

Cabinet

31 July 2008



County Durham Overview and Scrutiny Member Network Report: “There and Back” – Local Solutions to Local Transport Challenges in County Durham

Report of Head of Overview and Scrutiny

Purpose

1. To seek Cabinet approval for recommendations from an overview and scrutiny review that looked into transport in County Durham.

Background

2. A Network of Scrutiny Members from the County Council and District Councils was established late in 2006. The aim of the Network was to support the delivery of effective scrutiny in County Durham, act as an information exchange and share best practice. Once established, the Network resolved to undertake a scrutiny investigation of transport in County Durham. The background to the project was the Government Consultation “Putting Passengers First “ and the Transport Bill.
3. There were three key strands to the investigation. Members wished to look at services provided by:
 - Commercial operators
 - Health
 - Community transport.
4. Meetings rotated around County, District and Borough Council offices, each meeting being chaired by a non-executive member from the Authority concerned. The Network was supported by a core of scrutiny officers drawn from a number of authorities and the Integrated Transport Manager, Durham County Council. All authorities participated and the final report (drafted by County Council officers) was agreed by all members of the Network in April 2008. The report is attached.
5. The key findings of the Network were:
 - Durham is essentially a rural County with lower than average levels of car ownership.
 - Lack of access to transport can lead to social exclusion for some groups.
 - Demographic changes in the future (i.e. growing numbers of older people) may worsen the situation.
 - Levels of bus services in rural areas to match those in urban areas will never be achievable, but more innovative service provision should be explored.

- The County Council's emerging Bus Strategy is key to addressing a number of the issues.
6. The Conclusions and Recommendations are contained in Section Eleven of the report (page 85 onwards). Key Recommendations relate to:
- Immediate financial support for implementation of the Bus Strategy
 - Increased support for secured services
 - A review of "Waiting for a Bus"
 - MP's to be asked to support full reimbursement of fuel price increases to operators via Bus Service Operators Grant
 - Better communication with Members (County, District and Parish) when services are amended or withdrawn
 - Support for the integrated transport health pilot in Easington District and its extension, if successful, County-wide
 - Enhanced consultation/engagement by health trusts with ITU, operators and user groups when service changes/reconfigurations planned
 - Support for a greater role for community transport operators in providing services for the Council
 - Membership of the County Durham Transport Partnership Forum to be expanded to include user groups (older people, young people and those with disabilities) to allow commercial operators to be aware of user issues
 - More accessible information for older people
 - Investigation of half fare schemes for young people
 - Transportation issues for young people following after school activities to be considered
 - Targeting of publicity about specific services on young people
 - Commercial operators to consider needs of people with audio or visual impairments; that low floor mechanisms on buses operate consistently and driver training reinforces the specific needs of bus users
 - Specific comments in relation to Arriva
 - Monitoring of Nexus.
7. Given the joint nature of this report, arrangements are being made for its submission to all local authorities in the Network.

Recommendation

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- i) That Cabinet consider the recommendations in the report.
 - ii) That Cabinet consideration is informed by a response to the report (within a given timescale to be determined by Cabinet) from the Corporate Director of Environment on behalf of the County Council and the appropriate Sustainable Communities and Environment Partnership highlighting the implications of the recommendations for the County Council and the Partnership (pending a name change) before a Cabinet decision is taken.
 - iii) That the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee (OS) receive an update on progress in 6 months time from this Cabinet meeting (January 2009) as part of the systematic review process of OS recommendations.

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