

Agenda Item No: 5
Report To: Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 21 July 2015
Report Title: Quality Bus Partnership
Report Author: Sheila Davison, Head of Health, Parking & Community Safety
Portfolio Holder: Cllr Heyes – Portfolio Responsibility for Highways, Wellbeing and Safety



Summary: To update members on the work of the Quality Bus Partnership, to advise of the links to other transport related committees and task groups and future developments. The need for a more detailed review of the Quality Bus Partnership is also addressed.

Key Decision: No

Affected Wards: All

Recommendations: **The Committee be asked to consider the information provided and advise officers:-**

1. if there are any specific concerns that the Committee would like to see considered by the Quality Bus Partnership;
2. if any further information is required and
3. whether the Committee wish to receive a further update in a year's time

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Report Title: Quality Bus Partnership

Purpose of the Report

1. To update members on the work of the Quality Bus Partnership (QBP), to advise of the links to other transport related committees / task groups and future developments. The need for a more detailed review of the QBP is also addressed.

Background

2. On the 23 June 2015 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee asked for a brief information report on the QBP to enable them to consider whether a more detailed review is necessary (minute reference 45 OSC 230615). The committee commented that the partnership had been in being for in the region of ten years and raised a concern that only one operator is providing a bus substantive bus service within the borough. A concern was raised that services have recently been withdrawn from some areas of the borough.

Ashford's Bus Quality Partnership

3. Ashford's QBP brings together Kent County Council, Ashford Borough Council and Stagecoach with the aim of:
 - a. Creating a public transport network that is an attractive alternative to private car use;
 - b. seeking to increase use of bus services to achieve a sustainable and self-sufficient transport system and
 - c. acknowledges that these aims require a high quality reliable public transport that can only be delivered through partnership work with a commitment to co-ordinated investment, bus service network planning, marketing and complementary infrastructure and bespoke initiatives.
4. The agreement contains a number of very detailed undertakings for each of the partners. A copy of the full agreement is provided at Appendix 1.
5. The partnership operates on a voluntary basis in accordance with the various transport provisions. Nothing in the agreement is legally binding on any of the parties and cannot be interpreted in any manner being restrictive to the commercial or operational activities of Stagecoach in East Kent or any other organisation.
6. It will be noted that the agreement is somewhat out of date and this is a matter being addressed by the QBP with KCC leading. We are advised that this will be brought to the next QBP meeting scheduled in September 2015.
7. It should also be noted that the aims, objectives and style of operation of QBPs seem to vary greatly across the country for example many include reducing pollution in their objectives. Ashford QBP certainly has green travel

and new travel initiatives within its remit, however, it tends to focus on current operational issues. Members should note the QBP does not address the franchising of bus services which falls to KCC.

8. It is anticipated that members' concerns regarding rural bus services will be raised at the next meeting of the QBP. The opportunity afforded by this meeting also provides an opportunity to discuss any other issues felt relevant by Overview & Scrutiny members.

Public Transport Liaison Task Group

9. It is worth mentioning that a new Task Group that has just been established by the Cabinet (minute reference 38 CA 110615). While the terms of reference have yet to be agreed its primary purpose will be to liaise with transport providers. It will give members an opportunity to examine service provision of all transport into, across or out of the borough. It is likely to have a strategic emphasis attempting to build on the advantages Ashford has in terms of location and growth potential.
10. The Chairman of the Task Group has indicated that rural transport provision will be a focus for the inaugural meeting in October 2015.

Joint Transportation Board

11. The Joint Transportation Board (JTB) is of course the main committee relevant to transportation for the borough council. Its focus is on capital and revenue funded programmes, traffic regulation orders and street management proposals. It provides advice on these matters to the relevant Executives as appropriate.
12. The JTB essentially provides a forum for consultation between KCC and the Council on policies, plans and strategies related to highways road traffic and public transport. It reviews progress and out-turn of works and business performance.
13. An important role for the JTB is to recommend and advise on the prioritization of bids for future programmes of work. It also receives reports on highways and transportation needs within the borough and as such there is a link between the JTB and QBP, the new liaison task group and others such as the taxi forum.

Other matters to consider

14. Within the borough council, the Health, Parking and Community Safety Service recently took over responsibility for the day to day work associated with parking, highways & transport. This has provided an opportunity for new managers to review the policies and procedures in operation that cover this area of work. While this is very much an on-going process it has already resulted in significant change relevant especially to parking. It is anticipated what we will see over the next 12 months more change will happen and report as applicable to members.

Conclusion

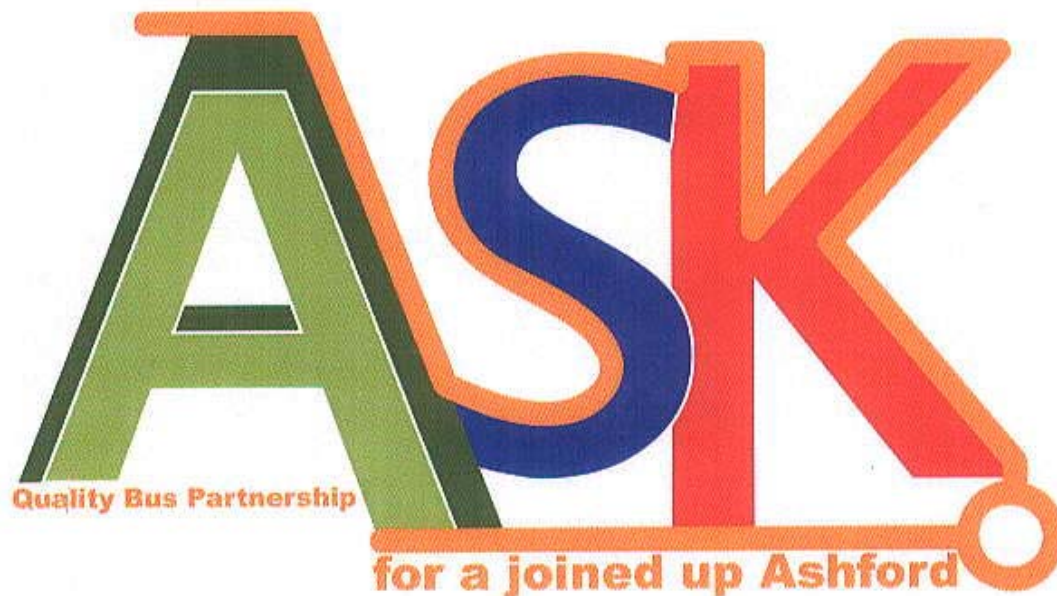
15. The work of the QBP is important and provides a positive environment in which KCC, the Council and Stagecoach can work together to the benefit of our community. Other groups are, however, equally involved in promoting of an effective, efficient and sustainable public transport system. There has been, and will continue to be, change over the next year while the new managers review the service and work with partners to do things in a different way.
16. This meeting is an opportunity to raise areas of concern and consider how best to move forward.

Recommendation

17. That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee schedule in a more in depth review of the QBP in a year's time.

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AASK is a Quality Bus Partnership between Ashford Borough Council, Ashford's Future, Stagecoach and Kent County Council.

The partners have joined together and committed to improving bus services for the growing town of Ashford.

ASHFORD QUALITY BUS PARTNERSHIP

AGREEMENT

9 FEBRUARY 2009

A Protocol between Stagecoach in East Kent, Kent County Council, Ashford Borough Council and Ashford's Future Partnership Board

The partnership to achieve quality local bus services in the Ashford Borough

1. Statement of Principles

Stagecoach in East Kent, Kent County Council, Ashford Borough Council and Ashford's Future Partnership Board share the common objectives of:

- 1.1. Creating a public transport network acknowledged by local residents, visitors and the business community as an increasingly attractive alternative to private car use.
- 1.2. Seeking increased use of local bus services to assist in achieving a sustainable and self-sufficient transport system, capable of meeting the needs of the 21st century, enriching the quality of life in the Ashford Borough, attracting investment, enhancing work and leisure opportunities, and helping to ensure that **Ashford is best placed** for growth in the South-East.
- 1.3. All four parties to this protocol acknowledge that these objectives require high quality reliable public transport that can only be delivered through working in partnership, with a commitment to co-ordinated investment, bus service network planning, marketing and complementary infrastructure and bespoke initiatives.

2. Framework for Action

- 2.1. The bus network within Ashford Borough has been identified as being appropriate for a joint commitment to invest and to upgrade facilities and operations, together with improved and imaginative marketing, which can contribute to the target growth.
- 2.2. Significant investment is already underway, with £1 million of Kickstart capital funding provided by KCC for the supply and delivery of 10 new low-floor easy-access vehicles for the A-line route; investment in bus route roadside infrastructure to improve conditions at bus stops and to ensure accessibility for all; and further investment in new vehicles for the KCC-tendered network in Ashford, ensuring that most of the town's routes are now served by low-floor, easy-access buses.

- 2.3 All parties to this protocol will work actively together to plan and establish a viable and accessible bus service network for the Ashford Borough area. All parties will work together on proposed changes to bus services, marketing and fares in any part of the network; and each party will have an input into the establishment of new, and amendment to existing, bus services. The parties to this protocol will be expected to reach consensus agreement on the above before plans are implemented.

3. Agreements of this Protocol

The four parties to this protocol agree to:

- 3.1 Work together to implement a substantial improvement to bus operating infrastructure, including stops, shelters, passenger information, accessibility
- 3.2 Work together and introduce innovations such as alternative environmentally friendly fuels, market sensitive fares including innovative ticketing (recognising that the level of fares in Ashford Borough is below the UK average) and improved information, including the extension of the existing real time information system, to ensure that the Statement of Principles and Targets of the protocol are delivered
- 3.3 Seek to deliver by a partnership approach and through market research and similar consultative measures, opportunities for the introduction of new or revised local bus services, which would increase the use of public transport
- 3.4 Seek to identify through market surveys and public attitude studies the means to increase the quality and availability of public transport services in the Ashford Borough
- 3.5 Seek to co-ordinate the development of the public transport network with land use planning to maximise the opportunities for local bus and rail services
- 3.6 Seek to co-ordinate the public transport network with other forms of transport to achieve maximum travel opportunities for the Ashford Borough
- 3.7 Seek to implement a Performance Improvement Partnership
- 3.8 Work with Tenterden Town Council and Parish Councils within the Ashford Borough and other representative organisations to exchange information and assist in the improvement of infrastructure and local transport information
- 3.9 The responsibility for organising and administering the meetings of the Partnership to be undertaken by KCC's Sustainable Transport Team

4. Ashford Borough Council, Ashford's Future Partnership Board and Kent County Council will:

- 4.1 Plan and progressively introduce, where possible, a series of bus priority and other measures, to improve the timing, punctuality and reliability of local bus services
- 4.2 Seek to ensure that both existing and new developments are accessible to the local bus service network for journeys to and from the historic town and commercial centre of Ashford, and to and from Ashford's expanding residential

and commercial areas, as well as to and from Tenterden Town and the other Parishes of the Borough; and to seek Section 106 developer contributions towards new or improved public transport infrastructure and/or services wherever appropriate

- 4.3 Seek funding for public transport facilities such as bus shelters, information and bus priorities commensurate with investment and other measures taken by Stagecoach in East Kent in improving local bus services
- 4.4 Secure, implement and maintain suitable attractive and appropriate arrangements for the provision of information and roadside infrastructure (stops and shelters) to a standard agreed between the partners, with Kent County Council to be responsible for damaged bus stop posts and hardstanding through its Roadside Infrastructure Unit contract; and Ashford Borough Council to be responsible for maintenance of its shelters
- 4.5 Assist in identifying new market opportunities for local bus services and support new initiatives to encourage greater use of public transport, including Green Travel Plans for employers and education establishments, especially in new developments identified as part of Ashford's future growth area
- 4.6 Give advance notice of roadworks affecting bus services and make every reasonable endeavour to safeguard bus access in cases of road closures or diversions, and ensure that the public are adequately informed of alternative arrangements, by means of information on stops and buses, and via Traveline, and by any other methods considered appropriate
- 4.7 Provide bus stop clearways operating 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, as well as other relevant infrastructure improvements to enhance bus access to stops (Kent County Council); and to provide additional resources for parking enforcement, especially of bus stop clearways (Ashford Borough Council).
- 4.8 Ashford's Future Partnership Board will promote major new developments with due regard for the needs of bus route priorities and the provision of appropriate bus route infrastructure such as raised kerbs, bus shelters and bus stop clearways.

5. Stagecoach in East Kent will:

- 5.1 Work in partnership with and consult with Kent County Council, Ashford Borough Council and Ashford's Future Partnership Board over the design, planning and implementation of a viable and sustainable network of local bus services, adopting a consistent marketing brand for the Ashford town network; and establish appropriate co-ordination with other public transport facilities, especially rail services
- 5.2 Work with Kent County Council, Ashford Borough Council and Ashford's Future Partnership Board to provide input into the Local Transport Plan (LTP3) so that the benefits of improvements introduced through this protocol can be measured in terms of patronage figures
- 5.3 Introduce where commercially feasible improved local bus services in line with the introduction of priority measures, automatic vehicle location systems and other new features which contribute to more efficient public transport operation

- 5.4 Seek to maintain all services in the Ashford Borough with minimum lost mileage and to a professional standard. As a minimum standard Stagecoach in East Kent will achieve standards of operation set by the Traffic Commissioner in accordance with NI 178
- 5.5 Invest in new and fully accessible fuel-efficient vehicles, as well as presenting existing vehicles in an attractive manner
- 5.6 Consult with Kent County Council, Ashford Borough Council and Ashford's Future Partnership Board on any significant proposed fare changes
- 5.7 Continue to develop higher standards of training and education amongst staff, including an understanding of passenger transport operation and customer care
- 5.8 Provide adequate management and supervision of services to uphold standards as well as being able to deal with emergencies and other unforeseen circumstances quickly and efficiently
- 5.9 Work in partnership with KCC to deliver and be responsible for maintenance of timetable displays, timetable display cases and bus stop flags at bus stops served only by Stagecoach routes; bus stops on routes served by KCC-tendered services will be maintained by the appointed Roadside Infrastructure Unit contractor
- 5.10 Work in partnership with KCC in rolling out ITSO-certified Electronic Ticket Machines (ETMs) with Smartcard readers and GPS/GPRS transmitters on all service vehicles from summer 2009. This project will generate significant benefits to passengers and bus operators, including reduced bus stop dwell times, more effective delivery and administration of concessionary travel schemes and enhanced information on patronage, network performance and the identification of incidents and congestion

Important Note:

This is a Voluntary Partnership Agreement in accordance with the provisions of the Transport Act 2000 and the Local Transport Act 2008. As such it is an agreement in which each of the parties is a voluntary partner.

Therefore, nothing in this agreement is designed or should be concluded as being legally binding on any of the parties, or in any manner being restrictive to the commercial or operational activities of Stagecoach in East Kent or any other organisation.

ASHFORD QUALITY BUS PARTNERSHIP

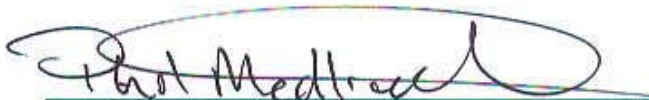
Signed this 9th day of FEBRUARY 2009



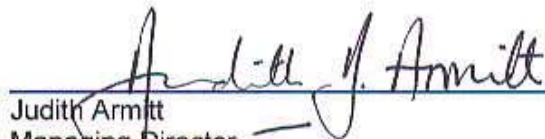
County Councillor Charles Hibberd
Lead Member for Environment, Highways and Waste
Kent County Council



Councillor Paul Clokie
Leader, Ashford Borough Council



Phil Medlicott
Managing Director
Stagecoach in East Kent



Judith Armit
Managing Director
Ashford's Future Company Ltd

6. Aims and Measures of the Quality Bus Partnership

All four parties to the protocol agree to work together using the following aims and measures of the Quality Bus Partnership:

(M1) Percentage increase in number of passenger journeys since 2008

The increase in the number of passenger journeys in recent years has been due to a number of factors, principal among them being the improvement in the level of service offered and the introduction of concessionary fares, which was first introduced county-wide in 2006 and England-wide in 2008. However, there are serious funding issues relating to the latter of these factors which are still to be resolved. The target figures predict a modest growth in passenger journeys on the baseline figure for 2008.

Target is 9% over the first 3 years

(M2) Percentage increase in number of multi-journey ticket sales since 2008

The very successful marketing undertaken by the operator has generated a significant growth in the sale of multi-journey tickets, especially the weekly Megarider ticket and Plusbus tickets. The expected growth in passenger numbers would also be expected to increase these sales further.

Target is 9% over the first 3 years

(M3) Increase of passengers expressing satisfaction with service provided since 2008

Bus passenger satisfaction rates would be expected to grow alongside the planned improvements that the QBP seeks to implement during the next three years. The parties to the agreement will seek to arrange a passenger satisfaction survey at an appropriate time.

7. Targets for Next Three Years

All four parties to the protocol agree to work together towards achieving the following targets for the next three years:

(T1) Percentage of services operating on time

Poor punctuality is due to many factors, including the increasing number of vehicles on the road and inconsiderate parking and loading at bus stops. We need to focus on better enforcement of illegal parking at bus stops and more rigorous monitoring of why and when delays happen, so that problems causing late running can be resolved.

Target is to build up to 95% within the first three years, as determined by NI 178 of not less than 1 minute early and not more than 5 minutes late

(T2) Number of stops with improved accessibility

Raised kerbs give better access at bus stops, especially for passengers with limited mobility and for parents with children in buggies. The standard measurement for raised kerbs should be 160mm, which meets the

requirements of the highway authority and of the bus operator, especially with the increase in the number of low-floor buses which can be prevented from accessing the bus stop parallel to the pavement if the raised kerb is higher than this. A programme of bus stop clearways is planned for 2009/10, which should at last provide the supporting infrastructure which the bus operator needs to provide a reliable, accessible service. The provision of bus stop clearways is paramount, and these should continue to be introduced at all urban bus stops as soon as resources permit. Equally important is their enforcement by parking officers, so as to ensure that all bus stops are kept clear of all other vehicles at all times. The provision of dedicated loading bays in busy shopping areas will often assist with this, providing the road space needed for delivery vehicles to supply retail premises.

Target is 67 stops in year 1, with the majority of the remaining stops in the urban area to be completed in years 2 and 3; and 100% of clearways to be 24/7 and accessible by end of year 3.

(T3) Number of stops with timetable information

The provision of clear and accurate timetable information at most bus stops is an essential part of public transport provision, and the operator has commenced a considerable improvement in the provision of timetable information in the Ashford area. The completion of this project at most bus stops should enhance the attractiveness of local bus services, and increase patronage. Priority will be given to the urban stops, with stops in the rural areas of Ashford Borough to follow.

Target is 155 stops in year 1, 195 stops in year 2, and 235 stops in year 3, out of a total of 264 marked stops in the urban area. There are also 145 marked stops in the rural area, which are primarily the responsibility of KCC.

(T4) Number of stops with new or replacement shelters

The provision of shelters at all principal pick-up stops is an important facility for encouraging an increase in bus passengers. Combined with the elements of roadside infrastructure described above, a bus shelter provides essential protection from inclement weather, especially for the elderly, for those who are less mobile, and for parents with young children.

Clear Channel is currently responsible for 70 bus shelters within the built up area of Ashford (including the 2 new shelters in Elwick Road directly outside the County Square Shopping Centre which were GAF/Interreg funded). Clear Channel has also agreed to take on the maintenance of 4 new Developer funded bus shelters in Trinity Road. In addition Ashford Borough Council maintains 16 bus shelters within the built up area of Ashford, many of which will soon need replacing.

Ashford Borough Council has therefore set aside £50,000 for the provision of 3 new bus shelters over the next 3 years, and it is expected that a further 3 bus shelters will be provided by developers during the same period.

Target is 2 new shelters in year 1, 2 new shelters in year 2, and 2 new shelters in year 3.

(T5) Projected dates for conversion of Ashford inter-urban routes to low-floor easy-access vehicles

Stagecoach in East Kent desires to convert the following routes to low-floor easy-access vehicles by 2012 subject to funding:

<i>Route 10</i>	<i>Ashford-Hythe-Folkestone</i>
<i>Route 400</i>	<i>Ashford-Tenterden-Rolvenden</i>
<i>Route 510</i>	<i>Ashford-Lenham-Maidstone</i>
<i>Route 652</i>	<i>Ashford-Wye-Canterbury</i>

(T6) Percentage of drivers with NVQ Level 2 in Road Passenger Transport

The investment provided by the operator in its workforce reflects their commitment to a reliable, customer oriented service, and is to be welcomed and encouraged

Target is 40% in year 1, 50% in year 2, and 60% in year 3

8. Additional Improvements to the Bus Network

All four parties to the protocol will work towards the following additional improvements to the bus network insofar as the provision of funding permits:

- 8.1 Stagecoach in East Kent and Kent County Council to ensure that service quality and reliability is maintained
- 8.2 Kent County Council to ensure that service performance of financially supported services continues to be monitored
- 8.3 Ashford Borough Council/Ashford's Future Partnership Board to maximise developer contributions for the provision of public transport services, infrastructure and information
- 8.4 Ashford Borough Council/Ashford's Future Partnership Board and Kent County Council to continue to plan the development of the Smartlink bus project, linking projected new housing development with the town centre and international station
- 8.5 Kent County Council to carry out an audit of all remaining bus stops as part of the Roadside Infrastructure Unit contract
- 8.6 Ashford Borough Council/Ashford's Future Partnership Board to review car parking quantity and pricing policies within the context of future town centre regeneration
- 8.7 Ashford Borough Council/Ashford's Future Partnership Board to develop new park and ride provision at appropriate out of town sites, with aim of reducing town centre parking capacity and increasing out-of-town parking capacity
- 8.8 Kent County Council and Stagecoach in East Kent to explore inter-availability of certain SEK tickets on non-SEK services
- 8.9 To extend the provision of real time information throughout the Ashford Borough area

9. Conclusions

- 9.1 This Quality Bus Partnership (QBP) sets out the aims, measures and targets which will form the basis of the Ashford QBP. Provided there is commitment from all four parties to the protocol, the bus passenger network in the Ashford Borough area should enjoy significant new initiatives, improvements and investment in the immediate future.
 - 9.2 The development of the Smartlink network of bus services should then continue alongside the further growth of Ashford, providing a modern network of town bus services with S106 developer support. Such financial pump-priming should enable the new Smartlink network to move towards commercial viability over time.
-