



Scrutiny Panel

Item
10

16 March 2021

Report of	Assistant Director Policy and Corporate	Author	Jane Thompson ☎ 508642
Title	Review of Bus Service Provision		
Wards affected	Not applicable		

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1. The Scrutiny Panel has requested a review of bus service provision in Colchester and to consider what further action needs to be taken in respect of the review. This review follows on from the earlier 2017 review, but is a separate review, looking at current circumstances affecting bus services.

2. Reason for Scrutiny

- 2.1 At its meeting in September 2017 the Panel agreed to review the bus services operating in Colchester. Further details of the scope and history of the review are set out in section 4 of this report. However, at its meeting in August 2018 the Panel determined that a series of questions should be sent to Essex County Council (ECC), the bus operators and Community 360. These responses were considered at the Panel meeting in July 2019 and it was agreed to recommend to Cabinet that a Passenger Transport Strategy be drafted.
- 2.2 The Panel decided to carry out a further review of the bus operation and update themselves on the current situation in light of Covid-19, the Council's declared Climate Emergency and new Strategic Plan objectives.
- 2.3 The Panel is also invited to consider what further action, if any, it wishes to undertake to conclude the review.

3. Action Required

- 3.1. To review and note the responses received from Essex County Council, the bus operators and Community 360 to the Panel's request for information and information presented at the meeting
- 3.2. To consider what further action needs to be taken in respect of the review of bus services in Colchester.

4. Background Information

- 4.1. In July 2017 Councillor Scordis submitted a scoping document to the Panel to request a review be held to examine the operations of bus companies in Colchester Borough. In

September 2017 the Scrutiny Panel resolved to hold this review and objectives and a formalised scope were agreed.

4.2. The review followed the objectives as agreed at the September meeting.

These included:

- To understand the strategic role and benefits of bus operation and how it can best serve the community;
- To investigate and scrutinise what bus companies are doing to:
 - Improve the punctuality of services
 - Increase bus usage
 - Reduce emissions
 - Make buses more accessible
 - Communicate with passengers when services are cancelled or altered.
- To improve the dialogue between bus companies that operate in the Borough and Colchester Borough Council, Councillors and Residents.

4.3. The Scrutiny Panel meeting on 16 April 2018 was attended by representatives of bus companies, Community360 and ECC. Prior to this meeting, officers had collected information from the invited organisations and the Panel discussed this with the representatives in attendance.

4.4. The Panel resumed its consideration of the issue in August 2018: A follow-up letter with questions to operators and ECC was approved by Panel. The questions related to the Bus Services Act 2017, Colchester Blueprint and follow-up questions based on the objective areas for the review and responses to the Panel's initial questions. A summary of the responses to the questions are attached as appendix 1.

4.5. At its meeting on 29 January 2019 the Panel resolved to schedule an update on the review for the 2019-20 municipal year. At the Panel meeting held on 11 June 2019 the Panel further resolved that this update be scheduled for its meeting on 16 July 2019, and that the supplementary questions be re-sent to those bus companies which had not yet provided responses.

4.6. At the 16 July 2019 meeting the Panel recommended to Cabinet that the Panel's work in reviewing bus operations presented and that Cabinet be invited to draft a Public Transport Strategy. However, Cabinet chose not to draft a Public Transport Strategy. This was due to public transport not being a mandatory strategy for the Borough Council as it is a function of the Transport Authority, who in this case is ECC. Cabinet did reiterate its commitment to working with ECC on public transport issues.

4.7. Following consideration by Cabinet it was decided to revisit the review and send new questions to ECC, Community 360 and the bus operators. These questions were sent out on 26 February.

4.8 ECC passenger Transport and Sustainable Transport Managers will present their policies to the Panel and explain how the policies help promote bus travel in Colchester.

The bus operators and Community 360 have also been invited to discuss their operational issues with the Panel.

4.9 The Panel has prepared topic areas where they would like to further consider the issues facing the operation of bus services and how more people can be encouraged to use public transport. At the Panel meeting representatives of the bus operators working within the Borough, and representatives of the County Council, as the Transport Authority, will be invited to discuss areas. These are likely to cover:

- Ways in which Covid-19 restrictions are affecting the provision and use of buses
- Post-Covid planning
- How bus provision can affect and be affected by our Council's local plan
- Route planning and new residential developments
- How the Borough's bus network fits into wider transport strategies, such as the transport strategies of Essex County Council
- How the Borough Council engages with transport and environmental strategies at different levels, including those of the County Council.

4.10 The Panel may also consider the following:

Policy Planning and Strategic Issues

- How do bus services fit into wider plans for modal shift away from cars and to public transport, cycling, walking and other sustainable transport options?
- Taking a holistic view of the transport system. How do the County strategies on public transport/bus use fit within the sustainable transport strategy and overarching Transport Strategy?
- How can bus service providers be more involved in the process for designing the Local Plan, and interact with local developments, to ensure services develop to match new communities.
- The potential use, in the medium-term, of transport hubs to allow motorists to drive or cycle, park, then use bus services to journey into Colchester.
- Discussion of ways to potentially improve use of Park & Ride system. E.g., charge per car [not per passenger] and 'park & drop' system to ferry shopping back to car park.
- Impacts on inequality which can be achieved through a comprehensive, accessible and affordable public transport system.
- Concerns for service providers, especially given the effect of the Covid-19 situation and restrictions.

Ticketing

- Cost of tickets, compared to alternative options such as parking or taxis.
- Use of contactless payment and whether this has produced any change in the demographics of service users.
- Whether it would be possible for a one-stop-shop app and/or ticket system to be developed to offer tickets covering a range of different transport services/options, potentially including rail and e-scooter travel. Could this also include a 'booking' system for car sharing?
- Are 'one-touch' scannable passes possible, to reduce payment times and improve punctuality.

Punctuality and Increasing Usership

- What are the driving factors where service unreliability and unpunctuality are experienced?
- How is punctuality measured and what constitutes a late-running bus?
- What new Tech options are there which could improve punctuality, ease of use and passenger numbers.
- Have the service providers conducted any research or sought best-practice ideas to seek to increase service use by the public?
- What incentivisation options are there to entice potential passengers? E.g., discounts on use of service, or work with Colchester BID/businesses for passengers to enjoy benefits from local firms?
- What plans are there for continued improvements in environmental standards of vehicles?

4.11 We are aware of various ticketing arrangements and promotions that are in place to promote bus travel in Colchester;

- University of Essex negotiate a special Uni Card with Firstgroup which give generous annual season ticket for staff and students. This has now been transferred to an app-based ticket.
- Borough Card allows unlimited bus travel in and around Colchester on First Essex, Arriva Colchester, Panther Travel, Ipswich Buses, Stephensons of Essex, and Heddingham Omnibuses.
- PlusBus – bus journey add-on to rail ticket

4.12 It is brought to the Panel's attention that Essex County Council are the Highway and Transport Authority the Borough Council has limited influence on bus operations. However, the Borough Council can influence and assist bus services in the borough is as follows -

1. Responding to ECC's Colchester Future Transport Strategy consultation – the Council endorsed the strategy and included the following in our response –

- **Integrating transport** schemes including creating interchange hubs at bus stops and rail stations with access to e-bikes, e-scooters or quality walking routes, or cycle parking for onward travel to the town centre or other destinations. Also integrated booking and payment systems for easy access to move between transport modes.
- **Public Transport Improvements** Considering options for expanding the public transport offer to allow faster, seamless access and connectivity to destinations. Examples are closer integration with the Park and Ride service, rapid transit and demand responsive transport. As well as looking at prioritising public transport to allow better, inclusive and faster access to destinations, considering smarter ticketing and integration with other transport modes, and working with commercial transport providers to encourage costs effective and family friendly pricing.
- **Eco Parking (Park and Choose)** The recently adopted Positive Parking Strategy includes environmental charging, which seeks to move away from charging for parking and instead focus on the environmental impact of vehicles driving into the town, and the looking at the possibility of a workplace levy on parking spaces. Also, closer integration of the park and ride offer with the newly adopted Colchester Positive Parking Strategy to ensure park and ride is favoured over town centre car parks for those working or visiting Colchester.

2. **The Borough Council's Local Plan and other Planning policies** promote development in sustainable locations, ensuring that development is located to reduce the need to travel or development is of a scale that promotes sustainable transport that is accessible for all.
 3. **Air Quality requirements** – The Borough Council work with operators to consider the impact of their services on the air quality in the town centre and how to reduce emissions. We have also assisted with catalytic conversions of some buses to reduce emissions.
 4. **Colchester Travel Plan Club (CTPC)** – the Council hosts the CTPC which promotes bus use and other forms of sustainable transport to encourage alternatives to car travel to work. The club liaises with the bus operators to offer incentives to use public transport such as ticket discounts. Member organisations employ approximately 10,000 staff and teach 20,000 students in the borough.
 5. **ECC Bus operators meeting** – The Sustainability and Climate Change team attend the quarterly ECC Bus Operators meeting, however meetings ceased for a year due to the Covid-19 pandemic, with the last meeting taking place in December 2019. The meetings recommenced in December 2020 and will attend future meetings. Agenda items include future developments, marketing, ticketing and infrastructure. The Environmental Protection Manager also attends meetings to update on air quality and the current Defra project, Clean Air for Colchester, which encourages drivers to switch off their engine while they wait to help reduce air pollution from idling engines, as well as walk and cycle for short journeys.
- 6. Equality, Diversity and Human Rights implications**
- 6.1 There are no specific implications regarding Human Rights, however there are implications regarding equality and diversity, in that the efficient and comprehensive operation of local bus services should be inclusive of all people and take account of the needs of disabled service users including people who have sensory impairments, such as those people who are partially sighted.
- 7. Standard References**
- 7.1 There are no particular references to consultation or publicity considerations or financial, community safety, health and safety or risk management implications.
- 8. Strategic Plan References**
- 8.1 The operation of efficient and environmentally sustainable bus services within Colchester Borough has reference to the following themes and priorities of the [Strategic Plan 2020-23](#) -
- [Tackling the climate challenge and leading sustainability](#)
 - Reduce carbon emissions to help achieve a net zero Carbon footprint for Council Services by 2030.
 - Air quality across Colchester is improved.

- [Creating safe, healthy and active communities](#)
 - Tackle the causes of inequality and support our most vulnerable people
 - Provide opportunities for young people
- [Growing a fair economy so everyone benefits](#)
 - Enable Economic Recovery from Covid-19 ensuring all residents benefit from growth
 - Work with partners to deliver a shared vision for a vibrant town
 - Create an environment that attracts inward investment to Colchester and help businesses to flourish

Appendices

1. Summary of responses to the 2018 questions to bus operators

Background Information

Borough Council Policies and Plans

CBC Climate Emergency Action Plan - [Document.ashx \(cmis.uk.com\)](#)

Colchester Air Quality Action Plan - [Colchester Air Quality Action Plan 18-03-16.pdf \(windows.net\)](#)

National Policies

Climate Change Act 2008 - [Climate Change Act 2008 \(legislation.gov.uk\)](#)

Clean Air Strategy 2019 - [Clean Air Strategy 2019 - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

Ambient Air Quality Directive - [LexUriServ.do \(europa.eu\)](#)

Essex County Council Policies

Colchester Future Transport Strategy (consultation document)
[colchester-future-transport-strategy.pdf \(essexhighways.org\)](#)

Getting around in Essex - A Bus and Passenger Transport Strategy
https://www.essexhighways.org/uploads/docs/DS14_4705_Bus_Strategy_WEB.pdf

Other Links

University Discount FirstBus Card

[UoE Student travel | Essex | First Bus \(firstgroup.com\)](#)

Department for Transport – Statistical Release – Annual Bus Statistics 2016/17 -

https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/666759/annual-bus-statistics-year-ending-march-2017.pdf

Local Bus Passenger Journeys information datasets

<https://www.gov.uk/government/statistical-data-sets/bus01-local-bus-passengerjourneys#table-bus0103>

Transport Focus – Bus Passenger Transport Survey – March 2018

<https://www.transportfocus.org.uk/research-publications/publications/buspassenger-survey/>

Essex County Council Bus Information

<http://www.essexhighways.org/getting-around/bus.aspx>

Getting Around in Essex – A Bus and Passenger Transport Survey

http://www.essexhighways.org/uploads/files/DS14_4705_Bus_Strategy_WEB.pdf

Concessionary Fares in Essex <http://www.essexhighways.org/bus/Fares-and-bus-passes/concessionaryfares.aspx>

Colchester Travel Plan Club <http://www.colchestertravelplanclub.co.uk/>

Colchester Bus Users Support Group <https://colchesterbususers.wordpress.com/>

Borough Card – one ticket for journeys using more than one bus operator

[Colchester Borough Card | Essex | First Bus \(firstgroup.com\)](#)

Plus Bus – bus journey add-on to rail ticket - [PLUSBUS | Colchester PlusBus](#)