

## **HOUSING ECONOMY & INFRASTRUCTURE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Minutes of a meeting of the Housing Economy & Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee held on Monday, 13 March 2015 at 2.00pm in Meeting Room G1, Addenbrooke House, Ironmasters Way, Telford**

**PRESENT:** Councillors C R Turley (Chairman), E J Carter, L A Murray, J M Seymour, R J Sloan and Co-Optees; D Johnson and S Reynolds

**ALSO PRESENT:** H Rhodes (Cabinet Member for Customer Services, Libraries & Transport); J Ellis (co-optee, Co-Operative & Communities Scrutiny Committee) and R Williams (co-optee, Budget & Finance Scrutiny Committee).

**IN ATTENDANCE:** A Astley (Assistant Director: Neighbourhood & Customer Services); K Harris, Transport & Highway Development Service Delivery Manager and D Proud Group Manager - Transport, Strategy and Road Safety.

#### **HEISC-01 MINUTES**

**RESOLVED** – that the minutes of the meeting of the Housing Economy & Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee held on 18 February 2014 be confirmed and signed by the Chairman.

#### **HEISC-02 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Councillors F Bould, C P R Mollett, and K L Tomlinson.

#### **HEISC-03 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None.

#### **HEISC-04 TRANSPORT REVIEW**

The Committee heard from the Transport & Highway Development Service Delivery Manager and Group Manager - Transport, Strategy and Road Safety that significant savings of £80K had already been made in the previous year as a result of re-tendering some services and utilising section 106 planning obligations. Arriva had embarked on an Independent Network Review and the Council would work with them to determine whether any existing subsidised services could be taken on commercially. As part of the growth taking part in the borough, Transport Officers would also look to further utilise section 106 planning obligations to develop services in conjunction with Arriva. Other sources of funding would also be investigated, eg EU Revenue Funding via the Local Enterprise Partnership and Local Growth Deal funding. Members were provided with details of passenger journeys and subsidy cost per head on subsidised routes.

Members welcomed efforts to ensure that savings were mitigated without loss of services. However, as it was acknowledged that savings had to be made, Members asked how the Transport Service would engage in consultation if any subsidised services were lost in future. The Transport & Highway Development Service

Delivery Manager advised that the primary vehicle for consultation was the Bus User's Group; a commitment to consult with Ward Councillors and Parish Councils was noted and Members suggested that Residents' Associations should be added to this list. The Cabinet Member's commitment to consult widely in the event that any subsidised routes were cancelled was welcomed.

The Chair noted that according to Department for Transport statistics, the overall number of passenger journeys in the borough was falling, whilst concessionary travel journeys were remaining somewhat static. The Group Manager - Transport, Strategy and Road Safety confirmed that this reflected the national picture. Cllr Carter noted that a significant amount of new housing developments were planned across the borough and he felt that this would increase the demand for public transport locally, particularly if the price of petrol began to rise. He felt that it was important that the attractiveness of the local transport service was improved in order to increase passenger journeys and make subsidised services more commercially viable. He suggested one way of achieving this would be to introduce more 'express' services, such as that offered on the Telford Town Centre to Shrewsbury Route (X5) and suggested the 481 service from Telford Town Centre to Stafford (via Newport), would be a suitable candidate since part of the route duplicated that of the 33 and 55 services. Mr Ellis noted that the duplication on the routes of these three services meant that often they were all leaving Oakengates at very similar times, especially on subsidised evenings and Sunday services, which meant that this route was particularly well serviced. In contrast, he noted that other areas with low car ownership, such as Ketley Bank and Wombridge, did not benefit from a bus service. He also noted that service levels on routes 14, 15 and 23 were poor. He asked how the Council decided what routes to subsidise and ensured that best value was achieved?

The Assistant Director: Neighbourhood & Customer Services was able to clarify that as part of a service review by Northgate Kendrick Ash (NKA) which sought to generate savings to meet government targets, a bus subsidy policy had been adopted by the Cabinet and applied to the last round of tenders in 2010, resulting in the existing subsidies being applied. Since that time there had been changes in staff which had resulted in loss of knowledge about the policy but had become clear that the policy would need to be reviewed prior to re-tendering later this year to ensure that it was fit for purpose. The Group Manager - Transport, Strategy and Road Safety advised Members that the policy could only be applied to existing services and tested them against three criteria: cost per passenger, accessibility and sustainability. There was no criteria to look at whether new services should be subsidised. The Chair advised that the policy and minutes of the Cabinet meeting which adopted the policy were publicly available; some of the Cabinet's related meetings had been held in "closed session" but this was likely to be because the information discussed was commercially sensitive but a record of the meetings were still available.

Members noted that the Council did not have a role in determining commercial services but felt that the Council had a legitimate voice to call for changes in service provision in order to benefit residents. The Assistant Director: Neighbourhood & Customer Services agreed that Members had significant insight to share about current services and it would be helpful if that could be fed in to the Transport &

Highway Development Service Delivery Manager and Group Manager - Transport, Strategy and Road Safety so that they could raise concerns with Arriva as part of the Independent Network Review and discuss the tender of the 481 service with Staffordshire County Council.

Cllr Murray noted intentions to mitigate the savings through the use of Section 106 planning obligations and he queried what happened to services when the funding ran out. The Group Manager - Transport, Strategy and Road Safety indicated that in the case of service 77, funding had been secured for ten years and it was hoped that this was a sufficient amount of time for the new developments to complete and the service build up to a commercially operable level. Cllr Carter expressed the opinion that new builds required focus, such as a supermarket, to create sufficient footfall to give continuity for public transport.

Members discussed the timing of provision of bus shelters within new housing developments and were advised that this was subject to a separate budget.

Members discussed a number of recommendations to improve the efficient use of the bus subsidy budget. As Members had also identified some improvements which could be made to the bus service in general, the Assistant Director: Neighbourhood & Customer Services asked that Members provide any further feedback on the operation of commercial routes to her or the Group Manager - Transport, Strategy and Road Safety so that those comments could inform upcoming discussions with Arriva.

**RESOLVED – that it be recommended to Cabinet that:-**

- (a) The Council should engage with Arriva as part of its Independent Network Review, to explore ways to increase service efficiencies and increase the attractiveness of bus services including to:-**
  - (i) consider extending the provision of limited stop express journeys on regular services with long journey times**
  - (ii) consider whether new services can be provided or services reinstated in areas with limited or no service provision**
  - (iii) limit duplication in timetables across services where possible**
  - (iv) provide accelerated journey times for subsidised evening and Sunday services**
  - (v) consider methods to provide a through-ticket style service for connecting journeys**
- (b) That the Committee receive an update on the outcome of Arriva's Independent Network Review**
- (c) Ahead of the next round of tendering for subsidised services, the Bus Subsidy Policy be revised to ensure that it is fit for purpose and that the Committee receive a draft for comment before it is adopted by Cabinet**
- (d) That the Council continue to encourage healthy competition in the tender process for the provision of subsidised bus services**

- (e) That Transport and Planning Services should work to more regularly secure S106 planning obligations to support public transport for new developments**
- (f) In the event that any service reductions are proposed by the Council, affected Communities, Ward Members, Parish Councils and Resident Groups should be widely consulted**

Members of the Co-Operative & Community Scrutiny Committee were welcomed to continue to engage with the Housing, Economy and Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee to conduct scrutiny of bus subsidies.

### **HEISC-05 WORK PROGRAMME AND CHAIR'S UPATE**

The Chair referred to the work programme and provided an update on each item as follows:-

- A briefing note updating on progress of the recommendations made with regard to Empty Properties had been circulated by email on 2 February.
- A briefing note on the work of Fleet Services was circulated. Members applauded the innovative initiatives proposed but also made a number of comments on the development of services:-
  - Dial-a-Ride (DAR)
    - Block bookings for the Dial-a-Ride service were not supported. Although the Committee understood the security this could offer, for instance, to individuals undertaking an adult learning course, there were fears that the system could be abused and isolate vulnerable users unable to access a seat or prevent individuals from re-trying the service if they were declined a seat on their first application. Members asked whether any work had taken place to ascertain whether any alternative provision could be made in conjunction with education providers rather than amending the DAR booking criteria.
  - Social Shopper
    - Opportunities to access market towns and garden centres were welcomed and Members suggested that sheltered housing providers could provide a key market, as well as community groups providing for older and vulnerable people. Members wondered whether opportunities existed for community groups to hire vehicles with a driver during downtime.
  - Community Buses
    - Members queried whether the “Bendy Bus” still operated?
  - Proposed Changes to Community Transport
    - Members welcomed pilot schemes for the proposed initiatives and hoped that the final offer could encompass the whole of the borough.

- Members were keen to ensure that the fare system was commercially competitive.
- Scrutiny Chairs were due to meet informally to consider ways to engage in scrutiny of the **LEP and LTB** as the arrangements were not formalised in the scrutiny handbook or Council Constitution.
- The Assistant Director: Planning Specialist had indicated that legislation around **CIL and S106** Agreements was due to change and had therefore suggested that scrutiny in this area should be postponed until after the election. Members agreed. The Chair also reminded Members that details of section 106 agreements relating to education were included in the budget report presented to Council on 5 March and an annual report on all section 106 agreements would be presented to Cabinet in June.
- A briefing note on the most recent round of consultation for **Shaping Places** was circulated in the latter part of 2014. No further update was anticipated until the next phase which takes place after the election. Although this was accepted, Members were disappointed at the lack of further update.

The meeting ended at 3.34pm

**Chairman:** .....

**Date:** .....