

		AGENDA ITEM 6
		PSEG/17/15
Committee:	Place Services and Economic Growth Scrutiny Committee	
Date:	22 October 2015	
LOCAL BUS CONSULTATION		
Enquiries to:	Christine Sharland, Scrutiny Officer 01245 430450 Christine.sharland@essex.gov.uk	

In June 2015 the Cabinet approved 'Getting Around in Essex – a bus and passenger transport strategy', and a key commitment in that Strategy was a review of the local bus network, which forms 15% of the overall bus network that is supported by taxpayers. Following a review of that network a Local Bus Consultation was launched on 17 September comprising an overview of key points and proposed changes to the Essex County Council (ECC) Contracted Bus Network on a district by district basis, and a questionnaire.

Given the Committee's ongoing interest in passenger transport a briefing was held on 24 September to provide Members with an opportunity to learn more about the Local Bus Consultation as well as receive an update on the development of the Strategy, and the new Bus Strategy Commissioning Board. An invitation was extended to all County Councillors to attend the briefing.

Helen Morris, Head of Commissioning for Essex Connected Infrastructure, delivered the briefing to the Committee and answered Members' questions.

At the outset the Committee was reminded that individual Members could submit their views on the development of the Strategy's work streams at any time to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation and Place Commissioning Team, so that their views can be taken into consideration as work is taken forward.

'Getting Around in Essex – a bus and passenger transport strategy'

The overall aims of the Strategy are:

1. To increase passenger numbers by delivering an attractive, comprehensive, resilient and high quality network;

2. Maximise the economic and social benefits to people, businesses and communities across Essex;
3. Ensure that what is delivered is cost effective and good value for money.

Work is ongoing around the development of the new Strategy and the eight work streams that it identifies, namely

1. Working in Partnership
2. Customer Quality Commitment
3. Better, Well Used Services
4. Support for Valuable, but not commercial, services
5. Good Customer Information
6. Tailored solutions
7. Ticketing
8. Focussed local planning

At the briefing the Committee was reminded of its previous engagement in the consideration of the new Strategy.

In June 2014 the Committee learned about the history of bus services and networks, the changing role of local authorities, the statutory framework, the changing nature of the delivery mechanism from municipal model to a largely commercial one, and the Traffic Commissioner as the main regulator. At that stage the Committee had raised various issues that Helen Morris confirmed had been woven into the development of the Strategy.

In November 2014 a workshop was held for the Committee on the planned consultation on the proposed new Strategy, and again Members were given the opportunity to raise issues and influence outcomes. A report on the outcomes of the workshop was subsequently agreed by the Committee in December 2014 (Minute 6).

In June 2015 the Cabinet approved the new Strategy, and work commenced on its delivery.

Local Bus Consultation

At the Appendix to this report is a summary of the proposed changes to the ECC Contracted Bus Network, which are proposed as the result of a review that has been conducted as part of one of the eight priority areas or work streams identified in the adopted Strategy ie Focussed local planning.

The Local Bus Consultation is the third consultation linked to the new Strategy, and Helen Morris stressed the importance of receiving feedback on the proposals that will contribute to the County Council's ability to develop a much better understanding of their impact upon people both in positive and negative terms. If Members were aware of particular groups who should be consulted, that information could be used to ensure that those groups received advice on the Consultation. Written responses will contribute to the evidence base and analysis of consultation responses.

The following key points were drawn to the Committee's attention:

- 85% of the network is commercially provided, and therefore a majority of bus services will be unaffected by this consultation. The remaining 15% of the network is supported by ECC, using taxpayers' money.
- The proposals do not include the making any wholesale budget cuts, cutting routes that are well supported or removing whole categories of service e.g. Sunday services.
- The re-design of the affected network is proposed to reflect current travel patterns, ensure rural communities are not left isolated, making best use of money (so changing routes means that taxpayers are only paying for one bus instead of two) and ensuring consistency (so ensuring similar communities have a similar frequency of service).
- A new policy is proposed that sets out the way that ECC will support services in future. This gives a priority to types of service it will support based on its corporate outcomes, and significant consultation with the public.
- ECC is only proposing to withdraw services where they have low use or there are alternatives. Low use is where the cost per passenger journey is over £5 to the tax payer, or about to go over £5 per passenger journey and we can prevent that by reducing part of the service (for example by taking off the lowest use journeys). This is a long standing policy and is based on a balanced and value for money approach. So the services which are simple withdrawals are failing or about to fail an existing policy test and would have been withdrawn in any case.
- On many routes ECC will be offering a wider service – either increased frequency or serving new communities or places. This can mean timetable and journey time changes for existing passengers.
- ECC is withdrawing some services where there are alternatives – this might include a similar service with a slightly different timetable, a short walk to a different bus stop, a new alternative with a slightly different route.
- ECC is 'commercialising' some services. This can mean some changes in route and timetable, and it almost certainly means fare increases as costs move from the taxpayer to the fare payer and become commercial.
- ECC is also changing the nature of some contracts - so that operators will keep the revenue and control the fares – to incentivise operators to grow and invest in routes. Taxpayers will be charged less up front as a result, but this also usually means fare increases – moving the share of the cost away from the taxpayer to the fare payer.
- In some deeply rural areas ECC is proposing to replace once or twice weekly services with a Monday to Saturday demand responsive service. This

actually represents an improvement in service – although also a change in how people travel. This approach is fairly new to Essex (currently there are two similar services in the Dengie Peninsula, which work well). It is dependent on communities making good use of it.

- Overall picture:
 - 105 services - no change
 - 35 services - changes to provide extended services, including responding to requests from previous consultations
 - 29 services to be replaced with Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) – representing a service improvement
 - 38 services which will change significantly to better integrate the network – the overall effect is to retain current levels of provision but make better use of resources
 - 16 services where there are minor changes
 - 18 services where there are changes or withdrawals - because alternatives are available
 - 12 services at risk of being withdrawn because of low use
 - 10 services being commercialised (being taken over and run by an operator)

It is proposed that changes arising from the Local Bus Review will be considered by the Cabinet in November 2015 for potential implementation during the April 2016 school holidays. Helen Morris stressed that the Review is a re-design and not a cost cutting exercise with the new policy being important for managing changes in the future; and the consultation was a genuine attempt to engage people in the consideration of the proposals and seek feedback.

As part of its own feedback the Committee suggested that it would be helpful to seek feedback through focus groups. The Young Essex Assembly had been a useful contributor to a scrutiny project being undertaken on Jobs, Welfare and Skills and could provide a useful perspective on school bus routes etc.

Bus Strategy Commissioning Board, and Forum

When the Committee took part in a workshop in November 2014 (Minute 6/ December 2014 refers) prior to consultation on the proposed new Strategy, reference was made to proposals for a new delivery board. As no particular consensus was reached by the Committee at the workshop, Members had been encouraged to submit their ideas separately.

At the briefing it was confirmed that the purpose of the new Bus Strategy Commissioning Board was to establish close working relationships between Essex County Council (ECC), operators and other stakeholders and to work in partnership to improve Essex transport, and to achieve the aims of the Getting Around Essex strategy. Its focus will be on delivery of the eight priority areas identified in the strategy and, supported by information from the consultation and Local Area Reviews of the services across Essex.

The Getting around Essex strategy consultation (2015) identified a strong need to work in partnership with transport operators and with other stakeholders such as other local authorities and customer groups. The Board was set up in recognition that a partnership is key to ensuring that the people who use and rely on buses, including school children, local businesses and the travelling public (including road users) receive a good transport network. It was confirmed that the Board is intended to be an advisory rather than decision making body.

In addition to the new Board that will concentrate on strategic matters, a new Bus Strategy Forum is to be set up to capture a wider range of opinions and focus upon more local and specific issues. Its membership will include County Councillors, Operators, District Councils, Bus User Groups and other interest groups.

The new Board met for the first time in July 2015. It was noted that Councillors Henderson and Pond had been appointed to the Board by the Cabinet Member, and while they were both members of the Committee their names had not been put forward as its representatives. Councillor Pond had attended meeting in July, and confirmed that being the first meeting it had focussed on more general matters relating to the Strategy.

As part of the briefing Helen Morris sought again the Committee's views on membership of the new bodies.

Councillor Kendall voiced his concern that there was not cross political party representation within the current membership of the Board, and he felt that the Liberal Democrat Group should be represented.

The Chairman undertook to give further consideration to the matter, and to formalise a mechanism for those Committee Members who were also on the new Board to report back to the Scrutiny Committee. *(NB this is reflected in the conclusions below)*

In addition it was suggested that consideration should be given to seeking representation on the new Bus Strategy Forum from the Parish Forum, and Employers/ Training sector ie to reflect the needs of people relying on passenger transport to access work and training opportunities across Essex.

General

During discussion Members did touch upon several matters that fell outside the purview of the Local Bus Consultation that formed the current focus of attention at the briefing itself. Nevertheless if Members forwarded their questions and views on other passenger transport matters to the Place Commissioning Team, then they could be taken into account in the delivery of other work streams for instance passenger growth.

At the end of the briefing itself the Chairman thanked Helen Morris for an informative briefing on the Local Bus Consultation that was now underway.

Conclusions

The briefing provided Members with an opportunity to learn more about the Local Bus Consultation. The information exchanged would assist them in their individual consideration of the proposals and their implications for local passenger transport, and could be used to inform any individual representations they might wish to submit.

With specific reference to the new Bus Strategy Commissioning Board and Forum, the Committee supported the inclusion of several outside representative bodies in discussion around the development of the Strategy as set out in the recommendation below.

In addition there was a consensus that the Committee would wish to be represented on the Board, and it is recommended that it be represented on the Board by the Chairman and Councillor Kendall.

Given the significance of the new Strategy for the way that bus and passenger transport evolves in the future, the Committee's representatives would be tasked with ensuring that the Committee be advised as necessary on any pertinent proposals as they emerge for its attention.

Action to be taken by the Committee

It is proposed that consideration be given to the following recommendation:

- 1. It is recommended to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transportation that consideration be given to:**
 - **Seeking feedback on bus consultations through targeted focus groups including the Young Essex Assembly,**

- seeking representation on the new Bus Strategy Forum from the Parish Forum, and Employers/ Training sector ie to reflect the needs of people relying on passenger transport to access work and training opportunities across Essex, and
 - that Councillor Simon Walsh, as Committee Chairman, and Councillor David Kendall be appointed as the Scrutiny Committee's representatives on the Bus Commissioning Strategy Board.
2. That the Committee's representatives on the Bus Commissioning Strategy Board be tasked with reporting back to the Committee as and when necessary on the development of the Bus and Passenger Transport Strategy.
-

Appendix

Summary of Proposed Changes to ECC Contracted Bus Network by District – August 2015

1.0 Introduction

The County Council is carrying out a review of all its two hundred plus contracted bus services. All of the contracts have been reviewed in detail, resulting in there being changes proposed to the large majority of them.

In line with the principles set out in the County Council's "Getting Around In Essex" strategy, changes are being made in ways to minimise the impact on bus users wherever possible and to strengthen the overall network, so no categories of service are proposed to be entirely withdrawn (so for example it is **not** currently proposed that the County withdraws all its Sunday or evening services en-bloc as has been the case elsewhere). Rather each service has been reviewed both in its own right and as part of the overall bus network and changes proposed to make the best use of available resources and make efficiency savings wherever possible. Despite this there are some general themes:

- A move toward aligning ECC contracted timetables for evening and Sunday services with their daytime equivalents to rationalise service provision.
- The proposed use of more demand responsive options (DRT) to serve deeply rural areas.
- Some standardisation over the range of times and frequencies services are operated at.
- Better planning and use of resources to offer coherent packages of work that will employ fewer resources to achieve the same outcome, offering better value for money.
- Commercialisation of some services, so that they are run without Essex County Council funding. This is likely to result in fare increases for customers, to bring them in line with the commercial rates, over which ECC has no control and which may be substantial.
- A move toward increasing the use of nett cost contracts, whereby the operator retains the fares and sets fare levels, in return for a reduced level of support from ECC. Again this is likely to lead to increased costs to customers over which ECC will have no control. The use of longer term contracts to encourage longer term investment by operators and reduce the cost of short term contract provision to ECC. (i.e. operators may be more willing to invest in newer vehicles as they can safely plan to depreciate these and other overheads over a longer timeframe).
- Some ECC services are contracted to run until 2017. In areas where many such services are run, some additional services will be extended or let to 2017 to allow a general re-planning of services in these areas as whole over 2016/17. Negotiations are also underway with some of the operators of contracts expiring in 2017, where it may be desirable to bring forward amendments to their contracted services, to enable better alignment with particularly Commercial sector routes.

Below is a very broad summary of the major impacts in each district. Proposals for individual services within each area are included in the district level based

questionnaire.

2.0 District/Borough/City Based Summary:

Basildon

- Evening and Sunday services would be restructured to take into consideration commercial services in the area.
- A number of service number and route changes would be made to make better use of the resources employed and improve journey options for many users.
- Limited commercialisation and a move toward nett cost contracts.

Braintree

- Extensive use of DRT proposed for northern and western areas of the district.
- Proposed that some routes are rationalised to follow daytime commercial patterns or to improve use of resources.
- Some services to be reviewed in 2016/17.
- Some commercialisation of school timed services proposed.

Brentwood

- Many services unchanged.
- Some poorly performing services proposed for withdrawal.
- Some service rationalisation for better resource use proposed.

Castle Point

- Most services remain unchanged,
- Some poorly performing services proposed for withdrawal.

Chelmsford

- Some services would be reviewed in 2016/17 as contracts do not expire until 2017.
- Significant changes to current service times/frequency of operation to make better use of the resources involved are proposed.
- Some proposed renumbering of services to make the network easier to use.
- Some service routes and times would be rationalised to follow the commercial daytime operation.
- Proposed that some poorly performing services be withdrawn, where feasible these are covered by adaptations to main services.

Colchester

- Significant changes to current service numbers and times/frequency of operation to make better use of the resources involved are proposed.
- Proposed that many service routes and times will be rationalised to follow the commercial daytime operation.
- Proposed new access to Cowdray Avenue -Leisure/business /employment centres. This has been a long standing request by Colchester Borough Council.
- Some commercialisation/nett cost arrangements for school timed services proposed.

Epping Forest

- Most services remain unchanged as the contracts expire in 2017. They will be reviewed in 2016.
- Some contracts would be tendered until 2017 only, to allow joint re-planning with the above.
- It is proposed that a small number of poorly performing services are

withdrawn.

- Proposed improved Epping/Ongar connection.
- NB Separate negotiations are being carried out with Transport for London, over ECC contribution to the TfL contracted services 20 and 167 in Loughton.

Harlow

- Many services including the whole Sunday network remain unchanged as they are in contract until 2017. They will be reviewed over 2016/17.
- Some evening services will be commercialised.
- Some minor timetable and route revisions to services coming into Harlow from outside of the district.

Maldon

- Many services will remain unchanged as they are in contract until later in 2016. They will be reviewed during early 2016.
- There will be some service number/route/timetable changes to make more efficient use of resources.
- There are a few proposed withdrawals of minor poorly performing services, which can largely be accommodated by the Dengie Dart DRT Service,
- Some commercialisation has taken place already.

Rochford

- There are some proposed withdrawals of poorly performing services.
- Some services will be rationalised with route/service/timetable changes to make better use of resources.
- Improved service between Paglesham and Southend.

Tendring

- There would be significant revisions to service numbers, timetables and frequencies to make best use of the resources involved across the district.
- It is proposed that some poorly performing services would be withdrawn.
- It is proposed that some services will be revised to follow the daytime service patterns.
- Proposed improved access to Mayflower Retail Park in Parkeston during the day.
- Services also diverted to meet passenger requests.

Uttlesford

- Very significant use of DRT services proposed to replace a range of journeys in the north and east of the district.
- Proposed that school timed journeys will be preserved, but may be run commercially or as nett cost contracts.
- Some revisions to rationalise timetables and match the commercial service level are proposed.

3.0 Final note

These proposals are all made prior to the outcome of the consultation and tender processes. It may be necessary make further changes or change approaches to service provision, in light of the consultation and potential cost increases at tender.