or economical. In terms of s.106 funding, Mr Lightowler clarified that while all funding was welcomed, it was important that the money was provided in a usable way, with limited restrictions and in sufficient quantity to support relevant

work. Summarising, Mr Lightowler advised the committee that he expected diesel buses would probably be replaced by electric buses in around 20 years.

15. Responding to questions about bus scheme costs, Mr Balfour explained that there was no set financing structure and that it was often more practical for KCC to provide successful applicants with a suitable vehicle and equipment to operate the scheme, effectively providing the necessary start up. Responding to comments on the use of s.106 funding in relation to bus service provision, with examples of poor co-ordination being cited by the questioning Member, Mr Balfour advised the committee that KCC has some influence via discussion around how the funds are divided but that all decisions were matters for the developers and the planning authority to make.
16. Responding to questions regarding bus service consultations, Mr Lightowler advised the committee that some operators were better than others in terms of communication and consultation with their service users. He noted that Stagecoach had undertaken more consultation in response to the Select Committee recommendations and had shown evidence of learning from past and more recent mistakes throughout the process. He commented that he hoped that Arriva would take a similar approach in the future.
17. Providing further clarification on funding for Community Transport schemes, Mr Lightowler advised that a small amount of funding had been secured by his KCC department to provide grants to support the purchase of vehicles for relevant schemes. He emphasised that the funding was not significant and it was important that these schemes received ongoing local support to ensure their success and sustainability following KCC's assistance in the start-up phase. Mr Lightowler noted that while KCC did have a role to play in the discussion around s.106 money at the pre-planning stage and that he was confident that KCC did consult with local Members on developments and s.106 activities.
18. Members articulated their support for the progression of a Member Bus Panel, as put forward in the recommendations. They also commented positively on the expanded use of the Young Persons Travel Pass that was being provided by Stagecoach. A Member also commented that they would like to see updates from the Quality Bus Partnerships being considered at Joint Transportation Boards. The Member also highlighted that all future service reviews around bus provision had to take account of accurate usage figures to ensure efficient delivery of the important transport services.
19. Responding to questions, Mr Lightowler explained that communication between KCC Highways District Managers and operators varied depending on the operator and details of the service requirements or activity levels in the relevant area. He did highlight an example of good practice by Go Coach, in Sevenoaks, which conducted extensive engagement with community groups, schools and other partners. Mr Lightowler confirmed that regardless of location in Kent, KCC did always provide feedback to operators on their services.

RESOLVED that the progress report on the Bus Transport and Public Subsidy Select Committee recommendations be noted and that the guests be thanked for attending and answering questions.