

Extraordinary Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath
District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on
Thursday 20 October 2016 at **6.00 pm** at the **Council Chamber, District
Offices**, College Heath Road, Mildenhall IP28 7EY

Present: **Councillors**

Chairman Simon Cole
Vice Chairman Ruth Bowman

Chris Barker
John Bloodworth
Brian Harvey

David Palmer
Nigel Roman

Also in Attendance:

David Bowman, Cabinet Member for Operations
Lance Stanbury, Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth

Dean Robbie, Service Delivery Manager, Stephensons of Essex

112. **Substitutes**

There were no substitutes declared.

113. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rona Burt, Christine Mason and Reg Silvester.

114. **Public Participation**

There were no questions/statements from members of the public.

115. **Transport Links for Rural Villages in Forest Heath**

The Committee received Report No: OAS/FH/16/028, which was the second in a series of reports/meetings looking at the disjointed and unpredictable way of public transport connections in Forest Heath, particularly in the case of Red Lodge.

For this meeting, the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, in consultation with Councillor Lance Stanbury Portfolio Holder for Planning and Growth had selected four public transport operators to invite to the meeting to discuss transport issues affecting Red Lodge (Abellio Greater Anglia; Coach Services Limited; Mulleys Motorways Limited and Stephenson's of Essex).

Each of the four providers had been asked in advance of the meeting to respond to a series of questions. Responses were received from three of the transport providers and were attached at Appendix 1 to Report No: OAS/FH/16/028 (Abellio Greater Anglia; Coach Services Limited and Stephenson's of Essex). Attached at Appendix 1A to the report was a late response to the questions submitted by Mulleys Motorways Limited on 17 October 2016.

The aim of the meeting on 20 October 2016 was to hear from the transport providers regarding the rural transport services they provide; their integration in Red Lodge, and for the Committee to discuss its concerns.

The Chairman welcomed to the meeting Dean Robbie, Service Delivery Manager from Stephenson's of Essex.

Dean briefly informed the Committee on the history of Stephenson's of Essex; his role in the company as Service Delivery Manager and previous transport roles held. He explained that the aim of Stephenson's of Essex was to integrate services where possible. However, this was not included as an element in the tendering process when bidding for new routes. The company tried to liaise with train companies, but the trains did not often co-ordinate with schools. 95% of the time the company did get it right, and tried to improve where it was not so good such as trying to improve communications and the selling of services, which was a joint venture between the buses and local authority.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth discussed the wider issue of economic development, in particular Red Lodge, which was growing. He informed the Committee that public transport from Red Lodge to Cambridge did not link up, and questioned how this could be achieved.

In response, Dean explained that the company was trying to achieve growth on the 16-16A bus route, which ran an hourly service from Newmarket via Red Lodge to Bury St Edmunds. The company wanted to sell its service with reliable and decent buses to grow the business further into Suffolk.

The Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth addressed Dean as to whether there could be an opportunity to see if the 16/16A bus route could be used as a pilot with Forest Heath District Council; Suffolk County Council and officers to work with Stephenson's of Essex to really try and get the route going.

In response Dean stated that the company aimed to work with everybody, and that the company as a business wanted to grow its brand from Stephenson's of Essex into Stephenson's of Suffolk.

The Committee questioned whether the Council had sight of proposed new transport routes in Forest Heath, and if not, whether it could make

recommendations to Suffolk County Council (SCC) to have sight of these in future.

In response the Cabinet Member for Operations informed the Committee that he sat on the Joint Suffolk County Council/West Suffolk Cabinet Member Meeting (Highways and Transport), and did not see why future transport routes could not be included on the agenda.

The Committee also discussed issues around multi-ticketing; timetabling on mobile phone apps; bus passes and reimbursement; customer experience; monitoring bus route reliability; SCC routes and tendering; bus stations and bus stops, to which Dean provided comprehensive responses.

The Chairman, on behalf of the Committee thanked Dean Robbie for attending the meeting, which everyone felt had been extremely useful. Mr Robbie then left the meeting at 6.55pm

The Committee expressed some disappointment in that only one of the transport providers had attended the meeting, but noted that Abellio Greater Anglia (ABA) had sent apologies, and indicated that AGA would be happy to speak or meet with officers or councillors after the meeting, giving the Committee the opportunity to ask any further questions or to discuss the outcome of the meeting. The Chairman informed the Committee that this was indicative of the industry as a whole and showed the kind of institutionalised attitude that the Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth would be up against.

The Committee then discussed other responses received from Abellio Greater Anglia; Coach Services Limited and Mulleys Motorways Limited (Appendix 1 and 1A).

Members also discussed bus contracts and questioned how long contracts were awarded for and whether there were any key performance indicators on the contracts and penalties incurred; needing a better understanding of the tendering process; whether S106 monies were being spent wisely; and the prospect of devolution which would hopefully help in improving infrastructure and transport in the future.

The Committee suggested that the next step would be for the Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth to meet transport providers individually, particularly Dean Robbie from Stephensons of Essex, to discuss further the operation of the 16/16A bus route to see what could be done, working with Suffolk CC as well, to improve the integration and advertising of this service.

It was further suggested that the Cabinet Member for Operations liaises with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth regarding future meetings of the Joint Suffolk County Council/West Suffolk Cabinet Member Meeting (Highways and Transport).

Councillor Nigel Roman moved the recommendations, this was duly seconded by Councillor Brian Harvey and with the vote being unanimous, it was

RECOMMENDED: that

- 1) The Cabinet Member for Planning and Growth be asked to further progress discussions with transport operators, in particular Stephenson's of Essex, to see how services could be improved in terms of delivery and promotion.
- 2) The Cabinet Member for Operations liaises with the Cabinet Member for Planning in Growth regarding future meetings of the Joint Suffolk County Council/West Suffolk Cabinet Member meeting (Highways and Transport).

The Meeting concluded at 7.25pm

Signed by:

Chairman
