

## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH GROUP FOR TRANSPORT – 22 SEPTEMBER 2021 HELD ON TEAMS - 10:00AM**

### **PRESENT –**

#### **Members**

- **Cllr Keith Welham (MSDC)(Co-Chair)**
- **Cllr Mary McLaren (BDC)(Co-Chair)**
- **Cllr Paul Ekpenyong (MSDC)**
- **Cllr Keith Scarff (MSDC)**

#### **Officers and Witnesses**

- **Simon Barnett – Transport Development Manager (SCC)**
- **Susan Davey – Rural Transport Manager (SCC)**
- **Vicky Moseley – Corporate Manager – Communities (BMSDC)**
- **Katherine Davies – Sustainable Transport Officer (BMSDC)**
- **Robert Carmichael – Governance Officer (BMSDC)**
- **Joy Moran – Transport Services Manager – Connecting Communities -BDC**
- **Daniel Davis – Connecting Communities Service Manager - BSEVC – MSDC**

### **APOLOGIES**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Jane Gould.

### **AGREEMENT OF TERMS OF REFERENCE**

It was proposed by Councillor Paul Ekpenyong and seconded by Councillor Mary McLaren that the terms of reference for the meeting be agreed as follows:

To recommend whether or not to develop the subject of Transport within Babergh and Mid Suffolk into a full scoping exercise for the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The group will receive data and evidence on public and rural transport service and base their recommendation upon evidence provided and report their recommendation back to the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

It was resolved by a unanimous vote that the above terms of reference be adopted.

### **REPRESENTATIONS FROM INVITED WITNESSES**

Members considered the presentation from Simon Barnett – Transport Development Manager SCC who outlined the key points below:

- The role that SCC has in transport including the Statutory duties of the Council and how they had no power over the commercial times of busses and routes that they take.
- That SCC procured and managed local bus services via tender and Connecting communities
- That they maintained a database of all bus stops and routes in Suffolk to populate national systems.

- That there had been a national decline in bus use over the past 10 years and that the commercial network has become less viable which has been worsened by the impact of Covid 19.
- That their current Large Vehicle Driver shortage was having an impact not just on commercial areas but for volunteer drivers.
- That there was currently no investment in the sector and that there was no money for investment with the current position of companies breaking even.
- That opportunities for investment could be secured through planning applications and S106 applications
- That the national Bus Back Better had been launched and that SCC was creating a Bus Service improvement plan.
- That the Babergh and Mid Suffolk area had seen the greatest loss in routes that had been withdrawn in the 2018/19 changes.
- That the County held data on staffing numbers, route miles, locations covered, route frequency and costs.
- That as Suffolk was a rural County and as such meant that there were fragmented services
- That currently funding was not forthcoming to support new or existing services.
- That Legislation restricted what the County Council could undertake.
- That there was no legal requirement to inform customers of changes to routes.

Members considered the presentation from Joy Moran – Transport Services Manager – Connecting Communities -BDC who outlined the key points below.

- That Connecting Communities services have been provided for more 20 years.
- That the organisation had 7 vehicles of 11-17 seats providing a service including the Dial a ride from the area of Sudbury to Shotley and Ipswich.
- That this is a pre-booked service whereby they try and link passengers together to ensure efficient journeys where possible
- That some people book together and use the service to stay in touch with others to avoid loneliness.
- That the service linked in with other commercial providers for trips into Ipswich
- That there was a door-to-door service which worked within 5 miles of Hadleigh and that all vehicles had disability access and operators were trained to use this.
- That the service provided transport for people to hospital who didn't qualify for hospital transport. This service was also used by care homes to transport people to hospital.
- That the service did not completely stop during covid.
- That the service was hit badly in the 2018/19 SCC restructure of funding whereby 4 services were cut including evening services to Ipswich, Stowmarket and Manningtree.
- That the service monitored journey refusals, which were very few and were directed to other services where a service could not be provided.
- That the greatest need was from older people who don't have access to a car.
- That health-related hospital transport had strict criteria and meant that some people were falling through the cracks of not receiving support.
- That the vehicle fleet was aging and would need replacing in the next few years but currently electric was not a viable alternative.
- That the service provided 22,500 passenger journeys in 2019/20 across all services.

Members considered the presentation from Daniel Davis – Connecting Communities Service Manager - BSEVC – MSDC who outlined the key points below:

- That BSEVC had been supporting the community for 35 years and originally supported Bury St Edmunds but now worked within Mid Suffolk and Ipswich.
- That the service predominantly supported Family Carers and people over 65.
- That the service also used community cars that were driven by volunteers and had a minibus for hire that could be used for social groups, charities, and private hire.
- That the vehicles were between 6 and 8 years old and are procured through a leasing contract.
- That through lockdown all staff were kept in employment, and the service undertook journeys to get people to medical appointments and vaccination appointments.
- That there had been a significant drop in the number of journeys from 3332 between January 2019-March 2020 to 691 between March 2020-March 2021.
- That all staff were dementia friendly and trained for wheelchair accessibility.

The Attendees responded to Members questions on issues including:

- That for Babergh Community Transport paid drivers were used.
- That many of the volunteer drivers were over 60 and that due to covid had meant there had been changes in peoples lives and circumstances leading to volunteer shortages.
- That the pre-booking of journeys was running at capacity but that some days were busier than others.
- That bus operators cannot ask for or suggest payment for people who receive the free bus pass privileges.
- That the usual length of the contract from SCC for community transport was 5 years so that the operators could plan for long term solutions, however any longer than that would not be supported as external factors of prices could have problems for longer term contracts (i.e., fuel, leasing). This was evidenced with the longest contract being of 8 years.
- That the information regarding the change of timetables was not required by law but there are a few officers who go out and update timetables when they have been altered/ service has ceased.
- That there was considerable scope for work with regards to hospital and medical transport and how the Councils Wellbeing strategy could be a key part in looking at this issue.
- That SCC were developing a Bus Service Improvement plan whereby the County would be keen to be involved in any pilot schemes and wider active travel initiatives.
- That the community transport operators worked as part of 7 organisations across the County.

## **MEMBERS DEBATE AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

The Sustainable Travel Officer outlined to Members that the Bus Service Improvement Plan would need to be completed before any proper scrutiny could be considered on that area and that all parishes had been sent the consultation.

Councillor Keith Welham highlighted the dynamic between providers of the service and customers and advertisement of services that were available especially with regards to the Hospital transport as well as through the Bus Back Better partnership

Councillor Keith Scarff agreed that Hospital transport was irregular, and residents had relied on the Good Neighbour Scheme.

Councillor Paul Ekpenyong spoke to the point that the advertisement of existing services and there was poor interlinking between the services and that there needed to be a cultural change of needing to accept and make better use of public transport and that smaller vehicles would be needed for the rural areas of Babergh and Mid Suffolk.

Councillor Mary McLaren agreed that there was an issue with the advertisement of the services and that she had not heard anything with regards to this from the parishes in her Ward, and that there was an issue of helping these organisations run in an environmentally sustainable way.

Councillors agreed that a possible way that the districts could enable this was through infrastructure for charging points for larger transport vehicles. Members discussed that the sources of funding that came through Section 106 agreements and CIL Levy.

Members discussed the possible recommendations and what would be an effective resolution from the committee.

The following decision was Resolved by a unanimous vote.

**RESOLVED**

**To carry out a scoping exercise for a review of the effectiveness of the Connecting Communities transport services provided to Babergh and Mid Suffolk Districts, and how well they are promoted as well as the level of integration and interconnectivity of those services.**