

SCRUTINY BOARD (SUSTAINABLE ECONOMY AND CULTURE)

THURSDAY, 31ST JANUARY, 2013

PRESENT: Councillor M Rafique in the Chair

Councillors J Akhtar, D Cohen,
P Wadsworth, R Harington, B Urry,
Councillor D Collins and J Illingworth

96 Appeals Against Refusal of Inspection of Documents

There were no appeals against the refusal of inspections of documents.

97 Exempt Information - Possible Exclusion of the Press and Public

There were no resolutions to exclude the public.

98 Late Items

There were no late items added to the agenda. However supplementary information in relation to Agenda Item 6 – Scrutiny Inquiry – Bus Services In Leeds – Further Information was admitted by the Chair.

99 Declaration of Disclosable Pecuniary and Other Interests

Councillor Urry declared an interest in Agenda Item 6 – Scrutiny Inquiry – Bus Services in Leeds –as a Member of the Leeds Passenger Consultative Committee.

100 Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitutes

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Marjoram, Councillor Lyons, Councillor J McKenna, Councillor Ingham and Councillor Chapman.

Councillor Illingworth was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Ingham.

Councillor Collins was in attendance as substitute for Councillor Marjoram.

101 Scrutiny Inquiry - Bus Services in Leeds

The Head of Scrutiny and Member Development submitted a report which introduced the third session of the Scrutiny Inquiry into Bus Services in Leeds. This session involved dialogue with representatives from bus operators and passenger representatives.

In attendance to answer Member questions and provide information to the inquiry were:

David Brady, Vice Chair, Leeds Passenger Consultative Committee;
Georgiana Weatherill, Environmental and Sustainability Manager, Leeds City College;
Councillor James Lewis, Chair of West Yorkshire Integrated Transport Authority;
Keith McNally, Chair of Association of Bus Operators in West Yorkshire (ABOWY);
Dave Alexander, First Bus and ABOWY;
Andrew Stirling, Ross Travel and ABOWY (representing smaller providers);
Colin Newbury, Arriva and ABOWY;
Andrew Hall, Acting Head of Transport Policy; and
Dave Pearson, Assistant Director of Transport Services, Metro.

David Brady proceeded to inform Members of the issues faced by passengers using buses in Leeds. The high cost of bus tickets was discussed and comparisons drawn with rail fares which are generally cheaper for local journeys. The issue of ticketing was also raised as a problem with tickets often not being transferrable between the differing operators, smart cards were identified as a way of resolving this problem. The reliability of services was raised as a key issue alongside the need for more early morning and late evening services. It was also suggested that bus companies might give some consideration to a passenger charter.

Georgiana Wetherill addressed the Board with the issues encountered by staff and students. It was highlighted that ticketing was expensive confusing and lacked options in terms of people who do not work every day. She raised the lack of opportunity to use buses for people who commute to Leeds from outside the Leeds District. Comments were made that more investment needed to be made in introducing more real time displays.

At this point Councillor James Lewis addressed the Board. The Board were informed about the consideration being given to Quality Bus Contracts which had resulted in Bus operators wishing to explore further a Bus Partnership offer, and updated on the latest position of the Integrated Transport Authority (ITA). The implications of changes in the Bus Service Operators' Grant (BSOG) and the proposed Better Bus Areas grant funding were outlined. Members were also informed that as part of the City Deal there will be a regional transport investment fund. Public transport areas for focus could include: ticketing reform; service delivery; and value for money. Comparisons were also drawn with London which receives a much greater subsidy to run buses than West Yorkshire.

Keith McNally addressed the Board. He informed the Committee of the need to grow bus patronage in Leeds and how this could be achieved in a de-regulated environment. The difficulties encountered in operating a bus company were highlighted, specifically, the reduction in the Bus Service Operators Grant which provides some rebate on fuel duty.

Members then asked questions of witnesses present. Members compared the high costs of bus tickets in Leeds to cheaper prices in other northern cities

and asked for the reasons behind the discrepancies, this was explained by the different sizes and densities of cities and the partnership structure in place in some areas.

Members discussed whether changing routes so that they went through more estates would encourage more people to use buses and whether the express services could serve more outer areas of Leeds.

Members also pressed bus operators present to get on with the roll out of smart cards for buses in West Yorkshire which would help make public transport easier to use and quicker.

Members cited criticism of bus services as being infrequent, expensive and unreliable. Further, that too few people were paying a lot for a poor service and that this problem needed to be addressed. Comments were also made that for short journeys there was no incentive for families to use the bus as it was cheaper to get a taxi.

Members went on to comment that the Transport Act of 1985 had hoped to inspire competition however it was noted that smaller operators had been squeezed out of the market or been taken over by the larger corporations in many instances. This had resulted in networks being focused on getting in and out of the city centre rather than routes across the city.

Members suggested more work could be done to spread peak times so that buses were not just full in the morning and evening rush hours but it was acknowledged that this would require city wide promotion. Also raised was the suggestion of using smaller buses on rural routes and estates.

Members gave consideration to a congestion charge for Leeds and asked bus company representatives for their views. Bus company representatives commented that parking was cheap in Leeds which encouraged people to use cars over buses. Members were also informed about the investment being made into vehicles, which is required, so that they meet emission standards; this should ultimately make buses more efficient and affordable. Work has also been done so that bus engines can use less polluting fuels.

Members asked questions about the strategy for the future of bus services across Leeds and whether all traffic hotspots had been identified. However it was put to the Board that all investments in infrastructure for buses needed to be cost effective and that some suburban areas do not justify investment.

It was suggested that closer working with major employers could be undertaken to explore ways of encouraging behaviour change to more sustainable modes of travel. An example was given of shuttle buses operating where staff frequently need to move between sites.

Members asked questions about making travel affordable for people out of work and free for children. Bus representatives welcomed the suggestions in

principle and agreed to consider how they can support them. They also expressed a desire to work in partnership with Metro.

The Chair of the Board welcomed the evidence of greater discussion between those involved and summed up the views of the Board, stating that bus patronage could be increased by the following:

- The introduction of a smart card system to buses in West Yorkshire;
- Improved networks
- Addressing congestion;
- The possibility of a passenger charter;
- Smaller buses in local areas; and
- More competition
- Working with major employers.

Finally the Chair thanked Board Members for their comments and also thanked the witnesses who attended to answer Member questions.

(Councillor Wadsworth left the meeting at 11:50am during discussion of this item. Councillor Akhtar left the meeting during discussion of this item at 12:10pm)

RESOLVED – That the issues raised be noted and that the Board's final inquiry report be drafted.

102 Date and time of next meeting
10am, Thursday 21st February 2013.