

JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

TO: JOINT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE	REPORT NUMBER: JOS/22/11
FROM: The Chair of the Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee Mid and	DATE OF MEETING: 30 September 2022

RECOMMENDATIONS FROM OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY TASK AND FINISH GROUP FOR TRANSPORT.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

RECOMMENDATION TO BABERGH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- 1.1 That Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to Babergh Cabinet that an analysis of the unmet demand for community transport in the district be carried out.
- 1.2 That the Babergh Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to Cabinet that Suffolk County Council be informed of the apparent lack of publicity of community transport across the district, and to encourage joint working between Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils and Suffolk County Council to promote community transport services.

RECOMMENDATION TO MID SUFFOLK OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

- 1.1 That Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend to Mid Suffolk Cabinet that, as part of the development of the electric bus project, local consultations to elicit unmet transport needs should be carried out – one covering an urban area and one covering a rural area.
- 1.2 That the Mid Suffolk Overview and Scrutiny Committees recommend to Cabinet that Suffolk County Council be informed of the apparent lack of publicity of community transport across the district, and to encourage joint working between Babergh and Mid Suffolk District Councils and Suffolk County Council to promote community transport services.

The Task and Finish Group for Rural Transport, set up by the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee, first met on 22 September 2021 and received evidence from the following invited witnesses:

Simon Barnett – Public Transport Development Manager, Suffolk County Council.

Joy Moran – Transport Services Manager, Connecting Communities, based in Hadleigh and serving Babergh District.

Daniel Davies – Connecting Communities Service Manager, Bury St Edmunds Voluntary Centre (BSEVC), based in Stowmarket and serving Mid Suffolk.

They provided an outline of transport services provision across the two districts, both timetabled services and Connecting Communities provision. The number of people using the services had fallen since the start of the Covid pandemic in March 2020.

Babergh and Mid Suffolk lost a large proportion of their timetabled services as a result of cuts in bus subsidies in 2018/19. However, Suffolk County Council had an opportunity to make significant improvements via the national Bus Back Better initiative and were preparing a Bus Service Improvement Plan for submission to Central Government. The work of the Task and Finish Group could provide useful input to the Bus Back Better initiative.

Connecting Communities is a service provided under a contract from Suffolk County Council and requires the passenger to book in advance. It is used predominately by people over 65. The Connecting Communities Service cannot meet every request; records are kept of these 'refusals'. The vehicle fleets would need to be replaced within a few years. Members felt that the Connecting Communities Service is not widely known and needs promoting.

Further meetings were held to address the key issue – to identify where improvements should be made to enable better access to public transport, community transport and volunteer transport across the two districts. There were two significant developments which required the Group to adapt its approach: Suffolk County Council failed to secure any funding for its Bus Service Improvement Plan and Mid Suffolk Council approved funding for the acquisition and running costs (for two years) of two electric minibuses.

Members agreed that provision of significant improvements District-wide would not be feasible and to focus on one area per council would be more appropriate. A different approach to improving services in each district would be needed.

Suffolk County Council would have no funding available for reinstating services or providing new services. It was suggested that Connecting Communities 'refusals' would form the basis of assessment of unmet need.

Babergh Members of the Group felt that a first step towards assessing the transport needs in their district would be to ask Cabinet to agree to an analysis of community transport 'refusals'.

Mid Suffolk Members felt that, as part of the development of the electric bus project, local consultations to elicit unmet transport needs should be carried out – one covering an urban area and one covering a rural area.