

Minute extract from Cabinet meeting on 9 June 2021

573. Review of Bus Services

Cabinet considered the recommendation in draft minute 294 of the Scrutiny Panel meeting of 10 March 2021, a copy of which had been circulated to each Member.

Councillor Fox attended and with the consent of the Chair addressed Cabinet. When they had first joined the Council, Councillor Scordis and he had pressed for scrutiny of bus services in Colchester, which remained expensive and unreliable, especially when compared with services in London. He would like to see the introduction of municipal bus companies, but this was currently prohibited by the government. Cabinet were urged to follow the lead of the Labour and Co-operative party to go beyond the recommendations and press Essex County Council to deliver a reliable public transport system fit for the 21st century.

Councillor Crow, Portfolio Holder for Environment and Sustainability, reminded Cabinet that the Council had declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and had an absolute duty to ensure that it followed the steps in the climate emergency. He was also aware from his ward of the dangers of air pollution from traffic. To address these issues, the Council needed to support sustainable methods of transport to reduce car dependency. He supported the Scrutiny Panel recommendations and proposed that Cabinet accept them with addition of the following resolution:-

“Cabinet acknowledges that a number of the issues raised by the Panel and included in these recommendations, including enabling disabled passengers to travel with confidence, are addressed in the Government’s Bus Strategy (and future detailed regulations); as such, Cabinet will create opportunities to influence the implementation of the strategy for the benefit of residents”.

Councillor Dundas, Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategy, highlighted the difficulties the bus companies had faced because of the pandemic, which had severely reduced their funding. Councillor Lissimore, Portfolio Holder for Resources, highlighted the Bus Back Better strategy, which had been produced by the government in March and which was in line with the spirit of the recommendations. In terms of developing sustainable modes of transport, bus services should be relatively easy to improve as it did not require the development of additional infrastructure.

RESOLVED that:-

- (a) Cabinet encourages councillors to take up the ‘#UseTheBus challenge’, to invest in local communities, jobs and the environment by championing bus travel.
- (b) Cabinet uses the powers available to a Tier Two authority to enhance and highlight modal shift from car use. Powers of Planning, redevelopment of Town Centre and a boroughwide Parking Strategy being examples (but not an exhaustive list) of these powers.

- (c) Cabinet investigates incentives and offers, through the Business Improvement District [BID] and business partners, in developing a level playing field for bus passengers, when compared to parking deals, thus promoting sustainable transport options.
- (d) Guidance be issued to all elected members as to the options available regarding use of Section 106 funds from new developments, potentially to support bus infrastructure and routes.
- (e) Cabinet directs officers to investigate the possibility of working with partners to create a Borough-wide travel app, to support and encourage use of sustainable and active travel options.
- (f) Cabinet acknowledges that a number of the issues raised by the Panel and included in these recommendations, including enabling disabled passengers to travel with confidence, are addressed in the Government's Bus Strategy (and future detailed regulations); as such, Cabinet will create opportunities to influence the implementation of the strategy for the benefit of residents.

REASONS

As set out in the minute.

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

It was open to Cabinet not to approve the recommendations from the Scrutiny Panel.