

Cabinet Response to the Public Transport (Buses) Task Group Scrutiny Report

Introduction

At the Cabinet meeting on 5th March 2008 consideration was given to the report of the Public Transport (Buses) Task Group. In introducing the item the Leader acknowledged the work which had been undertaken by the Task Group. The Chairman of the Scrutiny Steering Board, Councillor P. M. McDonald, was present to respond to any issues raised on the report. The Cabinet then considered each of the recommendations.

Response to recommendations

The Cabinet noted that a large number of the recommendations were matters which fell within the remit of the County Council and/or other agencies. As such, it was felt that the relevant Portfolio Holder, in conjunction with the Chairman of the Task Group (should the Task Group Chairman so wish as it was noted that this was outside of their terms of reference) should refer various matters onto the appropriate body and that the Portfolio Holder should keep the Scrutiny Steering Board updated, via the Board's Recommendation Tracker System, on any progress with the matters in question.

The specific responses to the recommendations contained within the scrutiny report were as follows:

Recommendation 1 - Establish a Partnership Project Team to plan, raise funds and implement a new purpose-built town centre bus station for Bromsgrove.

Against the backdrop of increasing traffic volumes and its associated adverse effects on congestion, air quality and carbon emissions, together with the timely prioritising of the regeneration of Bromsgrove town centre, this Council should encourage the establishment of a Partnership Project Team consisting of all relevant stakeholders to achieve the best possible result for a new and improved facility on this existing site.

The Cabinet resolved that this matter be referred to the Town Centre Steering Group for it to decide how best to deal with the required interface with the relevant stakeholders for a new bus station for Bromsgrove (including the establishment of any required sub-committee of the Group in order to progress the new bus station), and that the relevant Portfolio Holder, in conjunction with the Chairman of the Public Transport (Buses) Task Group, keep updated as to any developments and update the Scrutiny Steering Board (SSB), via the SSB's Recommendation Tracker Report, on any progress in this regard.

Recommendation 2 - The need for a major review of routes and frequencies to provide (a) better links to outlying areas (b) better links to major amenities such as Hospitals and (c) evening and Sunday services.

A major complaint which emerged from the surveys and questionnaire replies was that more frequent services and better links were required to outlying areas, key community amenities (e.g. hospitals) and better evening routes and Sunday services were requested. Accordingly, the Task Group are of the view that the County Council, along with bus operators and Bromsgrove District Council should embark on a major review of routes and frequencies to produce new business cases to provide those services required by the community (e.g. a circular service connecting Bromsgrove, Redditch, Worcester, Kidderminster and returning to Bromsgrove).

(It is envisaged that the County Council would initiate such a review, possibly with the help and co-operation of the Local Strategic Partnership Transport Theme Group, or externally from someone like the Bus Users UK Group).

The Cabinet resolved that the Portfolio Holder and the Chairman of the Task Group refer this matter to the County Council and the Local Strategic Partnership Transport Theme Group, and that the Portfolio Holder report back to the Scrutiny Steering Board on any progress in this regard.

Recommendation 3 - Introduce a bus shuttle service between the proposed new railway station and the town centre.

The new railway station being built by Network Rail will have a “Park-and-Ride” facility adjacent to it, which will be in accordance with the County Councils “gold” or “silver” standard. The Task Group recommend therefore that this Council should participate to the fullest extent in a new partnership aimed at supporting and advising upon the bus interchange facility to the proposed new rail station, e.g., advising on routes and frequency based on local research.

(This matter should be referred for discussion by the Railway Station Theme Group).

The Cabinet resolved that the Portfolio Holder and the Chairman of the Task Group refer this matter to the County Council, the Local Strategic Partnership Transport Theme Group and the Town Centre Steering Group, and that the Portfolio Holder report back to the Scrutiny Steering Board on any progress in this regard.

Recommendation 4 - Modern accessible bus fleets through proactive involvement by Bromsgrove District Council and Worcestershire County Council to develop a new ‘vehicle rolling stock’ (buses) strategy and bid for funds.

This should be addressed/achieved via the County Council’s rolling stock renewal strategy. The Task Group recommends that this Council supports moves by the County Council to continue to develop such strategy and invites this

Council to become proactive partners in future bids for new rolling stock. The Task Group also requests that the Council submits this report as part of the “evidence” required to support such bids.

The cabinet resolved that the Portfolio Holder and the Chairman of the Task Group refer this matter to the County Council, with any involvement on the part of this Council in becoming a proactive partner in future bids for rolling stock to be put on hold until such time as the draft Local Transport Bill becomes law, and that the Portfolio Holder report back to the Scrutiny Steering Board on any progress in this regard.

Recommendation 5 - Joint feasibility study to introduce ‘Dial-a-Ride’ and other community transport to Bromsgrove.

The Task Group recommend that, in accordance with best practice, preparatory discussions be commenced with Redditch Borough Council to assess the feasibility of a joint bid (via the County Council) for a co-operated Ring-and-Ride scheme, and also that the Council should investigate with the County the potential to introduce a Community Bus Service to further “infill” gaps in current services.

The Cabinet resolved that this matter be referred to the Local Strategic Transport Theme Group for investigation and that the Group be requested to provide the Cabinet with a report in six months time detailing progress in this regard.

Recommendation 6 - Provide new bus shelters and improve waiting areas.

It was noted that the County Council were to introduce a “Worcestershire Standard” bus shelter/stop, which was commended by the Task Group, as it was felt that there is a need for a uniform standard, and they recommend a period of consultation to establish whether (and where) more pick-up points could be located (see below). The Task Group also requested that, given the implications for winter bus travellers, urgent action should be taken at a number of sites mentioned in the report to repair damaged/vandalised bus shelters.

The Cabinet resolved that the Portfolio Holder and the Chairman of the Task Group refer these matters to the County Council, and that the Portfolio Holder report back to the Scrutiny Steering Board on any progress in this regard.

Recommendation 7 - Consider other (convenient) pick-up areas.

In addition to the need for more (modern) bus shelters, a number of people responding to the surveys indicated that consideration could also be given to (a) an increased number of pick-up points (to bridge the walking gap especially for those with mobility difficulties); and (b) the flexibility to “flag down” drivers in areas where it is safe to do so.

The Cabinet resolved that the Portfolio Holder and the Chairman of the Task Group refer these matters to the County Council, and that the Portfolio Holder report back to the Scrutiny Steering Board on any progress in this regard.

Recommendation 8 - Improve bus time tables and make them more widely available.

The County Council are currently considering the production of a new strategy to apply a consistent approach to the marketing and delivery of information on passenger transport services in Worcestershire, and, as part of such review, will re-assess all their printed, electronic and face-to-face and marketing information. Accordingly, the Task Group (a) commends the move towards a “best practice strategy” by the County Council in this regard, and (b) urges Bromsgrove District Council to use a variety of “engagement” methods available to it (e.g. Together Bromsgrove, website, etc.), to consult with the public further to support the County’s preparation of a new marketing and information strategy.

The Cabinet resolved that, it being noted that the County Council was considering production of a new strategy on the marketing and delivery of information on passenger transport services in Worcestershire, this Council look at establishing website links to consult with the public further to support the County's new strategy, and that the Portfolio Holder report back to the Scrutiny Steering Board on any progress in this regard.

Recommendation 9 - Offer Bromsgrove District as a ‘pilot’ area (to the County Council) for the introduction of Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) at major amenities.

Clearly Bromsgrove should not be left behind in the move towards modernising the information (and methods of providing information) to our bus travellers. There are a range of initiatives being planned or suggested, from a new railway station to a new bus station and town centre redevelopment, which makes this essential. The Task Group therefore recommends that the Council becomes a pilot authority to work with our County Council partners to develop and implement a local best practice marketing and implementation strategy which can become a model for the County.

The Cabinet resolved that this Council offer itself as a pilot authority to work with the County Council for the introduction of Real Time Passenger Information at major amenities, and that the Portfolio Holder report back to both the Scrutiny Steering Board and the Cabinet on any progress in this regard.

Members were particularly keen, in view of the planned developments to the town, for Bromsgrove District to be used as a pilot and it was requested that the Cabinet be kept up to date on developments with this.

Recommendation 10 - Introduce a 'London Underground' style bus route map.

In order to help local residents plan and envisage travel around the area, it is recommended that, as part of the review, a route map be produced similar to the London Underground system map. The map would be based on a North/South and East/West configuration to enable it to capture the main destinations, i.e. Birmingham/Bromsgrove/Worcester (being North/South) and Redditch, Bromsgrove, Stourbridge (being East/West). This would enable all principal villages and estates along these routes to be listed together with the appropriate bus service number.

(This could be something that the County might sponsor/organise the launch of a design award)

The cabinet resolved that the Portfolio Holder and the Chairman of the Task Group arrange for the feasibility of producing a London Underground style bus route map to be looked into with the County Council, and that the Portfolio Holder report back to the Scrutiny Steering Board on any progress in this regard.

In order to fully plan for journeys, it was felt that a bus time table might need to accompany any route map and that the practicalities of the proposal as a whole would first need to be investigated in view of the possible work / costs involved.

Recommendation 11 - Improved driver training to improve customer service.

The County Council are seeking to ensure the development and delivery of appropriate training and assessment programmes from September 2008 (Passengers) and September 2009 for all small and medium sized operations in Worcestershire. The Task Group therefore (i) commends the County's Strategy for bus driver training to this Council; (ii) asks that a copy of this report be forwarded to all bus operators drawing their attention to the broad issue of reminding drivers of their duty of care and courtesy to passengers; and (iii) recommends that a newsletter in this regard be sent from the County Council to all operators and drivers.

The Cabinet resolved that this be referred direct to the County Council for action as these were not matters which fell within the remit of this Council.

Recommendation 12 - Proactive involvement by Bromsgrove District Council in the Worcestershire County Council Transport Strategy.

Having established a good working relationship with the relevant officers from the County Council during the consideration of this issue, it is the view of the Task Group that this Council should continue to foster this good relationship through a proactive involvement in the Worcestershire County Council Transport Strategy.

The Cabinet resolved that it be noted that Councillors Mrs Dyer and Mrs Sherrey were members of the group which was looking into the Worcestershire County Council Transport Strategy and that they would continue to have proactive involvement in this.

Recommendation 13 - A new Bus Station for Bromsgrove.

The existing bus station is wholly owned by Worcester County Council, and, as such, future development would be their primary responsibility. Our liaison with the County has engendered a positive response leading to a general appreciation that

- (a) It is essential that the town centre bus station is completely rebuilt (preferably on the existing site) and should involve public consultation at the design and layout stage, which should include 'County Standard' bus shelters and signage;
- (b) The site of the present bus station is the preferred site according to the public survey, and lends itself to be developed incorporating an Information Centre and perhaps a Police Drop-In Centre; and
- (c) The existing toilet block should be re-located, possibly on ground opposite the Drill Hall)

Our discussions with Worcestershire County Council have revealed a willingness to establish a Joint Working (or Focus) Group with the critical focus of achieving a new Bus Station for Bromsgrove.

The Cabinet resolved:

- (i) that it be noted that the issue of establishing a new bus station had already been dealt with under Recommendation 1;
- (ii) that it be agreed that the re-location of the existing toilet block as detailed at Recommendation 13 (c) be rejected as this was already being progressed;
- (iii) that the Portfolio Holder discuss with the Executive Director - Projects and Partnerships the possibility of establishing a Shopmobility unit close to the re-located toilet block and that the Portfolio Holder report back to the Cabinet in this regard; and
- (iv) that the Portfolio Holder and the Chairman of the Task Group report back to the Scrutiny Steering Board on progress on the above.

The additional issue of establishing a Shopmobility unit close to the re-located toilet block was raised. It was agreed that this would be discussed outside of the meeting and the position with this reported back to the Cabinet.

Recommendation 14 - Joint County and District Town Centre Steering Group.

The Task Group Chairman, Councillor B. Lewis F.CMI, be invited to sit on the Joint County and District Town Centre Steering Group to assist the Council in ensuring any approved recommendations contained within this Scrutiny Report are implemented.

The Cabinet resolved that the membership of the Joint County and District Town Centre Steering Group remain as at present but that input be sought from Councillor Lewis, as Chairman of the Task Group, on any transport related issues.

Following consideration of the Task Group report, the Leader and Cabinet expressed their thanks to the Chairman and members of the Task Group for the scrutiny exercise which had been undertaken.

Councillor Mrs. M. A. Sherrey JP
Portfolio Holder for Street Scene and Recycling