

MINUTES OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK GROUP - PUBLIC TRANSPORT ISSUES

MEETING DATE Thursday, 26 February 2015

MEMBERS PRESENT: Councillor Robert Fynamore (Chair), Councillor Julia Berry (Vice-Chair) and Councillors Charlie Bromilow, Margaret France, Mike Handley, Matthew Lynch, Mark Jarnell, June Molyneaux and Kim Snape

OFFICERS: Lesley-Ann Fenton (Director of Customer and Advice Services) and Dianne Scambler (Democratic and Member Services Officer)

APOLOGIES: Councillor John Walker

OTHER MEMBERS: Caroline Watson (Cumbria County Council)

15.13 Minutes

RESOLVED – That the minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group – Public Transport Issues meeting held on 8 December 2014 be confirmed as a correct record for signing by the Chair.

15.14 Declarations of Any Interests

There were no declarations of any interests.

15.15 Cumbria County Council - Community Wheels Scheme

The Chair welcomed Caroline Watson, Community Transport Officer who was attending from Cumbria County Council to talk to the Group about their Community Wheels Scheme. Using funding made available by Central Government, the County Council introduced a Rural Wheels scheme, with the aim of providing a service accessible to everyone in rural areas.

Initial funding from Central Government allowed for the implementation and development of the Rural Wheels scheme, which was initially trialled in one area of the County and developed county wide over the last 5/6 years and has been tailored to meet the needs of the residents across the County.

Additional funding allowed the County Council to purchase six mini-buses that they maintain and make available for use across the County. The scheme itself is run by volunteers and everyone who uses the scheme becomes a member. It is this

membership that drives the scheme, deciding on routes and level of fares. The scheme is not open to visitors to the County and it must not become a bus service.

The scheme has been particularly successful in the more rural areas of the County and helped to address issues such as social isolation, especially for older people who don't have access to other modes of transport. Such users of the scheme did lose out on not being able to use their concessionary bus passes so one of the main factors of the schemes success has had to be competitive fares.

Last year, Cumbria County Council took the unprecedented step to withdraw all its funding of subsidised routes across the County, a number of these routes were taken over by private operators and any gap in provision was met by the community wheels scheme. The County Council has worked with communities to establish their need and has tailored the service to suit accordingly.

The County Council also operates an addition village wheels scheme whereby they contract private hire companies/taxis/small minibuses to provide a more bespoke service that is proving to be more cost effective for small groups of people and is tailored around a specific need.

In response to Members questions, Caroline explained that the County Council have been able to negotiate reduced fares as they are used on a regular basis and usually at a time when they are quiet, usually between the hours of 10am to 2pm. The taxi firms have been happy to take these types of fares as it gives them additional work on a regular basis.

The County Council had been surprised at the number of services that private operators had taken on when the County Council had taken its decision to cancel its subsidised services. However, they were looking to do a review of its services as some of the routes initially taken over have recently been cancelled or reduced and further reductions were expected.

It was the feeling of this Group that there is an expectation from Lancashire County Council that any such scheme developed in this authority would be partially funded by both the Borough and Parish Councils. Caroline explained that this was not the case in Cumbria. The County Council funded everything and were able to currently balance the books with the profits of the scheme including the private hire arrangements that were in place.

Members of the Group discussed how existing community based travel that had been funded by Lancashire County Council had folded, due to unreliable volunteers, problems with recruiting and availability at key times and asked Caroline how the schemes in Cumbria had addressed such issues.

It was explained the success of the schemes in Cumbria was due to its advertisement and recruitment strategy. They use positive press to celebrate successes within communities and advertise by use of parish community noticeboards. They have done door to door postal drops and have circulated printed information around the area as much as possible. The County Council does regularly update its information on its website but they have found that printed flyers distributed by the volunteers and drivers to be more successful.

One of the key factors in maintaining their reliable volunteer pool is their philosophy that people can do as little or as much as they want or are available to do, and that there is no pressure to do more. The voluntary element of the scheme is extremely important in keeping costs down and many communities realising this, have been keen to get involved to maintain the service.

In Cumbria, drivers are only required to undertake a CRB check if they are driving one of their vehicles, if they are using their own transport, they do not as they fall outside of the CRB rules, however, to date they had had no incidents, and vulnerable groups were treated differently.

As far as they were aware Cumbria County Council was currently the only authority that had embarked on this type of rural based travel scheme. It had been a difficult decision to take but up to now they had been able to meet the gap in provision. They would continue to monitor the situation and were hopeful that they would continue to meet demand.

The Chair on behalf of the Group, thanked Caroline for attending the meeting.

15.16 Lancashire County Council's - Revised criteria for Assessing Subsidised Bus Services

The Group considered the revised criteria that Lancashire County Council had proposed in relation to subsidised bus services across Lancashire. Members were pleased that following the recent consultation some amendments had been made but still thought that additional weighting needed to be given to people who fell under the Disability Act, for example those people who suffered from epilepsy.

Members felt that this was a topic that could be discussed at the 3-Tier Forum and thought that this could be a recommendation of this Group.

15.17 Network Rails Issues

The Group considered the content to be included in two letters. One to Network Rail and one to Northern Rail will be drafted by the Director of Customer and Advice Services on behalf of the Overview and Scrutiny Task Group members, encompassing all the issues that Members of the Group had raised relating to train travel issues across the Borough.

RESOLVED – That subject to a couple of amendments to include the following issues:

- **Investigating the opening of the bridge access at the bottom of Alker Lane.**
- **Real time passenger information at Adlington and Euxton Balshaw Lane stations.**
- **Lighting improvements at Adlington and signage at Euxton Balshaw Lane stations.**
- **Provision of bicycle shelters at Chorley station.**

the two letters be sent to Network Rail and Northern Rail.

15.18 Questions for the Transport for Greater Manchester Committee

The Group suggested areas of discussion from which questions could be asked of representatives of the Transport for Greater Manchester Committee of the Manchester Combined Authority that would be present at the next meeting including:

- How funding is raised and allocated.
- Public transport priorities and function
- The benefits of a combined transport Authority for the Council and residents of the borough
- Drawbacks
- Performance of the bus and rail network and how it is managed.
- Level of influence over bus operators
- Ticketing systems
- Passenger services, facilities and support (bus station, shelters, passenger information).
- Any issues in relation to rural isolation/access by public transport.

15.19 Date of Next Meeting

Thursday 19 March at 6pm.

Chair

Date