

THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE18 March 2013PUBLIC TRANSPORT INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUPREPORT OF HEAD OF ACCESS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

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RECENT REFERENCES:

None

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report sets out the work and recommendations of the Informal Scrutiny Group (ISG) which was established by The Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18 June 2012 to consider public transport issues in the District. The ISG's terms of reference are set out below.

The Group met five times during the autumn of 2012 and took evidence from a number of representatives involved with public transport services, its provision and associated activities in the Winchester District. From these meetings, the Group formulated a series of recommendations, as set out below.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

That Cabinet and the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport consider:

1. The potential to work with the Community Groups and the County Council in developing and promoting community and public transport schemes and information provision. New mechanisms would need to be set up if improvements in this area are to be achieved. It has been suggested that transport workshops could be held in different parts of the District to improve such communications and involvement.

2. The merit in developing a public transport strategy for the District, as advocated by WinACC. A Cycling strategy recently adopted by the City Council provides a good framework for how this could be done. It would require sufficient resources in order to develop a sound strategy that could gain the support of the County Council, as Transport Authority, and other key stakeholders. As part of this process, Members and officers will need to consider if a step change in the City Council's approach to parking management as suggested by the Friends of the Earth would be the right approach for Winchester.
3. Maximising uptake of the opportunities provided by the Local Sustainable Transport Fund, which has provided valuable funding to support initiatives in the District to support public transport including both promotional activities and new infrastructure. Making the greatest possible use of this funding, and exploring new future funding opportunities, should be a key focus for the City Council. The new inter-operator and smart ticketing arrangements being developed in South Hampshire may provide benefits for the Winchester District and initiatives should be taken to ensure that such opportunities are used to the fullest extent possible.
4. Ensuring the Park and Ride service is used to high capacity, with additional stops in locations such as Kings School, and Olivers Battery for services into and out of Winchester including rail commuters. Consideration could also be given to coming to an arrangement with Bluestar for park and ride tickets to be valid on their services after 21.00hrs which would benefit P & R passengers and help maintain Bluestar evening services. Such changes would need to be carefully assessed to determine their impact on the peak hour express services in and out of the town centre. This could be undertaken as part of a wider review of the Park and Ride, which will be necessary to determine how prospective new car park sites at Pitt Manor and Barton Farm could be incorporated to into the services.
5. That the County Council's scheme to focus public transport on areas of social need and accessibility to key services be cross checked with the City Council's own social deprivation information and networks.
6. Giving greater focus to providing information to community groups on grants available for promoting services and on how to set up new community transport schemes. The Winchester Passenger Transport Forum provides a good platform from which to learn about such opportunities.
7. Holding discussions with Winchester Area Community Action to ensure that all opportunities to join-up services are kept under review (for example between Age UK and Dial-a-Ride).

That the Licensing and Regulation Committee be requested to review:

8. Winchester's taxi fare structure and charges, as these are claimed to be the amongst the most expensive in the country, and the impact and effects this has on residents who live in rural areas who may have to make longer journeys by taxis.

That Cabinet and the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport work with the County Council to ensure:

9. That, as part of the review of central Winchester's traffic system, consideration is given to how best to take full advantage of systems that bring benefits to buses (such as transponders triggering traffic signals) be considered.
10. That the County Council be asked if the proposed integrated ticketing service (the Solent Travel Card) could be extended to serve the Winchester District.
11. That, in light of the recent successful Local Sustainable Transport funding bid for the South Downs, discussions be held with HCC and the Parks Authority to see if the City Council can work jointly on transport schemes which could be of benefit to the Winchester District and the South Downs National Park.

That Cabinet and the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport work with the public transport providers to:

12. Ensure that Winchester is marketed as a destination in their promotional materials and on their web sites.
13. Investigate the possible role for Parish Councils, working closely with bus companies and the County Council, in helping update bus timetable information and in promoting the availability of bus and community services.
14. Request that the bus companies be invited to re-examine their fare structures, particularly with regard to short journeys, such as Stanmore to Winchester town centre, which appear disproportionately expensive compared to other fare structures in other neighbouring areas.
15. Address the need for better real-time passenger information provision across the whole of Winchester Town. Clarification is needed from the County Council as to when this will be happening and what areas and services that it will cover.

THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 March 2013

PUBLIC TRANSPORT INFORMAL SCRUTINY GROUP

REPORT OF HEAD OF ACCESS AND INFRASTRUCTURE

1. Introduction and Terms of Reference

- 1.1. This Informal Scrutiny Group (ISG) was established by The Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held 18 June 2012. The first meeting of the Group was held 28 September 2012 and the following terms of reference were agreed:
- 1.2. *“With a particular reference on buses, the ISG will investigate the provision of public transport services and infrastructure to support the evening economy in the Winchester Town area and look at the provision of rural services in general, including dial-a-ride and community transport services.”*
- 1.3. In addition, the Group agreed that it would examine the following:
 - a) Explore the nature of the difficulties facing people seeking to use buses in the evenings in the Town, whilst acknowledging that the Town Forum are progressing measures to address this.*
 - b) Explore the nature of the difficulties facing people seeking to use buses in rural areas.*
 - c) Seek to identify ways to address these difficulties in a sustainable and viable way in partnership with other local authorities and agencies.”*
- 1.4. The Membership of the ISG was Councillors Read (Chairman), Bodgter, Henry, Hiscock, Jeffs, Southgate and Weir.

2. Evidence received at the Meetings

- 2.1. Throughout its meetings, the Group had invited a number of representatives with a stake in public transport to come and give evidence to the ISG. The Group expressed its thanks to all of those that took part.
- 2.2. At the second meeting of the ISG (held 22 November 2012), the Group received evidence from:
 - Winchester City Council’s Portfolio Holder for Planning and Transport (Cllr Weston)
 - Chairman of the Winchester Town Forum (Cllr Collin)

- Winchester Action on Climate Change (Phil Gagg)
 - Winchester Area Community Action (Paul Williams)
- 2.3. At the third meeting of the ISG (held 26 November 2012), the Group received evidence from:
- Winchester City Council's Deputy Leader and Portfolio Holder for Strategic and Economic Development (Cllr Humby) and the Economy and Arts Officer (Alison Woods)
 - Winchester BID (Chris Turner)
 - Blue Star Line Buses (Alex Patten)
- 2.4. At the fourth meeting of the ISG (held 3 December 2012) the Group received evidence from:
- Stagecoach Buses (Andrew Dyer and Tom Waterhouse)
 - South Downs National Park (Alison Thorpe)
 - University of Winchester (Justin Ridgment)
 - Friends of the Earth (Chris Gilham)
 - Stanmore Community Association (Alistair Marsden)
 - Hampshire County Council's position, explained by Andy Hickman
- 2.5. At the fifth meeting of the ISG (held 11 December 2012) the Group received evidence from:
- Age UK (Cynthia Boswell)
 - Winchester City Council's Community Safety Officer (Sandra Tuddenham)
 - Winchester City Council's Licensing Manager (John Myall). A representative of the taxi association had been unable to attend.

3. Conclusions and recommendations

3.1. From the 22 November 2012 meeting:

- 3.2. Having discussed bus provision with invitees to the scrutiny group meetings it is clear how little the City Council can influence the provision of services in the District. The services are either commercially operated or are subsidised by the County Council on the basis of their agreed criteria. The City Council has no statutory duties in relation to public transport, but chooses to support some transport

schemes including: the Winchester Dial a Ride; the Winchester Park and Ride; the newly introduced Winchester Evening Bus service and some other community transport schemes, some on an ongoing basis and some as one off contributions to help kick start initiatives. Some Districts in Hampshire choose to increase their area of influence by allocating funds to directly subsidise bus services which they determine worthy of support. Other than those services mentioned above the City Council has not done this to date. The County Council are a key player in the provision and support of bus services and have dedicated staff resources and budgets to enable them to do this. The City Council does not currently have staff who can undertake such a role.

- 3.3. Proactive liaison with the County Council is key if the City Council is to play a greater role in bus service provision and in influencing and improving services. Securing community involvement and support is also an important factor. Mechanisms for achieving this would need to be set up if improvements in this area are to be achieved. It has been suggested that transport workshops could be held in different parts of the District to improve such communications and involvement.
- 3.4. The County Council were invited to participate in the Review but declined due to resource issues. Information was supplied on their policies and details of service provision which was presented to the group by City Council officers. Although acknowledging that it is difficult to service all Scrutiny reviews across the County it is still disappointing that the County Council will not attend Scrutiny meetings as these are a valuable way in which services and policies can be tested and new ideas developed which may benefit both sets of authorities.
- 3.5. Information in relation to bus and rail journeys, ticketing and services is key if people are going to change their travel behaviour and increase public transport patronage. Information provision is limited particularly in rural areas and in particular lack of adequate real time information in Winchester is an issue which needs to be resolved.
- 3.6. With limited late night public transport, Winchester's late night economy (which included restaurants and the theatre) is not accessible to everyone. Other larger areas such as Southampton do benefit from evening bus services but these invariably take passengers away from Winchester. This may be due in part to the type of evening activities available in Southampton compared to Winchester particularly for younger people. A new Winchester evening bus service serving parts of the Winchester town area has recently been introduced through an initiative by the Town Forum. This is being monitored and patronage appears to be building up. If successful, this may provide the basis for a wider service.

- 3.7. Some work is being undertaken in South Hampshire through Local Sustainable Transport Fund projects to develop cross ticketing and smart card technology across different public transport services. Such initiatives would benefit parts of Winchester District and every opportunity should be taken to ensure that further opportunities are explored and encouraged.
- 3.8. Although limited to relatively few, train services still play an important role in transport provision. Opportunities should continue to be explored to enhance services and improve accessibility to rail stations through travel planning activities and through new developments.
- 3.9. There appears to be more potential to work with the Community Groups and the County Council in developing and promoting community transport schemes using the newly formulated Transport Tool Kit. A recent good example is the new Community Bus service for Southwick and Boarhunt. Promotion of the development of Community Car Share Schemes would form part of this approach.
- 3.10. There is merit in considering the development of a public transport strategy for the District, as advocated by WinACC. A Cycling strategy recently adopted by the City Council provides a good framework for how this could be done. It would require sufficient resources in order to develop a strategy which is sound and hence gain the support of the County Council as Transport Authority and other key stakeholders.
- 3.11. The Local Sustainable Transport Fund has provided valuable funding to support public transport initiatives in the District including promotional activities and new infrastructure. Maximising the use of this funding, and exploring new future funding opportunities, should be a key focus for the City Council. The new inter-operator and smart ticketing arrangements being developed in South Hampshire may provide benefits for Winchester District and opportunities should be taken to ensure that uptake of such opportunities is maximised.
- 3.12. It had been suggested that, under provisions of the Localism Act, the City Council could consider assuming the role of providing subsidised public transport from the County Council. However, whilst it was possible that this might lead to more locally focused services, there are likely to be greater benefits in terms of economies of scale, expertise and political ownership in the service remaining with the County Council.
- 3.13. It had also been suggested that bus operators and the County Council should be encouraged to merge commercial and subsidised services, with the effect of using the subsidy to divert a commercial service through a nearby under-served village or area.
- 3.14. Hampshire County Council is currently undertaking a Traffic Management Study of the central Winchester one-way system and it is important that the impacts on buses are fully taken into account in this

Study and, if possible, further benefits to buses (such as greater use of transponders to trigger traffic signals to favour buses) should be explored.

- 3.15. The Group had discussed the issue of getting the best out of the Park and Ride services, in particular improving off peak stops in locations such as at Kings School. It was felt that this may be appropriate and should not diminish the peak hour express service in and out of the town. This could be part of a wider review of Park and Ride which will be undertaken during 2013 along with considering parking strategy in Winchester Town.

4. From the 26 November 2012 meeting:

- 4.1. The County Council has devised the bus network based on social need and using information relating to access to key services including; education; shops; health facilities and employment. The City Council has information on areas of social deprivation which could be cross related to the bus network to inform the City Council where there are key parts of the District which should be targeted for support.
- 4.2. There may be scope to ask bus companies to consider greater marketing of Winchester as a destination in their promotional materials and on their web sites.
- 4.3. There may be a role for Parish Councils to be invited to work closely with bus companies and the County Council to update bus timetable information and promote availability of bus and community services.
- 4.4. The County Council should be asked if the proposed integrated ticketing service (the Solent Travel Card) could be extended to serve the Winchester District. Members also noted the benefits of customers being able to buy tickets in advance of getting on buses, particularly at busy stops.
- 4.5. That the bus companies be invited to re-examine their fare structures, particularly with regard to short journeys, such as Stanmore to Winchester town centre, which appeared disproportionately expensive compared to fare structures in other areas.

5. From the 3 December 2012 meeting:

- 5.1. That, in light of the recent successful Local Sustainable Transport funding bid for the South Downs, discussions are held with HCC and the Parks Authority to see if the City Council can work jointly on transport schemes which could be of benefit to the Winchester District and the South Downs National Park.
- 5.2. That the City Council needs to consider whether a step change in its approach towards parking management and passenger transport provision is appropriate for Winchester, as suggested by the Friends of

the Earth. The preparation of a detailed Parking Strategy for Winchester to supplement the Winchester Town Access Plan may be an appropriate mechanism through which to do this and will enable other objectives to be considered as part of this process.

- 5.3. Better real-time passenger information provision is needed across the whole of Winchester Town (ie by replacing the current system based on timetables with one that shows actual bus movements). Clarification is needed from the County Council as to when this will be happening and what areas and services it will cover.
- 5.4. Providing information to community groups on available grants for promoting services and on how to set up new community transport schemes may be an area for greater focus. The Winchester Passenger Transport Forum provides a good forum through which to learn about such opportunities.

6. From 11 December 2012 meeting:

- 6.1. That the Licensing and Regulation Committee be requested to look at Winchester's taxi fare structure and charges, as these were claimed to be amongst the most expensive in the country, and the detrimental affect this had on residents who lived in rural areas and have to make longer journeys.
- 6.2. That discussions are held with Winchester Area Community Action to see if all opportunities are being considered, and where feasible taken, to join-up services (for example between Age UK and Dial-a-Ride).

OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

7. SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY AND CORPORATE BUSINESS PLAN (RELEVANCE TO):

- 7.1. Many of the suggested recommendations will help to achieve the Community Strategy objectives depending upon how thoroughly and how soon they can be implemented.
- 7.2. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:
- 7.3. Careful consideration is needed as to how the suggested recommendations are taken forward, and by whom, and the necessary resources will need to be found to undertake the required work.
- 7.4. In relation to recommendation 4, careful consideration of the VAT implications of changing the way the P&R ticketing system operates would be needed as the current almost full VAT exemption on P&R income is based on the current system and any changes would require a full review.

7.5. RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES

7.6. None

7.7. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS: Community Transport Toolkit,
Hampshire County Council

APPENDICES:

None