
Update on the Rolvenden Rocket Project and the Big Conversation

To: Ashford Joint Transportation Board

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Classification: For information

Ward: All

Introduction

1. The purpose of this report is to update members on the community minibus scheme, the Rolvenden Rocket' and provide information on the borough council's response the KCC consultation on rural transport.

Rolvenden Rocket

2. The Rolvenden Rocket is a pilot scheme that aims to:
 - Improve the wellbeing of our communities and reduce social isolation
 - Provide increased access to transport, particularly in rural areas
 - Improve air quality

The Rolvenden Rocket was launched on 27 July 2018.

3. Ashford Borough Council (ABC) leased and insured a 17-seater minibus for use by community groups within the parish of Rolvenden. Rolvenden Parish Council (RPC) is the host of the initiative and is responsible for the day-to-day running of the scheme.
4. The minibus is driven by volunteers from within the community who have undergone a driver accreditation assessment and are fully DBS checked. Bookings are handled by the parish council using an on-line booking system.
5. The costs to use the Rolvenden Rocket for the first 50 miles of any trip will be charged at £2 per mile, with subsequent miles charged at £1 per mile. A non-refundable £10 booking fee applies and all charges include VAT, insurance and breakdown cover. These charges enable RPC to cover the cost of fuel and reimbursed the borough council the cost of the lease and insurance.
6. Officers are working closely with Rolvenden Parish Council to ensure the success of the pilot and take on board key learning points. The pilot will be reviewed after six months. The findings of the review will be reported to the relevant members.
7. Alongside this officers are currently working on developing final processes for other parish councils wishing to introduce the scheme to their area, as well as producing an advice and guidance pack for clubs and societies that maybe interested in hosting their own minibus.

8. Further information on the Rolvenden Rocket is available on the parish council's website at <http://www.rolvendenparishcouncil.org.uk/community/rolvenden-parish-council-10423/rolvenden-rocket-minibus/> and the borough council's new page at <https://news.ashford.gov.uk/news/rolvenden-rocket/>.

The Big Conversation on Rural Transport

Kent County Council (KCC) Next Steps

9. The Big Conversation consultation was launched by KCC on 13 June 2018 and ended on 8 August 2018. As part of this process they held 12 public meetings and four Parish Council meetings. Approximately 2,400 responses were received and officers are currently analysing them.

Ashford Borough Council's Consultation Response

10. The response of the borough council was developed based on feedback from councillors and signed off by the Cabinet Member for Community Safety and Wellbeing.
11. The focus of the response was a commitment to ensuring Ashford is a borough where people want to live and visit and where businesses want to locate. The vast majority of those who live, work and visit Ashford will make use of bus services, as well as other public transport options – now and into the future. Public transport should be a preferred choice for residents when they need to travel.
12. A well-planned, known and utilised rural bus service is crucial in Ashford to achieving our strategic ambitions for the future of our borough. These ambitions include:
 - Town centre regeneration and development activity, including a flagship town centre leisure development and extending the Designer Outlet
 - Improving the health and wellbeing of our communities, focusing around our One You approach and making healthy choices the easy choices
 - Improving our air quality, including by achieving a modal shift away from car use to public transport

The provision of regular, high quality and low emission bus services in the borough of Ashford is therefore of paramount importance.

13. The response covered the following key areas:
 - That local communities should lead the way in describing the model of service that works from them – this will likely require a mix of options across Kent
 - In terms of any scheme rolled out, we would want to ensure all vehicles are low emission vehicles of the highest standards. KCC should ensure that those areas without formal air quality management areas are not serviced by lower quality, higher polluting buses.
 - There would need to be other ways in which people could book their journeys, especially for those who may not have access to the internet or who are unable to

use online services. The council has been extremely proactive in pressing for high speed, high quality internet connect, but it is important to note that this is not the only barrier to using the internet that people experience.

- It would be advantageous for the KCC services to link to public transport timetable apps and vice versa so real-time information on the location of buses, updates and connection problems can be identified and provide customers with the information to make an informed decision on their travel choice.
- Maternity and pregnancy is also a protected characteristic. This is critical in terms of safe provision of bus services that could be used by families, particularly those with young children – which is more than just somewhere to store a pram.
- Key to the success of these schemes is the allowance of sufficient time for bedding in, promoting the scheme and adjusting it as required based on learning and feedback. People will likely need convincing of the reliability of service.

Next Steps by KCC

14. Pilot options are being developed and will be evaluated across a number of criterion, including consultation feedback. KCC will be facilitating a Bus Summit in October 2018 where these pilots will be announced. Further information on this will be communicated in due course.
15. Confirmed pilot schemes will be implemented in Q1/2 2019/20.
16. Further information on the consultation and background document are available on the KCC website at <https://www.kent.gov.uk/roads-and-travel/travelling-around-kent/big-conversation>

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