

SCRUTINY PANEL A

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

on Tuesday, 15th March, 2016 at 6.30 pm

Present: Councillor Catherine Mason in the Chair;
Councillors Ben Bradley, Tony Brewer,
Joanne Donnelly, Helen Hollis and Paul Roberts.

Apologies for Absence: Councillors Lauren Mitchell and Helen Smith.

Officers Present: Mike Joy and Lynn Cain.

SA.11 Declarations of Disclosable Pecuniary and Non-Disclosable Pecuniary/Other Interests

There were no declarations of interest made.

SA.12 Minutes

RESOLVED

that the minutes of the meeting of the Panel held on 3rd November, 2015, be received and approved.

SA.13 Scrutiny Review - Effective Public Transport within Ashfield

The Chairman, on opening the item, apologised to Members regarding the cancellation of the last planned meeting of the Panel due to more pressing Council issues presenting themselves for resolution.

Agreement from the last meeting saw the focus of the local transport review concentrate on the current bus service provision within Ashfield and to examine whether it continued to effectively meet the needs of local communities. In particular the Panel expressed a wish to consider the following:-

- the current bus services for Skegby, Stanton Hill and the Carsic Estate;
- the levels of current Government subsidies/incentives for providing public transport and how they are utilised by the bus companies;
- whether 'areas of deprivation' are taken into account when bus companies assess potential bus routes within the District;
- how the needs of their customers are considered by commercial bus companies;

- the type of concessions currently available to older people.

Unfortunately at this meeting a representative from County Council was unable to make the meeting, however he had expressed an interest in engaging with Members on the issue at a future meeting. The Panel were encouraged to use the meeting to compile a list of pertinent questions for the County Council's public transport representatives and consider exactly what information was required to enable them to progress the review.

The Scrutiny Manager then proceeded to present his report and provided some background information in relation to how bus services have commercially/operationally evolved and also outlined the role that County Council currently played. To progress the review, Members needed to consider where the perceived gaps in service were especially in relation to provision for the elderly, the vulnerable and disadvantaged groups. This was in accordance with the priorities of both the County Council and the District Council regarding social inclusion, economic regeneration and the health and wellbeing of residents.

Apart from transporting customers to their required destinations, 'public transport' played a far greater role in all of the following areas;

- Social inclusion
- Economic growth
- Reduction in environmental pollution
- Meeting the needs of the community.

Local bus services were key to providing access to opportunity. Vulnerable and disadvantaged groups were most reliant on bus networks; this included rural households, low income households, young people seeking work or training, older people, disabled people and job seekers. Past research by the Passenger Transport Executive Group (PTEG) had shown that £3 of benefits could be generated for every £1 spent on supported local bus services. In March 2015 the County Council approved a revised Strategic Passenger Transport Framework (SPTF) for assessing the need for the future provision of supported local bus services in Nottinghamshire. The County Council previously spent over £6m a year on local bus services, however, this figure had recently been reduced as part of ongoing budget saving requirements.

The SPTF scoring criteria for the provision of bus services included six factors covering the following:

- Subsidy per passenger;
- Passengers per journey;
- Availability of alternative public transport services in settlements served;
- Index of Multiple Deprivation (IMD);
- 'Primary Journey Purpose; i.e. employment, shopping, education;
- Car ownership levels in the settlements served.

The scoring however had been revised by the County Council in October 2015 and included an increase in the scores for the IMD (Index of Multiple Deprivation) and journey purpose factors in order to better reflect the County Council's strategic objectives. It had also been agreed to simplify the 'journey purpose' categories to emphasise the importance of employment and training.

The County Council representative has advised the Scrutiny Manager that he was happy to meet with Members and contribute to the Panel's review as appropriate. Representatives from the Quality Bus Network could also offer some valuable insight into the agreements/schemes currently operating in partnership with local bus companies which were aimed at addressing social priorities through the improvement of quality of service and facilities within the area.

As part of the review, Members reiterated that it would be beneficial to have a representative from Trent Barton at a future meeting to provide Members with an insight into commercially operated bus services.

A debate ensued whereby Member discussed, amongst other things, the following issues:-

- concerns regarding the ever decreasing bus services within Sutton in Ashfield (particularly the 141);
- the importance of public transport services for the elderly, people living with disabilities and mental health issues as a 'lifeline' to community events, shops and much needed services;
- the increasing need for partner organisations to invest in robust public transport services as part of the health and wellbeing agenda for improving the quality of life for disadvantaged sectors;
- in relation to the ever increasing older population, many widows are now being left isolated without access to good public transport links as fewer females learnt to drive in the 60's and 70's;
- whether commercial bus providers choose routes based purely on potential profit and the potential to reintroduce 'non-profitable' routes should adequate subsidies be provided;
- the possibility of utilising the Council's S106 funding to further enhance new developments with better integrated public transport links and to enable the Council to have some influence over areas of greatest need.

The Scrutiny Manager commented on the priorities contained within the Council's Draft Local Plan and acknowledged that the provision of 'good public transport networks' were included. The Nottinghamshire Local Transport Plan also recognised that there was still significant scope for increased public transport patronage instead of car journeys where good bus and rail services already exist.

In addition and in accordance with the Local Transport Act 2008, local bus services within the County area were currently provided for in the following ways:

Commercial Services:

Bus services where all the financial risk is borne by the operator and accounts for 85% of the Nottinghamshire bus network. However, in some rural areas commercial services represent only 10% to 20% of the market thus leaving significant gaps in the network.

Supported Local Bus Services:

These bus services are commissioned by the County Council where the services are not considered viable by the commercial sector. The services mainly cover areas which are not fully served by commercial operators and are predominately weekday peak and off-peak journeys providing access to employment, training, health, retail and recreation. Without the County Council's intervention bus service users would be unable to access key services.

Voluntary and Community Transport:

The third sector had traditionally provided transport for those people unable to utilise conventional public transport services. The role of this sector has been forecasted to grow as their capability and capacity increases, whilst the commercial sector concentrates on the core bus network and Council funding for supported services inevitably falls.

RESOLVED

that the Scrutiny Manager be requested to undertake the following in readiness for the next meeting of the Panel scheduled for July 2016 as follows:-

a) to arrange an informal meeting of the Panel to take place during April 2016;

b) to invite the following representatives:-

- Councillor J.F. Aspinall - Portfolio Holder for Health and Wellbeing;
- a Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) representative;
- the County Council's Transport and Travel Services Manager;
- a representative from a local bus provider;
- the Council's Planning and Building Control Manager;

c) in relation to the invite to the County Council's Transport and Travel Services Manager, to forward the following questions in advance to enable any answers to be researched accordingly;

- How is S106 funding allocated to public transport projects and what measures (i.e. agreements) are in place to ensure the developments are finalised as per the agreed criteria/conditions?
- How does the County Council allocate supported service routes, what types of criteria are applied and how are the business cases presented for approval, or otherwise?
- Where are community bus routes currently advertised?

- d) to endeavour to make contact with a local community bus service and request some information in relation to how the service runs, who provides the funding and how the Council supports them in their endeavours;
- e) following the informal meeting, a summary of the proceedings and any outcomes be forward to Panel Members for information.

The meeting closed at 7.17 pm

Chairman.