

Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee – 20 July 2004

Minutes of the meeting of the **Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee** held on **20 July 2004** when there were present:-

Cllr P K Savill (Chairman)
Cllr P A Capon (Vice-Chairman)

Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn
Cllr T E Goodwin
Cllr Mrs S A Harper
Cllr K H Hudson

Cllr C A Hungate
Cllr R A Oatham
Cllr M G B Starke

VISITING MEMBER

Cllr T Livings

OFFICERS PRESENT

S Scrutton - Head of Planning Services
G Woolhouse - Head of Housing, Health and Community Care
S Worthington - Committee Administrator

ALSO ATTENDING

R Bailey, Essex County Council
L Harvey, Essex County Council
S Smith, First Bus Travel
G Shuttleworth, Arriva

326 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 12 May 2004 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

327 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Cllrs Mrs H L A Glynn and T Livings each declared a personal interest in item 7 of the agenda by virtue of using bus services and Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn further declared a personal interest in item 6 of the agenda by virtue of being a Member of Rochford Parish Council.

328 PROGRESS ON DECISIONS

The Committee received the Schedule relating to progress on decisions.

Rochford Town Map

Officers confirmed that although a site had been identified, it had subsequently turned out that the land in question was privately owned.

Options for an alternative location were currently being explored.

329 BUS ROUTES WITHIN ROCHFORD DISTRICT – LIAISON ISSUES

The Committee welcomed Mr Richard Bailey, Infrastructure & Rail Manager (Acting), Passenger Transport, Essex County Council, Ms Lynn Harvey, District Engineer, Transportation and Operational Services, Essex County Council, Mr Stephen Smith, Director and General Manager, First Bus Travel and Mr Glenn Shuttleworth, Operations Manager, Arriva, to the meeting.

Mr Bailey advised Members of the work of Passenger Transport at the County Council. Following Transport 2000, the County Council negotiated voluntary agreements with the bus companies and was involved in developing quality bus partnerships. The number 7, 8, and 9 routes had been designated for development as quality bus partnerships.

The County Council was attempting to complement the purchasing of new buses undertaken by the bus companies in order to meet the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act by undertaking a programme of work designed to improve the infrastructure of bus routes, for example, arranging for raised kerbs to be installed at bus stops. Improving infrastructure was expensive and the County Council had bid for funding from Government in the Local Transport Fund for the period 2006 – 2011.

Passenger Transport Liaison meetings were held twice a year, to which representatives from the Parish and District Councils were invited. The County Council also provided funding for community transport initiatives and has contributed £60000 for community transport in the Rochford District in the current financial year to help the voluntary sector provide transport for those unable to access the usual methods of public transport.

The County Council also worked closely with this Council on decriminalised parking enforcement, with respect to the enforcement of waiting orders at bus stops, for example.

Mr Smith advised Members that First Bus Travel was part of First Group plc, one of the country's largest transport operators. First had depots in Chelmsford and Hadleigh. First buses in the Southend area were last year re-branded with the Metro brand, colour-coded bus routes were introduced and a colourful and easy to use map of the route network was published. The branding has proven successful, reducing the decline in passengers in the area. First was, however, aiming to turn this into passenger growth.

First carries 50000 passengers per week in the Rochford District on routes 20, 24 and 25 and via school bus contracts, but the company wished to increase this to 55000 passengers. However, this could well be affected by congestion experienced in Rayleigh Town Centre and on the A127. There were continuing problems associated with vandalism to school buses, but the company was working to ensure that any children guilty of such vandalism

would be banned from using the school bus services.

First was exploring opportunities for expanding services within the District as a result of the proposed new terminal for London Southend Airport, Thames Gateway development and with respect to areas designated for new housing development. The importance was stressed of new housing development linking, where possible, with existing bus routes or of plans for such developments being sympathetic to proper access for buses in and out of such sites.

2 of the vehicles within the District were fitted with 'Telematics' units, which allowed a display of 'next stop' inside the vehicles, displays of real-time information at bus stops and priority at traffic lights. It was anticipated that this technology should help to improve the reliability of the services.

Members were advised that Essex was a difficult area to recruit and retain drivers. First had accordingly increased drivers' wages in an attempt to address this problem.

The company wished to replace the vehicles on the number 20 route, but had not yet been successful in obtaining the funding for this.

Mr Shuttleworth advised the Committee that, within the District, Arriva operates bus routes 7 and 8 from Rayleigh to Shoeburyness, via Hockley/Ashingdon and via Hawkwell/Rochford respectively, 9 from Rayleigh to Shoeburyness via Eastwood, and 4 from Foulness to Southend via Great Wakering and 14 from Southend Hospital to Shoeburyness via Barling and Great Wakering. Routes were colour-coded, with easy to read maps.

Arriva had been criticised in the press for withdrawing rural services. The company was, however, funded by stakeholders, which meant that the company could not continue running services that were not commercially viable.

During debate, the following concerns were noted:-

- The Sunday service of the number 8 Arriva route, subsidised by the County Council, is poorly used.
- That the bus stop at the junction with Eastbury Avenue/Rectory Road should be a high priority for a raised kerb step-up.
- That, with respect to the number 14 Arriva route, the 8.00 pm service from Southend should not be discontinued without prior consultation.
- That in determining whether services were financially viable, Arriva relied upon data collected from the bus wayfarer machines. There were instances of drivers not registering return tickets on return journeys or season tickets, which would have altered the data significantly.
- Examples have been cited of drivers failing to stop at bus stops to pick up passengers.
- Some drivers had been observed driving too fast.

- Southend on Sea Borough Council would not continue to subsidise bus services after October.
- In Canewdon some bus services more heavily used by residents have been withdrawn whereas services less used have been retained; this could indicate an anomaly with Arriva's passenger data collection, similar to that already highlighted above.
- Buses often did not run to the scheduled timetable, turning up late, with gaps where no buses appear, followed by 2 or 3 buses arriving at a bus stop simultaneously; it was likely that this unreliability was a major contributory factor to the decline in passengers.
- Instances of mothers with prams being left at bus stops because of a lack of room on the bus for their prams.
- Drivers occasionally failed to pull into bus lay-bys to pick up passengers, but remained in the road, causing congestion.
- Instances of the number 4 and number 14 buses leaving Southend before the scheduled time, leading to passengers failing to catch their bus.

Responding to a Member enquiry relating to whether a summer bus service was planned for Wallasea Island, given the operation of the ferry there, the bus operators indicated that this would not be commercially viable.

In response to a concern raised about drivers not registering all tickets on buses, Members were advised that undercover inspectors regularly checked that drivers were correctly logging tickets.

It was noted that Arriva could not run minibuses on services not deemed commercially viable, as these vehicles would have to be rented by Arriva, thus incurring costs, and that the major costs associated with providing a bus service were salary costs.

The County officers confirmed that in cases where it was demonstrated that there was a social need for a bus service (eg, an evening service in a rural area) although it was not commercially viable, the County Council would consider subsidising such a service if the costs of running it did not exceed around £5 per passenger.

Responding to a Member concern relating to Arriva buses not arriving at bus stops according to the timetable, Mr Shuttleworth said that 89% of Arriva services did arrive at bus stops within a 6-minute window of their scheduled times. Additionally, inspectors were out and about actually checking arrival times.

Both bus operators confirmed that discussions were already taking place between all interested parties relating to the provision of bus services for the proposed new hospital diagnostic centre at Fossetts Farm.

In response to an enquiry relating to the advertising of bus services, Members were advised that new or revised Arriva bus services were advertised by means of leaflets or by placing a new map into the free newspaper;

occasionally special offers were advertised, eg, the reduction in fares for certain bus routes for a limited period. Arriva was also interested in the possibility of using the media for future advertising purposes. First Bus services were advertised by leaflets being placed through letter boxes in the relevant area (this was done by Post Office staff). During the school summer holiday First would be running a promotion for children under 16 to be able to purchase a 'First Day Out' ticket for £1.30 enabling them to travel on any First bus service in Essex for the date of purchase. This initiative would be advertised on radio and television and it would be interesting to see what kind of response the media advertising elicited.

The bus operators noted that *Rochford District Matters* would be a good forum for including details of revised or new bus services.

There was some debate about a problem that existed in Hockley, which involved traffic being held up on Spa Road by one or more buses regularly stationing themselves on the road for some minutes. One possible solution to this problem would be to convert the disabled parking bays in Spa Road to a bus stop. However, this would require a lot of public consultation and the disabled were likely to be unwilling to give up the parking bays, given that the introduction of decriminalised parking enforcement in the autumn should result in a large decrease in the incidences of unauthorised parking in these bays. The County Council was working on possible solutions to the complex problem in Spa Road.

In response to an enquiry relating to subsidies for rural bus services, County officers confirmed that there would be no objections to a Parish Council subsidising a rural bus service. It was, however, difficult to provide guidance on the likely cost of such subsidies as it would largely depend on the actual service required and the likely take-up by passengers.

Responding to a concern raised relating to instances of the Arriva number 14 bus leaving Southend more than 5 minutes earlier than its scheduled time, Mr Shuttleworth advised that this should not be happening. Inspectors conducted regular spot checks on bus routes to ensure that this did not happen. He should therefore be provided with more details of the instances in order to investigate the situation further.

Noting an invitation by the General Manager of First Bus Travel to visit the First control centre at Hadleigh, Members concurred that this would be of great benefit.

Resolved

That arrangements be made for Members of the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee to visit the First Bus Group control centre at Hadleigh.
(HPS)

330 MEMBERSHIP OF THE TAXI LICENSING SUB-COMMITTEE

The Committee noted that the vacancy on the Taxi Licensing Sub-Committee had been filled by Cllr Mrs H L A Glynn.

331 OVERALL WORK PROGRAMME

The Committee considered the report of the Chief Executive setting out the main areas of this Committee's work programme for the 2004/2005 municipal year and also reviewing the Committee's work over the past 12 months.

Members noted that the following items should also be included in the Committee's work programme for 2004/2005:-

- Regional Planning Guidance – Consultation
- Local Development Scheme/Local Development Framework
- Local Service Agreement: County Highways
- A review of the arrangements for using Section 106 Agreements
- Kerbside Recycling Contract Issues

Resolved

That the progress made in the past 12 months be noted and that the Committee's 2004/2005 work programme, as set out in the appendix to the Minutes, be agreed. (CE)

332 BT PAYPHONES – REMOVALS

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Planning Services seeking Members' views on BT's latest proposals to remove payphones from operation in Rochford District.

During debate, there was a consensus that there would be merit in retaining some of the phone boxes identified for removal by BT on the grounds that some of them provided a service in areas where mobile phone coverage was patchy and that some of them were well used. It would therefore be useful to indicate to BT that, should they still wish to proceed with removal of those phone boxes identified by this Committee as providing a real service to the community, it would be helpful if they could indicate the costs associated with the ongoing repair and maintenance of them.

It was also noted that there would be merit in asking BT whether care could be taken in the removal of any phone boxes to ensure that the ground in their vicinity be made level and safe for pedestrians to walk on after removal.

Resolved

- (1) That BT be informed that Rochford District Council raises no objection to the removal of the following payphones

- O/s 341, Pco1, Ashingdon Road, Rochford
- O/s Rayleigh Post Office, Pco1, High Street, Rayleigh
- Opp Silver Jubilee/629, Pco1, Rayleigh Road, Leigh on Sea
- Opp 40, Pco1, Victoria Road, Rayleigh

- (2) That BT be informed that, in the event of a decision being taken subsequently to remove phone boxes not listed above, that this Council be advised of the costs of maintaining and repairing the phone boxes.
- (3) That BT be asked whether care could be taken in the removal of any phone boxes to ensure that the ground in their vicinity be made level and safe for pedestrians to walk on after removal. (HPS)

333 BEST VALUE REVIEW ACTION PLAN – PUBLIC REGULATION, INSPECTION AND PROTECTION

The Committee considered the report of the Head of Housing, Health and Community Care updating Members on progress to date with implementation of this action plan.

Officers noted that the 'outcome' heading on the action plan table was misleading and that there would be clarity if the heading were changed to 'expected outcome'.

Responding to an enquiry relating to Licensing staffing, officers confirmed that the Licensing Manager had taken up post that week and that the Administrative Assistant had now been appointed. The Licensing Officer post would be re-advertised, but it was unlikely that anyone would be in post sooner than 2-3 months.

In response to an enquiry relating to out of hours services with respect to the remuneration of officers called out of office hours, officers would clarify what form, if appropriate, of remuneration was provided.

With respect to the request for an additional civic amenity site within the District, officers confirmed that a letter had been sent to the County Council, and that an update would be provided in the Members' Bulletin.

Responding to a Member enquiry relating to the provision of information on the Council website relating to protected trees, officers advised that it had not yet been possible to appoint an arboricultural officer, which could jeopardise the deadline in the action plan. Members would be provided with an update on this and on the situation with regard to the CAPS software required to provide the information electronically.

Resolved

That progress to date on the agreed action plan be noted. (HHHCC)

The meeting closed at 10.05 pm.

Chairman

Date

Work Programme 2004/2005

- Oversee continued progress on the Local Plan
- Oversee Roll-out of year 3 community transport
- Twice yearly presentations by ServiceTeam (re refuse collection and street cleansing) – in early autumn and spring
- Twice yearly presentations by Essex County Council Highways re performance, in summer/winter cycles
- Monitor and review operation by Anglian Water of Stambridge Sewage Treatment Works
- Oversee implementation of Decriminalised Parking Enforcement
- Oversee implementation of the Contaminated Land Strategy
- Monitor progress/implementation of actions arising from the Best Value Reviews of Public Regulation, Inspection and Protection and the Environment
- Regional Planning Guidance – Consultation
- Local Development Scheme/Local Development Framework
- Local Service Agreement: County Highways
- A review of the arrangements for using Section 106 Agreements
- Kerbside Recycling Contract Issues