

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Commission held at County Hall, Glenfield on Thursday, 20 September 2001.

PRESENT

Mr. N. J. Brown CC (in the Chair)

Mr. D. C. Bill CC
Mr. B. Chapman AE, CC
Mr. Mike Jones CC
Mr. N. J. Rushton CC

Mrs. V. P. Bill CC
Mr. P. A. Hyde CC
Mr. J. B. Rhodes CC
Mr. S. D. Sheahan CC

In Attendance

Mr. D.R. Bown CC, Mr. D. Jennings CC, Mr. C. MacLeod CC and Mrs. M. Sherwin CC.

15. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Commission held on 5th September, 2001 were taken as read, confirmed and signed.

16. Urgent Items

There were no urgent items for consideration.

17. Declarations of pecuniary and non-pecuniary interests in respect of items on the agenda.

There were no declarations of interest.

18. Declarations of the Party Whip

There were no declarations made under Overview and Scrutiny Procedure Rule 16.

19. Presentation of Petitions under Standing Order 36.

The Chief Executive reported that there were no petitions to be presented.

20. Best Value Review of Public Transport Support - Presentation of Key Findings and Implications.

The Commission considered a report previously submitted to the Cabinet which set out the findings of the Best Value Review Panel established to consider the County Council's Public Transport Services. A copy of the report is filed with these minutes.

The Commission then received a presentation from Mr. J. Holden, Public Transport Co-ordinator, Planning and Transportation Department, on the key findings and implications arising from the Review. Copies of the slides used in the presentation are attached to these minutes.

Arising from the discussion on the presentation the following points were made:

- Concern was expressed that applying the principles in the report would mean that 5% of the population would not have direct access to a bus service of at least hourly frequency but might also lose their existing services. In areas where the hourly service was not used throughout the day, but only at certain times, there was a risk that the entire service would be withdrawn. This would cause anger and resentment. Members were assured that adequate resources would be available to ensure that the 5% of the population not receiving an hourly service would receive levels of service at least as good as at present, though the provision of services provided would depend upon local consultation. An annual review process would be used to ensure a correct balance of funding was maintained between the hourly services network and the community transport proposals;
- The report did not address adequately the issue of services to out of county cities/towns. Residents on the Leicestershire boundaries often had stronger links and affinities with towns and cities in other counties than Leicestershire. This would require close co-operation between neighbouring local authorities. Members were advised that such co-operation was already in place and could be developed further if consultation with the public demonstrated the need;
- The report needed to be more specific about the losers from adopting the new transport network and about the resources that would be provided to enable community-based transport solutions to be provided to meet their needs. It was pointed out that it would not be possible to identify the losers precisely until more detailed work had been done on timetables, routes etc. Likewise, the resource implication could not be accurately assessed until this work had been done;
- Further work needed to be undertaken with Parish Councils to encourage the development of community transport. The efforts of officers in making Parish Councils aware of funding from the "Parish Travel Fund" were welcomed;
- Concerns were raised regarding services between Market Bosworth and Hinckley, particularly in relation to evening bus services.
- The increase in costs of bus service contracts and the trend towards reducing commercial bus service network was a cause for concern.
- The sustainability assessment of the Ivanhoe Stage 1 line was linked to factors relating to pollution and did not reflect the wider benefits of rail services such as reduced congestion on the roads.

RESOLVED:

- (a) That Mr. Holden be thanked for his interesting presentation on the outcome and implications of the Public Transport Review;
- (b) That it be noted that the report will be considered by the Planning and Environment Committee on 27th September and the Commission on 3rd

October with a view to submitting initial comments to the Cabinet.

20th September, 2001.
10.30 a.m. – 12.25 p.m.

CHAIRMAN

Best Value Review of Public Transport

Presentation to Scrutiny Commission

20th September 2001

Best Value Review of Public Transport

1 - Introduction

Scope - All public transport services except:

- concessionary travel
- mainstream home to school transport

Process

- Member Panel
- started work October 2000
- 'the 4Cs'
- two main stages of analysis
- now further consultation
- implementation plan late 2001
- review inspection early 2002

Best Value Review of Public Transport

2 - Challenge to the service

- public transport contributes strongly to Local Transport Plan objectives for Accessibility and Environment
- customers expect a good level of service, as does government

- this could not be achieved without Council intervention
- nor could we provide the service by other means
- but this does not imply any particular *level* of service
- nor does it imply all service provision is cost-effective

Best Value Review of Public Transport

3 - Bus Service Policy

Issues:

- services not meeting customer expectations
- need for better fit with corporate objectives
- bus subsidy policy reactive
- extra funding, and national developments, suggest more proactive approach
- some existing services offer poor value for money

Options analysis:

- examined key objectives of meeting access needs and providing alternative to the car
- concluded need regular services for credible access
- need integrated network of regular services, with community-focussed approach for other areas

Best Value Review of Public Transport

Bus Service Policy continued

Policy proposals:

- improved network of hourly daytime services

- community-based approach for 'deep rural' areas
- improved network of hourly evening and Sunday services
- 'school specials' associated with school travel plans
- improved interchange to help travel across the network
- emphasis on quality and promotion to ensure network can be maintained
- annual review process to ensure fit to budget

Best Value Review of Public Transport

Bus Service Policy continued

Policy in practice:

- with existing funding, around 95% of people would have an hourly daytime service
- increase from 27% to 38% of rural population with hourly service
- similar increases on evenings/Sundays
- need to ensure few 'losers' from new policy
- existing level of funding about right - less does not produce effective network, more risks poor value for money

Best Value Review of Public Transport

4 - Bus Service Quality

Improving commercially run services:

- fundamental limitation in lack of statutory powers
- but can work through existing Quality Bus Partnerships to help commercial services be more effective
- recommendations on improving the work of QBPs

Improving contract bus services - Build on existing initiatives particularly to:

- apply tighter quality checks before awarding contract
- enhance inspection/enforcement
- measure better the views of customers and set targets accordingly

Best Value Review of Public Transport

5 - Bus Service Cost

90% of bus work already tendered on the open market

Competitive market locally

But increasing market price and reducing commercial bus service networks a long-term problem.

No radical measure available but can combat by:

- further improvement in managing the market
- keep case for vehicle purchase or in-house operation under review
- help expansion of voluntary sector transport
- develop market for taxis and small minibuses

Best Value Review of Public Transport

6 - Bus Passenger Information

- Key issue for customers and new requirement from government
- Partnership with bus companies necessary for Bus Information Strategy
- Increased emphasis on electronic means but need range of types
- Issues of availability of information and maintenance of displays
- Requires some increase in County Council spend

Best Value Review of Public Transport

7 - Rail Services

For the Ivanhoe Stage 1 rail service:

- The service does not appear to contribute to sustainability objectives, or offer value for money for the authority
- This may be characteristic of this particular service rather than a general finding
- The Council should pursue the approach already made to the Strategic Rail Authority to take over funding

Best Value Review of Public Transport

Rail Services continued

For other rail policy:

- New stations and improved interchange are justified in specific instances
- But other agencies have the responsibility for general maintenance of stations and services

For cost and quality:

- On the Ivanhoe stage 1 service, these are mostly outside the Council's control
- But further promotion to increase fares revenue is justified

Best Value Review of Public Transport

8 - Accessible Transport

- Main policy issue is lack of countywide coverage
- Close working with voluntary sector providers, and increased spend, necessary to correct this

- Need to make taxis more useful, through mixed fleets and better customer care
- And through improved concessions for disabled people
- Need to ensure new low-floor buses have matching raised kerbs at stops
- Some service integration issues to be pursued, with Social Services, health authorities and S.E.N. transport

Best Value Review of Public Transport

9 - Service Management

Three main issues revealed:

- Externalisation. No obvious case but better considered in wider context of Highway Services Review
- Integration of transport procurement. Prima facie case made - Panel recommend work on this should be brought forward
- Trading agreements with Leicester. Generally helpful to the Council but issue of officer time commitment to be resolved