

MINUTES OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK GROUP - SUSTAINABLE PUBLIC TRANSPORT

MEETING DATE Thursday, 5 November 2020

MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Kim Snape (Chair), Councillor (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Julia Berry, Val Counce, Mark Clifford, Gordon France, Tom Gray, Yvonne Hargreaves and June Molyneaux

OFFICERS: Alison Marland (Principal Planning Officer) and Ruth Rimmington (Democratic and Member Services Team Leader)

APOLOGIES: Councillor Laura Lennox

20.OS5 Minutes of Meeting Thursday, 17 September 2020 of Overview and Scrutiny Task Group - Sustainable Public Transport.

The Minutes were approved as a correct record.

20.OS6 Declarations of any Interest

No interests were declared.

20.OS7 Verbal Presentation by County Councillor Keith Iddon

The Task Group welcomed Lancashire County Councillor Keith Iddon to provide a verbal presentation to explain the role of the County Council relating to public transport, highlighting initiatives involving sustainable transportation and to social isolation, and to offer insight as to what Chorley Council could do in this regard.

The Task Group heard that the operation of the buses was deregulated in 1986, and since then, independent bus operators approached the County Council to inform them of their routes, and in turn the County Council were able to suggest beneficial routes and offer subsidies. There was an accepted difficulty related to routes in rural areas, and the balance for the County Council to support these routes is £5 a head.

95% of all bus routes were commercially operated. The County Council held a statutory role to support the English National Concession Scheme for elderly and disabled passengers in addition to school transport.

The County Council had no control over rail transport, and the operation was the responsibility of individual rail companies, although the County Council was consulted

over changes or reduction in services. The reduction to two hourly service in Adlington was Covid related. It was acknowledged that there needed to be better communication between the Rail Company and the County Council with Chorley Council. Councillors felt that were answers outstanding. There were currently a lot of disgruntled residents with the service provided.

In response to a query by Members, it was explained that the County Council was limited in ways it can influence bus services to be environmentally friendly, but there were opportunities for bus companies to receive funding from the Department for Transport to use cleaner vehicles. Various attempts at receiving funding was unsuccessful, while other funding avenues required greater infrastructure which limited the ability of the County to make a successful bid.

Members raised concerns with individual bus routes through their wards. Cllr Keith Iddon encouraged Members to email him with any issue or concerns and he would do his best to assist. Members were encouraged to promote bus usage, as for transport to be sustainable, it had to be used, and the more used the buses were, the more routes and cheaper fares there would be.

It was asked if there was a tangible difference in cost between cleaner fuels and carbon, Cllr Keith Iddon was unable to say as currently there was significant levels of subsidy available, when these were no longer in place, they could be more expensive to run.

Funding Streams

The County Council were awarded £3 million in January 2020, with a further £1.5 for 2021.

The Department of Transport provided funding for the County Council to encourage public transportation use over private car use. Due to Covid-19, there had been a disruption to both funding and passengers.

When bus routes were no longer viable, the bus company would give notice, and the County Council, would do its best to seek the funds required to maintain the route. It was highlighted that a route that had been removed was difficult to reinstate.

The lack of bus routes and services affected the oldest and the youngest, in addition to those with health and social mobility issues.

Comparisons were made between the operation of public transport in Lancashire and the Combined Authority of Greater Manchester. The benefits were significantly greater, which also included larger awards of funding due to the influence and accountability of an elected mayor.

Social Isolation

Lancashire County Council supports Dial a Ride, which has 50 vehicles in the fleet. Dial a Ride is a free service to vulnerable people that cost approximately £350,000. Due to Covid-19, the service was not currently operational, but the fleet of vehicles was repurposed to deliver meals.

Subsidised bus services were in place to ensure that people could maintain their independence if they were unable to drive.

Members raised that they were not currently aware of the services provided and asked if they were promoted or advertised. Members agreed that Parish Councils could include the services in their newsletters raising awareness and volunteers.

Making Buses More Attractive to the Public

Bus companies had invested significantly to upgrade their fleets, with new buses that were capable of contactless payment, featured Wi-Fi, were more comfortable, enabled device charging and on-board screens.

For fares to decrease, more people were required to use the service. If there was a shortage of users, routes would decrease, although compromises have been made to ensure that routes were still in operation, even if they operated less frequently or were linked with another to make a longer route. It was the opinion that an infrequent, or long service route was favorable to none.

Transport for the North Update

There were proposals to have an integrated smart travel project to provide the best prices across the north with an Oyster style scheme, but an agreement with the commercial partners could not be agreed.

There was the creation of a local data hub to link into journey planners, but Lancashire County Council were not currently using this due to cost.

Members recognized Transport for the North as a positive organization with ambition and aspirations, but was disappointed with the outcome of Coppull railway station, but thanked Councillor Iddon and Andrew Varley for their assistance.

Members acknowledged that due to Covid-19, travel may never be the same and there was the opportunity for a restart, as there was no longer a focus on town centres, and there could be a chance to focus on leisure in the evenings and weekends, to enable everyone to be within walking distance to a bus stop.

It was explained that the Masterplan for highways and transport had been delayed, but there was consideration for reducing carbon.

What else can the Task Group do?

Both Councillor Keith Iddon and Andrew Varley were happy to answer any question at any time and were both happy to return to the Task Group at a later date.

20.OS8 Local Government Association Presentation and Information Discussion

Both Cllr June Molyneaux and Cllr Mark Clifford attended the Webinar.

Members found that the presentations interesting, with comparisons to other councils highlighted. There was enthusiasm for hydrogen and electric buses, but Alison

Marland, Principle Planning Officer, explained that there was constraint with electric buses due to the battery life, and the carbon cost of producing, storing and disposal of the batteries, and currently operators are exploring hydrogen.

Cllr June Molyneaux left the meeting 19:28

20.OS9 Review and Update the Scope

Members raised that they would be potentially looking at the Highways and Transport Masterplan, and to have Cllr Keith Iddon return.

Cllr Julia Berry left the Meeting 19:30

Members agreed to note the scope.

20.OS10 Date of Next Meeting

3 December 2020 18:00

Chair

Date