

SCRUTINY PANEL A

Meeting held in the Committee Room, Council Offices, Urban Road, Kirkby-in-Ashfield,

on Thursday, 12th March, 2020 at 10.00 am

Present: Councillor Melanie Darrington in the Chair;

Councillors Ciaran Brown, Trevor Locke,
Lauren Mitchell, Warren Nuttall, John Smallridge
(Vice-Chair) and David Walters.

Officers Present: Lynn Cain, Louise Ellis, Mike Joy, Phil Warrington
and Shane Wright.

In Attendance: Vicky Williams (Trent-Barton - Director of
Commercial Services)
Matthew Pike (Our Centre - Assistant Manager)
Elden Skinner (Our Centre - Transport Manager).

SA.12 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary or Personal Interests and Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

Councillor Warren Nuttall declared a Non Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interest in relation to agenda item 4 (Scrutiny Review: Bus Provision in Ashfield). His interest arose from the fact the he currently holds the position of Council representative on the Our Centre Board.

SA.13 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 23 January 2020, be received and approved as a correct record.

SA.14 Scrutiny Review: Bus Provision in Ashfield

The Service Manager for Scrutiny and Democratic Services introduced the item and reminded Members that the Panel had commenced the review at the last meeting and had identified its remit as follows:-

“to consider the current gaps in local bus provision within Ashfield and its impact on social exclusion issues and the health and wellbeing of residents including consideration of any environmental sustainability issues in relation to future bus provision.”

The report outlined an overview of bus provision from a regional and national context and detailed the local community transport schemes currently available within Ashfield. Members were now being asked to examine any potential gaps in service and how this was currently impacting upon the residents of Ashfield.

Vicky Williams, Director of Commercial Services at Trent-Barton, attended the meeting to offer a commercial operator perspective in relation to local bus provision and criteria for selecting subsidised routes. Members acknowledged that County Council funding for subsidising bus services through commercial operators had generally reduced over recent years although an additional County funding round of £683,000 had just been announced. The funding was being offered to endeavour to improve bus punctuality, better quality replacement services and expanding the selection of routes to customers.

In relation to particular challenges being experienced by commercial transport operators, the Panel were advised that the effect of Brexit had already increased engineering costs for Trent-Barton and turbulence in the oil market had seen increases in fuel prices.

However, congestion on the roads remained the biggest challenge alongside roadworks that were now taking longer to complete. Issues with punctuality and journey destination times had a direct impact on reduced patronage and customers having continued trust in the service to arrive on time. Rush hour was now covering 3pm until 7pm, which added to congestion and delays on the roads.

Trent-Barton endeavoured to work with all local Councils to ascertain hotspots and areas of need and advised that the County Council were very proactive in working with the commercial bus operators as required.

In relation to S106 funding contributions, these were a welcome addition to funding streams already available and the C1 and C2 service that currently served the Rolls Royce estate in Hucknall had been made possible from S106 contributions from the Developer. It was however, noted that new roads required adoption by the Highways Authority prior to the bus operators being able to access them and provide a service to the area.

Panel Members took the opportunity to discuss the matter and considered amongst other things:-

- the ongoing reduction in funding to commercial bus operators to subsidise routes and the changing priorities from the fund providers to provide for electric vehicles and priority ticketing;
- how Trent-Barton was currently tackling emission reductions and acknowledging that many of their vehicles had been updated with the help of Euro VI funding and start/stop technology;
- the substantial cost of providing new, fully electric buses, the desire to buy from UK manufacturers whilst recognising the current limitations regarding mileage capability to be obtained from the batteries provided (around 150 miles per charge);

- how routes were earmarked and subsidies applied for via the County Council;
- concerns surrounding the current Trent-Barton App and its unreliability in giving real-time information regarding bus arrivals, with confirmation that the company were endeavouring to access a solution by enabling drivers to log more accurate real-time information and expanding the capability to extract data from the newly installed ticket machines;
- the success of the C1 and C2 routes in Hucknall and the possibility of extending the service to evenings and weekends;
- the possibility of the 3's service being extended through Bestwood Village and acknowledgement that a more demand-led community bus service might fit the profile of residents better;
- the importance of bus routes being accessible to industrial estates and business parks to enable people to get to and from work as required and acceptance that many differing shift patterns were now in existence.

To gain a community transport perspective, two representatives from Our Centre, Matthew Pike and Elden Skinner, attended the meeting to assist Members with their review. They advised that Our Centre started in the 1980's and were now a registered charity that provided community transport services to rural areas and residents with disabilities and isolation issues.

Our Centre relied on community-based funding and donations to ensure that the organisation remained viable. Routes and services provided would fluctuate dependant on 'demand' and it was an ongoing challenge to work with other bus companies to ensure that their community bus service bridged the gaps in provision (including hospital, school, day centres and shopping trips) and kept the District and its residents connected.

Having been asked the question, Members were advised that Our Centre generally advertised their services through the following:-

1. 'Notts Help Yourself' website (which provides signposting for a vast range of support services);
2. Ashfield Voluntary Action (AVA);
3. social service referrals;
4. internet searches;
5. word of mouth recommendations.

In relation to current challenges being faced by the organisation, congestion again was an ongoing issue but not as problematic as the transport services provided were not usually required to adhere to a strict arrival timetable. Accessing ongoing funding was a continued challenge but officers continually endeavoured to source the necessary finances and build robust working relationships with other providers to ensure gaps could be bridged and services provided where necessary.

Members thanked the representatives from Trent-Barton and Our Centre for their attendance at the meeting and commented that the discussion had been extremely worthwhile and informative.

RESOLVED that

- a) the information/responses proffered by Trent-Barton and Our Centre as part of the Panel's review discussions, be received, noted and welcomed;
- b) that in readiness for the next meeting of the Panel in June/July 2020, the Service Manager for Scrutiny and Democratic Services be requested to extend an invite to the following:-
 - Nottinghamshire County Council Transport Manager
 - Lee Anderson MP
 - Mark Spencer MP
 - Christine Sarris – Assistant Director for Planning and Regulatory Services.

SA.15 Unauthorised Encampment Protocol

The Council's Service Manager for Strategic Housing and Lettings, Phil Warrington, presented an updated 'Unauthorised Encampment Protocol' for consideration by Members following a 12-month review of the document to ensure continuous development and improvement taking into account the experiences and lessons learnt over the past year.

It had become apparent over the previous 12 months that much of the original protocol was too detailed. Having dealt with 20 unauthorised encampments during 2019, the 'Direction to Leave' process had proved to be the most effective and the updated protocol duly reflected this approach in a more succinct fashion.

Members took the opportunity to debate the following:-

- the 'Direction to Leave' process and its implementation by the Authority;
- the potential use of injunctions for repeat unauthorised encampment on a particular site/piece of land and acknowledgement of the lengthy court process to obtain such an order;
- acknowledgement that some other authorities provide approved encampment sites for temporary re-location purposes;
- the necessity for a thorough clean-up operation after clearance of an unauthorised site;
- potential preventative methods to cease unauthorised encampments on Council land including barriers etc.;
- managing the public's perception of encampments and how the Council responds thus reducing the fear being experienced by some residents regarding the disruption caused;

- concerns regarding the ongoing costs to the Authority to implement preventative measures and clean-up operations to sites once vacated.

RESOLVED

that the proposed changes to the Unauthorised Encampment Protocol be agreed and recommended to Cabinet for approval.

SA.16 Scrutiny Review of Community Engagement

The Service Manager for Scrutiny and Democratic Services gave the Panel an update regarding the Community Engagement scrutiny review. Members had already discussed the topic over two meetings and were advised that a Community Engagement Strategy was in development and as part of the review, the Panel would be able to input into its content in relation to objectives and methods of engagement.

However, due to differing and emerging priorities, further development of the strategy had been placed on hold at the end of 2019 and work had only just recommenced on the document (a copy of the initial draft strategy was circulated for information).

Therefore, a suggestion was made to Members that the review focus should shift more towards considering the Corporate Plan priority of 'Putting people at the heart of what we do' and 'being honest with people in an open and professional way'. This would hopefully then ensure that the Council and particularly its Members, communicates with residents and local communities in the best and most consistent way possible.

RESOLVED

that Members be requested to consider what support/mechanisms they may require to best engage with their residents and local communities in readiness for discussion at the next meeting of the Panel in June/July 2020.

The meeting closed at 12.05 pm

Chairman.