

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM AGENDA



Friday 14th October, 2005

at 1.00 p.m.

in Committee Room “B”

MEMBERS: NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM:

Councillors Cambridge, Cook, Cranney, Fenwick, Flintoff, Hall, Lauderdale, J Marshall, Richardson, Rogan and Tumilty.

Resident Representatives:

Allan Lloyd, Linda Shields and Vacancy

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

2. TO RECEIVE ANY DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST BY MEMBERS

3. MINUTES

- 3.1 To confirm the minutes of the meetings held on 5th September 2005
(*attached*).

4. ITEMS FOR DISCUSSION

- 4.1 Scrutiny Investigation into Hartlepool's Bus Service Provision –
Evidence from the Authority's Portfolio Holder for Culture, Housing and
Transportation (*Scrutiny Manager and Scrutiny Support Officer*)

5. ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS ARE URGENT

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

MINUTES

5th September 2005

Present:

Councillor: Kevin Cranney (In the Chair)

Councillors: John Cambridge, Rob Cook, Bob Flintoff and Ged Hall.

Resident

Reps: Allan Lloyd and Iris Ryder.

Officers: Ian Parker, Director of Neighbourhood Services
Charlotte Burnham, Scrutiny Manager
Joan Wilkins, Principal Democratic Services Officer

Also

Present: Mr Peter Clark (Stagecoach) and Mr Doug Elphee (Stagecoach).

5. Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence were received from Linda Shields and Councillors John Lauderdale, John Marshall, Carl Richardson and Victor Tumilty.

6. Declarations of interest by members

None.

7. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on the 19th August 2005 were confirmed.

8. Final Draft Report – ‘Civic Centre Capital Maintenance Programme 2005/06 to 2007/08’ *(Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum)*

Further to minute number 4 of the previous meeting, the Scrutiny Manager sought approval for the structure and content of the Forums final report on the outcome of its consideration of the Civic Centre Capital Maintenance Programme 2005/06 to 2007/08.

Decision

The content and structure of the report was approved and authorisation given for its submission to the Scrutiny Co-ordinating Committee.

9. The Role of the Local Authority - Presentation *(Director of Neighbourhood Services)*

The Director of Neighbourhood Services gave a detailed presentation on the role of the Local Authority in providing bus services.

During the course of his presentation the Director of Neighbourhood Services recapped on previous operational arrangements prior to the introduction of the Transport Act 1985, at which time Councils were effectively prevented from running bus services directly. In looking at current arrangement it was noted that the Council has a duty to secure the provision of public transport and formulate policies for the services it secures. Attention was drawn to the Councils main areas of work in relation to:

- The Public Transport Policy (LTP) (Key policies within it being high frequency on main corridors, high quality stop information, an improved interchange, improved accessibility and increased patronage).
- The provision of the Supported Bus Service.
- Concessionary Fares.
- The provision of public transport Information.
- The public transport infrastructure.
- Quality Bus Partnerships.

To assist the Forum ideas were put forward for possible themes for scrutiny, i.e.:

- Policies (are the key policies the right ones),
- Subsidised services (VFM/effectiveness),
- Concessionary fares (Inequality/general factors and costs),
- Information (Amount/quality/real-time/resources),
- Infrastructure (Bus station, more stops/more shelters/more hassle, quality/resources)
- Partnerships (relationship with region/sub region).

Following consideration of the first presentation Members raised the following issues:-

i) **The cost effectiveness of routes.** - Whilst it was noted that Stagecoach's options in dealing with such routes were to remove the services or increase costs Stagecoach could reduce profits to shareholders. This option was, however, not taken advantage of and it was felt that services should be provided, whether good or bad.

ii) **Concern was expressed that many elderly residents were disabled**

and it was queried if the bus company would in the future be considering the provision of buses to cater for the disabled, as services currently did not. It was also felt that it was important to consult disabled users as part of the process for the provision of improved vehicles. - In response to this concern it was confirmed that all buses would be required to have a low floor and wheelchair access by 2012. Until that time the provision of improved buses would be done through negotiations with Stagecoach, with additional services to continue to be provided through the Dial-a-Ride scheme, which was provided on a membership basis, with 50% of the costs per journey paid by users.

iii) Regarding the provision of improved buses emphasis was placed upon the need to consult disabled users.

iv) Residents expressed concern regarding problems with routes across the town and the absence of services from certain areas. The areas raised identified were:

- It was felt that the absence of a stop outside Crosby Homes and the re-routing of the service which used to run along Ryehill Gardens needed to be looked at as part of the provision of a transport infrastructure. The Director of Neighbourhood Services indicated that the decision to re-route this service had been taken by Stagecoach, however, it was recognised that the Council needed to look at its policy to ascertain if the provision of this service was included. Efforts were to be made to address the situation.

Residents could not understand why the bus could not come up Ryehill Gardens, as it already goes along Hart Lane, and were advised that this would not be possible as there was insufficient tie for Services 3 to do the required loop and the road layout would not facilitate it.

- The removal of service from Hart Lane to Park Avenue. Concern was expressed that notice of the cancellation of the service had only been published the day before the service ceased and that resources which could have been used to continue the service had been used to raise pavements. In response to this, the Forum was advised that improvements to the bus stop infrastructure were resourced through the LTP and that these resources couldn't be used to run bus services. The need to look at this as part of the Council's policy was again highlighted.

v) Attention was drawn to the availability of considerable anecdotal evidence of problems with the bus service and concern expressed regarding possibility that a lot of routes would suffer as a result of the concentration of resources on specific, more economically viable, routes. Members queried what percentages of bus journeys were on main routes and the level of subsidy provided. The Director of Neighbourhood Services indicated that an analysis could be undertaken to provide this information and agreed that this was a valid issue for scrutiny to look at in terms of the Council's Policy.

The Chairman thanked all of those present for their participation in the meeting and indicated that he looked forward to seeing them throughout the scrutiny process.

Decision

The content of the presentations and the issues raised were noted for consideration as part of the ongoing scrutiny enquiry.

10. The Provision of Bus Services in – Presentation *(Mr Clark – Operations Manager Stagecoach in Hartlepool)*

The Chairman welcomed Mr Clark from Stagecoach. During the course of his presentation Mr Clark provided a brief history of the Hartlepool bus undertaking and provided details of investment, compliance issues, the development of services, traffic congestion and indiscriminate parking, the review of bus services, subsidised bus services and the perception of bus services.

Mr Clark indicated that since taking over the bus services in 19994 Stagecoach had committed considerable capital expenditure in its Hartlepool operation's, transforming the once ageing fleet into one of the best in Europe. It was also highlighted that Stagecoach saw a solid future for the provision of the bus service in Hartlepool and had:

- Committed considerable resources to the training of drivers.
- Amended services on the ground of information provided, i.e. bus service 3.

Following consideration of Mr Clark's presentation Members raised the following issues:-

i) Members highlighted that there was a very poor public perception of bus services in Hartlepool. Mr Clark acknowledged the criticism raised by its service users and assured the Forum that Stagecoach would co-operate fully and participate in discussions in a constructive and positive manner, with the hope of seeing a positive outcome from the deliberations. Whilst it was recognised that public consultation would be an integral part of the scrutiny process concern was expressed by Stagecoach that they had not been given the opportunity to respond directly to concerns as part of consultations prior to completion of the Local Transport Plan. In view of this a request was made by Stagecoach for them to be involved in the compilation and wording of questionnaires and that they be given the opportunity to respond to any issues raised.

ii) In relation to the issue subsidies it was felt that the services required should be provided whatever the cost and that it should not be necessary to give subsidies to Stagecoach to encourage them to provide them. It was felt that people had a right to expect service

improvements now and not in 2012 and whilst previous surveys had reflected a good service this was no longer the case.

Members were advised that increased car ownership had resulted in a reduction in bus usage and that in some areas where services had been marginal they were now total loss makers. It was recognised that the changes made in March as a result of subsidy changes had been unpopular, however, they had been necessary to keep services viable. Stagecoach was not making millions of pounds of profit and had been hit by rising fuel costs.

iii) The provision of services on unpopular routes. - Members queried if smaller buses could be used and whether the profitable routes had been looked at in terms of improvements, reference was made to the two buses provided along Marlow Road and the absence of a bus along Mainsforth Terrace. This resulted in the need for residents of the OAP homes on Mainsforth Terrace to walk to Marlow Road to catch a bus.

iv) Why do buses go along Arncliffe Gardens and not up Elwick Road and down Park Road instead? – It was confirmed that this would not be operationally possible and attention drawn to congestion at the Arncliffe Gardens junction. The issues of the provision of a service along Arncliffe Gardens had been looked at by Stagecoach. The decision had been taken that it would be unfair to remove the service, however, it was recognised that bus drivers did not like to drive along the road as a result of the number of parked cars and congestion.

At this point in the meeting the opportunity was taken to clarify the next stages of the process and attention drawn to the opportunity later in the process to look in more detail at specific routes. Details of names, addresses and problem were to be taken at the end of the meeting to allow officers to endeavour to address the issues raised.

v) It was felt that it was unfair to blame residents for not using buses and attention drawn to the affects of inadequate service provision and the rise in fares, with particular attention drawn to the affects of the removal of Service No. 12 (Seaton Carew) on a Sunday morning. – It was highlighted that Stagecoach could only respond to demand and could not run services without the provision of subsidies. Regarding Service No. 12, Members were advised that insufficient demand had resulted in the removal of the service on Sunday mornings, however, the service was to be reinstated in a Sunday morning in late October. It was, however, reiterated that Service No. 12 was a weak performer.

vi) Attention was drawn to the importance of partnership working and the need for give and take, with a responsibility to ensure that resources are effectively used. It was queried what the base line costs were for the running of a service and whether it would be possible to provide a greater mix of vehicles, i.e. smaller vehicles on less popular routes enable the provision of weaker services to continue. Members were advised of the various contributory factors to baseline costs for the provision of bus services, i.e. the

time of the journey, peak times cost more, etc. and attention drawn to the economic practicalities of running smaller buses, with greater maintenance cost being just one element. It was also highlighted that the greatest cost of running any service was the provision of a driver and that in the areas being raised the gap between costs and revenue were becoming greater making it even more difficult to sustain the service.

As requested details of the base line costs were to be provided by Stagecoach to assist Members in their enquiry.

vii) **Concern was expressed by Stagecoach regarding the formula used by Hartlepool for the calculation of annual increases in tender prices for subsidised services. The formula did not reflect the increases in costs on items such as wages, insurance and diesel fuel.** – Stagecoach felt that the formula was unrealistic and it was suggested that consideration perhaps needed to be given to what formula's are used by other local authorities in terms of best practice.

A number of other small issues were raised regarding routes across the town, details of which were to be discussed later in the scrutiny process. In summing up discussions so far it was highlighted that this was a fantastic subject for scrutiny and that as part of the process consideration needed to be given to:

- The identification of ways to engage with the public when services change.
- Addressing concerns regarding the infrastructure.

The Chairman thanked all of those present for their participation in the meeting and indicated that he looked forward to seeing them throughout the scrutiny process.

Decision

The content of the presentations and the issues raised were noted for consideration as part of the ongoing scrutiny enquiry.

KEVIN CRANNEY

CHAIRMAN

NEIGHBOURHOOD SERVICES SCRUTINY FORUM

14 October 2005



Report of: Scrutiny Manager / Scrutiny Support Officer

Subject: Scrutiny Investigation into Hartlepool's Bus Service Provision – Evidence from the Authority's Portfolio Holder for Culture, Housing and Transportation

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform Members of the Forum that the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Housing and Transportation has been invited to attend this meeting to provide evidence in relation to the ongoing investigation into Bus Service Provision.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Members will recall that at the meeting of this Forum on 19 August 2005, the Terms of Reference and Potential Areas of Inquiry/Sources of Evidence were approved by the Forum for this scrutiny investigation.
- 2.2 Consequently, the Authority's Portfolio Holder for Culture, Housing and Transportation has been invited to attend this meeting to submit evidence to the Forum.
- 2.3 During this evidence gathering session with the Authority's Culture, Housing and Transportation Portfolio Holder, it is suggested that responses should be sought to the following key questions:-
- a) What are your roles and responsibilities in relation to bus service provision under the Local Transport Plan?
 - b) What responsibilities do you exercise relating to bus service provision under the following Service Areas and Functions:

Transport Policy;
Social Transport Services;
Highways; and
Traffic and Transportation.

- c) How are you working towards the key aims and objectives of the 2000 Transport Act, in relation to the Local Authority's role?
- d) In your role as the Executive Member with the closest responsibility to bus service provision do you feel that the current bus infrastructure meets the needs of the community?
- e) Do you feel that the current bus service routes within Hartlepool meet a variety of needs in relation to: access to employment; education; health care; local shops and services; and leisure facilities?
- f) What are your views on the availability of information relating to bus service provision in Hartlepool, especially in relation to the coordination of timetable changes?
- g) What do you consider to be the barriers of using buses for disabled people and vulnerable groups, and how do you see the Council contributing to overcoming these barriers?
- h) What are your views in relation to the cost of bus travel and the availability of (different) ticket types within Hartlepool?
- i) How do you see the Local Authority's bus subsidies and concessionary fares contributions (together with any other related expenditure) feeding into the bus service provision in Hartlepool?

3. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That Members of the Forum consider the views of the Portfolio Holder for Culture, Housing and Transportation in relation to the questions outlined in section 2.3.

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BACKGROUND PAPERS

- (i) Neighbourhood Services Scrutiny Forum report 19th August – “Scrutiny Investigation into Hartlepool's Bus Service Provision – Scoping Report”