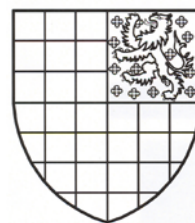


Town Hall
High Street
Lewes
East Sussex
BN7 2QS

☎ 01273 471469 Fax: 01273 480919

✉ info@lewes-tc.gov.uk
🌐 www.lewes-tc.gov.uk



**LEWES
TOWN
COUNCIL**

MINUTES

of the meeting of the **Working Party** formed to address **Traffic/transport-related issues in Lewes** held on **Tuesday 20th February 2018**, in the **Council Chamber, Town Hall, Lewes** at **11:00am**.

PRESENT Cllrs S Catlin (Wischhusen); H Jones; J Lamb; S Murray; and A Rowell. Also (*not appointed to the Working Party*) Cllrs J Baah and R Murray.

In attendance: S Brigden (*Town Clerk [TC]*) Ms Paula Woolven (*Community Transport in the Lewes Area [CTLA]*).

TIWP2017/08 **ELECTION OF CHAIRMAN:** Cllr Milner had been unexpectedly called to work in London, and Cllr Rowell was elected to act as Chairman of the Working Party for this meeting.

TIWP2017/09 **QUESTIONS:** There were none.

TIWP2017/10 **APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE:** Apologies had been received from Cllr Makepeace, who was on holiday; Cllrs Elliott, O’Keeffe and M Milner who were working, and Cllr E Watts, who was unwell.

TIWP2017/11 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST:** There were none

TIWP2017/12 **MINUTES:** The minutes of the meeting on 11th July 2017 were signed as an accurate record.

TIWP2017/13 **BUSINESS OF THE MEETING:**

Bus services in Lewes:

a) *Free travel:* Members considered a motion proposed for Council on 22nd February (NOM015/2017 copy in minute book) which proposed the investigation of free/discounted bus travel in Lewes with a view to implementing a scheme when contracts with East Sussex County Council (ESCC) were next re-tendered. ESCC were the responsible authority, and in response to early approaches they had offered some insight into the order of costs involved. It was understood that the subsidy offered to bus operators would need to recompense fully for lost fare revenue, and this was “significantly in excess of £100,000pa” for the commercial routes. A scheme could not exclude older people, and these already benefit from subsidized travel schemes. Bus companies would be entitled to a guarantee of income in respect of these existing subsidies, should free travel be extended beyond that group. ESCC had advised that the likely levels of such additional subsidy, even if affordable by the Town Council, would breach State Aid limitation rules and be unlawful. Members agreed that the concept of increasing bus usage was attractive and determined that they would research the matter thoroughly.

Ms Woolven, representing the community bus service operator CTLA, offered insights into the real needs that they saw in daily operations across the area, which was primarily for short on-demand journeys such as non-emergency transport for people attending medical appointments. In Lewes a CTLA bus service offered some services of this type, and in Uckfield a car-based volunteer driver scheme had been set up which was described as very cost-effective and well-used. Whilst initial set-up of such a scheme was said to cost several thousand pounds (more if a dedicated vehicle was purchased), regular operating costs were described as only a few hundred pounds each month.

Consequently, **it was resolved that:**

TIWP2017/13.1 Cllrs Catlin; Murray (S) and Rowell are asked to work collectively and

Continues...

in liaison with the Town Clerk, to research the principles of extending local bus service use and the need for a local scheme to provide non-emergency passenger transport to medical centres *etc.* reporting-back to a future meeting.

b) Request for financial support by CTLA:

Ms Woolven elaborated upon the report submitted with the agenda (*copy in the Minute book*) which gave details of the route 131 and 132 CTLA services which the Council had supported for some time. Passenger numbers continued to grow, and it was said to be common for new routes to take five years before attaining financial self-sufficiency. The report described the benefits of improved timetable information and wider distribution, and gave more information on the dial-a-ride services and increasing demand for it. Research indicated that the ability to leave the home and take a bus in this way had definable health and wellbeing benefits.

CTLA asked that the Council granted in 2018/19 a total of £11,604, comprising:

£3,500 to support route 131 and;

£5,104 to support route 132 (as in previous two years) and;

£500 to allow timetable information to be more widely distributed and;

£2,500 to support the Lewes Dial-a-Ride scheme.

Members compared this with the current budgeted provision of £7,000 and TC confirmed that the difference could be found from Reserves in the first year if Council were minded to do so, with future years considered during the budget cycle. It was agreed that this grant should be **recommended**.

Ms Woolven was asked to confirm that CTLA were a Living Wage Employer, which she undertook to do on her return to the office, and also to seek confirmation that CTLA would offer a guarantee of service delivery across the term of the grant.

Members thanked her for her most helpful contribution to the meeting.

c) Request for financial support by Compass Travel Ltd:

Council had referred to the Working Party the request of Compass Travel for continuation and possible extension of the financial support currently offered.

The Council granted £10,000 towards the cost of running the Lewes town bus routes 127, 128 & 129. These routes needed a subsidy to be viable and this money replaced funding withdrawn by ESCC and enabled operation of two buses on the services instead of one – effectively maintaining peak half-hourly service on the 127 and every 45 mins on the 128/129. Members were aware of the position, described by the company's Managing Director to a previous meeting, that Compass would actually suffer lower losses on these services if they only operated a single vehicle at a reduced frequency.

Compass's MD had submitted the following:

“If it was possible to increase the payment to £15,000 pa then we would be able to further improve the town services as follows:

- 1) Two newer buses to be dedicated to these routes and branded as “Lewes Town Link”.
- 2) The two buses to be fitted with ‘next stop’ displays.
- 3) A timetable leaflet to be produced for the Lewes town bus services. This could be potentially be distributed door-to-door.
- 4) Bus stop timetable displays could be increased and improved – using the same route branding as on the buses.”

It was also asked if funding could be agreed with a two or three year term, to provide stability in planning.

Members discussed the current problems frequently reported by users of these services, and various views were expressed as to the best way to maintain reliability. Some Councillors had travelled the route last year when Compass offered a

familiarization tour, and whilst understanding many of the issues faced by drivers “on the ground” there were remaining concerns such as the number of cancelled buses. It was felt that these cancellations were unusually frequent, and there was no warning to travellers who may already be waiting at the kerbside. Members recognized the routes were not commercially viable, and were keen to provide the level of service originally envisaged. They acknowledged operational difficulties, but hesitant to provide more funding if the current reliability could not be improved-upon. There were a number of suggestions as to how Councillors might monitor performance on behalf of users. After a wide-ranging discussion it was **agreed** to recommend payment of £15,000 in 2018/19 on the understanding that Compass provide an undertaking to introduce the newer buses in that year; produce the timetable leaflet suggested; maintain the frequency of the services throughout the term of the grant, and further undertake to provide an effective means of warning waiting travellers of late cancellations. There would be a review in September before any future years’ funds are agreed. This review would consider any stipulations which Council may wish to introduce, and practical indicators of service reliability, and Cllr Lamb and TC were asked to liaise in drafting some suggestions along those lines by mid-March.

d) Miscellaneous discussion points: A number of points had been submitted for discussion, but this was not practical without more information and these were deferred to a future meeting.

There was a brief discussion on matters in progress, and a submission by Network rail that a long-standing and well-used bench should be removed from under the canopy at the entrance to Lewes Station due to occasional occupation by antisocial individuals. This matter was being kept under review.

TIWP2017/14

CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 Council will be asked to note these deliberations and the principles underlying the decisions.
- 2 The small sub-group would liaise with the Town Clerk and research extended use of buses or “dial-a-ride” car/bus schemes.
- 3 Council is recommended to approve grant to CTLA as described above, in the sum of £11,604 in 2018/19.
- 4 Council is recommended to approve grant to Compass Travel Ltd as described above, in the sum of £15,000 in 2018/19.

The Chairman thanked everyone for attending and declared the meeting closed.

The meeting closed at 12:30pm

Signed:

Date: