

**TO: ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL  
25 JUNE 2013**

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**WORKING GROUP UPDATE REPORT  
Lead Working Group Member**

**1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 This report sets out the progress achieved to date by the Working Group of the Panel reviewing the Bracknell Forest Bus Strategy.

**2 RECOMMENDATION(S)**

**That the Panel:**

- 2.1 **notes the progress achieved to date by its Working Group reviewing the Bracknell Forest Bus Strategy.**

**3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)**

- 3.1 To keep the Panel up to date regarding the activities of its Bus Strategy Working Group.

**4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED**

- 4.1 None.

**5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

Bus Strategy

- 5.1 The Working Group of this Panel which previously reviewed a proposed reduction in available bus subsidy budget recommended that a review of the Borough's Bus Strategy be undertaken to inform future financial support and bus services. Accordingly, the Bus Strategy Working Group was established to review the Bus Strategy for implementation in April 2014.
- 5.2 A work programme of three Working Group sessions to guide the emerging Bus Strategy was agreed. The first session, which consisted of an introduction to buses and bus networks, the Council's role and responsibility in relation to buses, and the bus service priorities for Bracknell Forest, took place in February 2013. The second session followed in early April 2013 when the Working Group received an introduction to the Borough's bus network and history and considered priorities for Bracknell Forest together with a critique of network strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. A third session took place in late April 2013 when, informed by the first two sessions, the Working Group was invited to consider and reach agreement on priorities, concrete principals and specific targets for the Bus Strategy.
- 5.3 At the third session, the Working Group's views were sought in respect of the following in particular:

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- The definition of a high quality bus service, whether Bracknell town centre should continue to be the focal point of the bus network and whether every local community should have bus access to the town centre.
- Continuing to prioritise access to health facilities and out of Borough hospitals; defining good access; identifying 'priority groups'; and interpreting when, why and how these groups needed to travel including the importance of evening services.
- How the Council could best work in partnership with operators and influence better integration with other transport modes.
- How the Council prioritised the investment in infrastructure and whether it should work with other partners to ensure the funding was in place to provide/maintain the bus infrastructure e.g. security measures, shelters.
- The importance of encouraging greener buses/alternative fuel and how best the Council could work in partnership with operators to deliver this.
- Whether the Council should continue to develop Bus Quality Partnerships and how it could ensure that sustainable transport measures were incorporated within new developments.
- Whether the current level of funding of bus services should be sustained.

The views expressed by the Working Group in response included the following:

- The definition of a high quality bus service was ease of use, set travel frequencies, reliability, real time information and safety of buses. The town centre should continue to be the focal point of the bus network, particularly following its redevelopment. Although full route coverage of the Borough was sought, it was acknowledged that this may have a cost implication for the Council as it may need to subsidise routes that were not commercially viable.
- The majority of people attending hospitals travelled by car, there may be a need to increase the frequency of bus services to Brants Bridge if the range of health facilities provided there expanded, and hopper buses could be utilised to serve GP surgeries and health related facilities such as leisure centres. Good access could favour a regular reliable quality bus service over frequency, address bus size and seating arrangements, offer routes reflecting the destinations sought by young people, provide maps on buses to highlight the location of facilities, and transport to industrial estates and schools. Both young people and the elderly should be priority groups as many young people were without their own transport and older people relied on concessionary bus travel. Different groups of people travelled at various times of day to numerous locations and whether to increase the frequency of day travel for the elderly or prioritise evening journeys for young people was an issue.
- Best partnership working with operators and influencing improved integration with other transport modes would feature free/reduced cost travel for young people; simple and convenient multi-operator fixed zone ticketing arrangements; and facilities for bicycles such as racks at bus stops and major transport interchanges and storage accommodation on buses.

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- Prioritising investment in infrastructure and working with partners to ensure the funding was in place to provide/maintain the bus infrastructure would consist of gritting bus routes in winter; improvement of bus shelters such as the introduction of greater weather protection, heating, vending machines and Wi-Fi funded by increased patronage and advertising on buses; and the positioning of bus stops to ensure that they offered passenger convenience without causing danger or traffic congestion. Bus lanes were not favoured or considered necessary.
- Emission levels of bus fleets were improving; longer contracts, possibly reflecting the useful life of a bus, may encourage operators to buy new buses at the outset; European emission standards were built into contracts at relevant points; emission levels that met the European standards were satisfactory; and seeking greener buses that surpassed the European standards was of a low priority.
- The incorporation of sustainable transport measures within new developments would feature Section 106 contributions to infrastructure, efforts to make bus use attractive by means such as the provision of bus gates to speed the journey, layouts and road network links designed to make developments amenable to bus use, and linking new cycle paths with the existing network.
- Although there was a presumption to pursue budget economies, the best approach to determine whether the current level of funding bus services should be sustained would be to consider what could be achieved with the same level of expenditure whilst endeavouring to secure some savings through contractual changes. The existing level of expenditure was not excessive for the provision of quality bus services and was a priority over some other areas of spend.

5.4 The Working Group will have a fourth meeting to consider the draft Bus Strategy and Action Plan, which will be subject to a 12 week consultation exercise and an equalities impact assessment, once it has been prepared and will then produce a report of its work.

## **6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS / EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT / STRATEGIC RISK MANAGEMENT ISSUES / CONSULTATION**

6.1 Not applicable.

### Background Papers

None.

### Contact for further information

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