

STEVENAGE BOROUGH COUNCIL
ENVIRONMENT & ECONOMY SELECT COMMITTEE
MINUTES

Date: Wednesday, 22 November 2017

Place: Shimkent Room - Daneshill House, Danestrete, Stevenage SG1 1HN

Present: Councillors: M Downing (Chair), M Hurst (Vice Chair), J Brown, L Harrington, J Lloyd and A McGuinness.

Also In Attendance: Councillor R Raynor as Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport
Alderman D Kissane and 4 representatives from Bus User Group Stevenage (BUGS)
D Heckles – Arriva Bus Company
D Brookes and J Howes – CentreBus Limited
M Lale, G Bridgen and J Wing – Hertfordshire County Council (HCC)
T Pike, Z Al-Jawad and R Woodisse – Stevenage Borough Council (SBC)

Start / End Time: Start Time: 6.00 pm
End Time: 7.55 pm

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received on behalf of Councillors D Bainbridge, R Boom and L Chester.

Councillor M Downing declared a personal interest in Item 3 as the Chairman of BUGS and informed the Committee that on this occasion he would not be speaking on behalf of that organisation.

2 MINUTES - 7 NOVEMBER 2017

It was **RESOLVED** that the Minutes of the meeting of the Environment & Economy Select Committee held on 7 November 2017, are approved as a correct record to be signed by the Chair.

3 STEVENAGE BUS SERVICE DISCUSSION ITEM

The Chair welcomed the representatives from BUGS, Arriva, CentreBus, HCC and SBC Officers to the meeting.

The Chair, Councillor M Downing, then declared a personal interest as the Chairman of BUGS and informed the Committee that on this occasion he would not be speaking on behalf of that organisation.

The Chair then invited the representatives from BUGS to address the meeting.

The following observations regarding the Bus Service were made by BUGS:

- Buses were occasionally dirty, both internally and externally, especially during the winter months when passengers had reported difficulty in seeing out of the windows.
- Examples were given of when buses did not stop at the railway station at peak periods when parked cars and other vehicles accessing the station forced buses into the centre lane of Lytton Way.
- Examples were also given of when buses departed late from the bus station despite appearing to be available for service. It was commented that some drivers would often not move their vehicles to the bus stop until the scheduled departure time.
- Congestion delays were frequently caused by problems on the A1, school run traffic and delivery vehicles blocking narrow roads.
- Disruption was caused by road closures for the Charter Fair and the temporary relocation of bus stops, sometimes to inappropriate places. It was also observed that some drivers did not follow the published diversion routes.
- Bus shelters were frequently in a poor state of repair and dirty, with repairs often taking many months to complete.
- The pedestrian gate at the bus station was repeatedly left open creating a potential health and safety hazard allowing people to stray into the operational area of the station.

BUGS also made a number of suggestions to alleviate problem of delays caused by congestion including:

- The bus companies could equip buses with radios to allow contact with drivers in the event of delays and thus re-route to less congested areas whilst maintaining the service.
- Local authorities could:
 - Impose parking restrictions in narrower streets and introduce more effective enforcement of those restrictions
 - Create one-way streets to improve traffic flows
 - Build park and ride sites at the approaches to the town
 - Ban use of private cars within the wider area of the town
 - Implement a congestion charge for through traffic.

In reply Members, representatives from the bus companies and officers made the following comments:

The difficulty of keeping vehicles clean in winter was acknowledged. Arriva advised the Committee that a new vehicle washing facility had been installed and both operators advised that their vehicles were cleaned overnight. However neither companies' vehicles were scheduled to return to their depots during operational hours this making further cleaning once on route impossible. To address the issue

of internal cleanliness it was hoped that drivers would undertake checks to remove litter if possible during the day.

It was noted that failure to stop at the Railway Station was often due to other vehicles blocking access to the bus stops, a problem observed at certain other stops within the town. The SBC Officer agreed to discuss with HCC colleagues the specific traffic orders required to alleviate this issue.

With regard to late departures from the bus station the Committee was advised that all departures were monitored and the data collected indicated that the departures were within the time window allowed by the Traffic Commissioner. However any driver observed to be departing late without good reason on a regular basis would be spoken to.

In respect of congestion the Committee was advised that Arriva was investigating the provision of radios in its buses and that extensive parking reviews had been carried out in certain areas of the town and would be extended into other areas as resource permitted. Only two instances of route blockages had been notified to the Council in the previous twenty four months and both BUGS and the bus operators were invited to inform the SBC Engineering Services Manager of any further issues so that the necessary corrective and enforcement actions could be taken. The other suggestions made by BUGS were unlikely to be considered due to practical considerations.

With regard to the Charter Fair, after the 2016 event a Bus Liaison Officer with specific responsibility for managing special events had been appointed at HCC. This had led to an improved event in 2017 and ongoing liaison with the bus companies continued. It was confirmed that it would be possible, as requested, to close roads a day earlier to allow for the Fair to set up.

In response to Member comments that the Fair had moved from its original location the Committee was advised that it was for HCC's Network Management Team to authorise the location of Fair rides on the highway and that they would have the power to direct the Fair to move south if they felt it was in the interest of maintaining the safe flow of traffic and bus access around the gyratory. In addition the bus companies acknowledged the need for improved communication with drivers to ensure that route changes were adhered to.

The Committee was advised that cleaning and maintenance of bus shelters was the joint responsibility of local authorities, advertisers and the original provider of the shelter dependant on the corrective actions needed.

With regard to the digital displays at bus shelters the Committee was advised that the displays were a mixture of timetables and real time information dependant on what was provided by the bus operators. Arriva advised the Committee that it was the intention to provide 100% real time information for display as soon as possible.

The problem of securing the gate at the bus station was acknowledged. A number of solutions had been tried but none had proved to be effective. The Engineering Services Manager invited suggestions to address the issue.

In reply to a question concerning the provision of reserve drivers and vehicles to prevent service cancellations the Committee was advised that reserves were available however on some days it was possible that, in exceptional circumstances, demand for these reserves could exceed supply.

At the conclusion of the discussion the Chair thanked all present for their contributions and requested that a copy of the summary and minutes be forwarded to all interested parties.

It was **RESOLVED** that the issues and comments raised during the discussion are noted and that a full set of the agreed minutes be sent to all participants once available.

4 **DRAFT REPORT AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE INDOOR MARKET REVIEW**

This item had not been circulated five clear days before the meeting nor had it been made available for public inspection during that time. The Chair determined however that given that the recommendations in the report had already been published the report be considered to allow for final amendments to the recommendations to be made and the finalised recommendations be published to all interested parties.

The Scrutiny Officer presented the report and advised the Committee that once the recommendations had been agreed a final report would be prepared for the Committee in the New Year after which the recommendations would be forwarded to the relevant Portfolio Holder and Strategic Director for comment. A response to those recommendations should then be made within two months.

The Committee was advised that market traders expressed appreciation of the Council's management of the market, supported the need for appropriate management and expressed concerns over potential external arrangements. The Committee agreed that long term recommendation 3 be retained in the report as a contingency option.

In reply to a question concerning pedestrian safety and access to the market, the Strategic Director undertook to determine whether it would be possible to introduce restricted access times for deliveries to be made to the market. A suggestion that a rising bollard be installed was not supported due to practical considerations and the number of properties and businesses serviced by the access road.

In reply to an enquiry regarding incentive vouchers for bus users to use the market the Garages and Market Manager undertook to raise the issue initially with the MTA and then with bus companies to see if it was a viable proposition.

It was **RESOLVED** that the recommendations in the report are agreed.

5 **URGENT PART 1 BUSINESS**

None

6 EXCLUSION OF PRESS AND PUBLIC

Not needed

7 URGENT PART II BUSINESS

None

CHAIR