

Appendix A Scrutiny Review – Quality Bus Partnership

23rd October 2012

Present: Cllr Trevor Webb, Cllr John Wilson, Cllr Mike Howard, Cllr Warren Davies, Mark Horan, Jenny Ling, Jeremy Cooper, Bryn Saunders, Rachel Geliamassi, Rasoul Shahilow

Apologies: Cllr Mike Turner, Cllr Peter Pragnell, Cllr Andrew Cartwright

1. Rationale for the partnership

a Why does this partnership exist?

The QBP was established in early 2000 and was seen as a way to improve services for bus users by working in partnership. It consists of Hastings Borough Council, East Sussex County Council and Stagecoach.

b What are its agreed aims?

The partnership aims to improve quality of overall service, infrastructure and waiting environment. By working together the three service providers can coordinate work and allocate spend more effectively.

c Where have they been published?

The last information published was in 2007. It was agreed that HBC would produce this information in a leaflet but this has not happened due to financial cut backs.

d Can you identify a better way of serving the public?

At present the QBP seems to be an appropriate way to improve services. The partnership regularly reviews progress via it's action plan and is happy to adapt to change where a more apt way of working is identified.

2. Added value from the partnership in current financial climate

a How does this partnership add value?

The partnership adds value by improving services. A good example of this is route 26 (St Helens, Conquest and Central St Leonards) which was one of the first routes to undergo improvements. Rolling out improvements to other routes is ongoing.

Partnership working helps achieve more effective working and therefore value for money.

b How do you demonstrate this added value to the public?

This should be evident to the public as the partnership achieves the best service for bus users. There will be improved accessibility, waiting facilities, roadside information.

Even residents and commuters who don't use the bus system will see improvements, for example the reduced numbers of cars on the road.

c How do you know whether funds are being well spent?

By achieving increases in bus user numbers and measureable improvements to user satisfaction results obtained through the independent body known as 'passenger focus'. There has been a 2% increase in satisfaction since 2010/11.

d How does the public know that partnership funds are being well spent?

There are no 'partnership funds' as such. There is no publication of expenditure or investment but the public should see the benefit as outlined in 2b.

3. Governance arrangements

a How do your partnership's corporate governance arrangements link to those of individual partners?

As the QBP is a voluntary body, this question does not apply

b How are decisions made?

The Partnership monitors the action plan targets which are assessed according to set criteria. Those considered highest priority moved to the top of the list for action.

c How are they recorded?

The meetings are minuted.

d Who makes sure that they are acted on?

The members of the Partnership. Cllr Scott and Maynard, lead members at County also follow up any outstanding issues.

e Who scrutinises them?

Senior managers at County Council and Stagecoach.

f To whom are they reported?

To lead members and through the QBP action plan

4. Performance management

a How do you know which partnership targets you are meeting and which you are failing to meet?

Regular monitoring of the action plan takes place at QBP meetings

b Who manages and reports progress?

The QBP oversees progress but the last time this was publicised was in the 2007 leaflet. There did not seem to be much demand for this so since that time reporting has only happened online.

5. Financial management

a Who provides the money?

Funds are drawn from the budgets of the individual partners, there is no pool of resources

b Who decides how to spend it?

The partnership's action plan identifies the priorities and spend is approved via the management structures of the partner bodies.

c Can the money be reallocated?

As there is no funding 'pot', reallocation is not relevant

d What are the financial reporting arrangements?

There are no formal reporting arrangements for the QBP. Each of the partners will have their own financial reporting systems in place.

6. Risk management

a How do you know when things are going wrong?

The Bus user group gives feedback on the service on a regular basis. All the partners have both email and telephone numbers for the public to contact them to report problems. They can also approach their elected member to act on their behalf. The statistics on service use are also an indicator of when problems are occurring.

b Who can take action when things are going wrong?

All partners have the power to address issues within their remit. For example County would intervene on issues regarding roads or parking

c How do you resolve conflicts of interest?

This has never been an issue as any problems have always been amicably resolved through discussion and negotiation between partners both within and outside of QBP scheduled meetings.

7. Termination arrangements

a What are the arrangements if this partnership comes to an end?

There are no arrangements in place for dissolving the partnership as it is a voluntary body.

b Or if you decide no longer to be involved?

There is currently no evidence that any of the partners would wish to leave the QBP body as outcomes are good and efficiencies achieved. The possibility of expanding to include other regional partners such as Rother or Eastbourne could be considered to ensure better links with local towns such as Bexhill and Battle, especially if/when the link road is completed.

c How will resources be reallocated back to partners?

There are no jointly held assets or resources.

8. Serving the public

a How effectively does this partnership communicate with the public?

Major issues are communicated via press releases by Stagecoach, smaller issues are fed back to the Bus User Group. Some events such as one at the Stade this year are organised and publicised under the banner of QBP.

b How can the public and service users obtain redress when things go wrong?

c Is there a complaints and suggestions process the public can use?

There is not a dedicated process for QBP but any operational issues will be dealt with by the usual procedures of the relevant partner. Stagecoach record and collate all complaints and comments for monitoring and work to reverse any negative trends.

Additional Questions

How do you reconcile public service with commercial viability?

The two aspects are not mutually exclusive. By growing the network, profits can be reinvested into all routes or developing new routes. This spreads the benefit throughout the town. There has been a 50% increase in passenger numbers since 2004, Kent has managed to double its figures, and so further increases are very possible.

If statutory subsidies were reduced would Stagecoach pledge to maintain the same level of service?

Stagecoach do have a commitment to maintain services where possible but this could only be achieved by increasing the overall numbers of bus users and re-investing the profits from revenue raising routes into all routes.

What improvements can be made to routes along the:

a. A259 –to Bexhill, especially in the evenings

This did exist prior to 2006 but as pensioners formed a considerable majority of passengers to Bexhill demand in the evenings was low. Review of services is an ongoing process but without a higher demand the out of hours services are unlikely to be reinstated. Getting buses along the Bexhill road in good time is key to attracting users and dedicated bus lanes would help in this regard.

b. A2100 - to Battle

Countryline, the company that was operating services along this route has gone out of business so there will be the opportunity for Stagecoach to look at developing a service although this has yet to be fully considered.

Community Transport Schemes do give the opportunity to provide a transport service to residents who are in particular need. A provider (Hastings Area Transport) does operate locally.