



Minutes

FHDC Bus Partnership District Focus Group

Held at: Boulogne Room/Remote

Date: Tuesday 1st October 2024

Present: FHDC: Fred Miller (FM), Paul Thompson (PT), Andrew Rush (AR), Polly Blakemore (PB), James Hammond (JH), Alex Stafford (AS)

KCC: Dan Bruce (DB), Stephen Pay (SP), Luke Naylor (LN), Steven Benjamin (SB)

Stagecoach: Susan Horn (SH) Matthew Swann (MS)

User Group: Elizabeth Halstead (EH), Chris Rolfe (CR)

MEM: Jenni Hawkins (JH)

Apologies for Absence: Susan Carey, Rory Love, Tony Hills, Daniel Millis

1. Introductions

The room introduced themselves by name, organisation and role

2. Terms Of Reference

PB asked that the Terms of Reference are agreed. All present agreed.

Polly Blakemore asked if the meeting had the right membership to ensure the best people based on their respective roles were present and noted no FHDC councillors present.

DB noted that EPSMG stood for Enhanced Partnership Scheme Monitoring Group.

3. Reports from other Partnership meetings

DB suggested as this was the first meeting that a brief history of how we got here from previous iterations of partnership meetings would be useful alongside a short history of BSIP / NBS

The following aspects were covered: National Bus Strategy introduced 2021 by Government with a view to supporting recovery from pandemic and subsequent growth. Included all aspects of bus provision including Service/ticket/vehicles/routes etc. Included LTA requirement for BSIP and Enhanced Partnerships.

BSIP explanation: Oct 2021 original BSIP submitted. Public engagement carried out with tight deadlines. Funding: April 2022 feedback £35.1m indicative amount. 2/3 of funding capital infrastructure – physical and had to align with Government priorities. Revenue element could not just include network and also had to cover Fares and promotions. March 2023 £18.9m awarded for an agreed accelerated delivery programme.

EP Bus Services Act 2017. Deliver certain commitments across stakeholders. April 2022 start. Statutory meetings EP Board KCC/Operators. 3x EP schemes due to size of Kent.

Replaced QBP. Districts encouraged to form new focus groups Under new EP meeting hierarchy.

DB noted BSIP of course has been rolled out at time when services have been struggling. BSIP has been used as far as possible to offset these issues – e.g. KCC negotiated flexibility with DfT to use an element of revenue funding to sustain a number of commercial services which had become unviable.

DB shared slides of 23/24 Capital Initiatives. Explained 3x Bus Priority Schemes.

23/24 Revenue support including £2.5m new/enhanced services.

F&H breakdown of funding. Fares, infrastructure, community transport grants, network service report, various routes. Reach the beach (Cross Keys) BSIP monies used.

Updated BSIP as per DfT requirement in July 2024 to look to wards 25-29 financial years. Several initiatives across Kent. Kept initiatives at strategic level as needed to be countywide document. Allows flexibility to deliver local priorities under the strategic initiatives should funding become available. Funding position to support 25-29 from DfT currently unclear. New BSIP Live on KCC website.

PB asked about QR codes as Stagecoach app can be temperamental and what timescale can be expected.

DB commented that work still to be done. Maps will live later this year – testing group. There is a secured contract to provide QR plates with a quick roll out. Early 2025 Jan to March for 7500 marked bus stops in Kent.

CR asked about ticket machines on buses as debit cards often not working in buses, possibly due to PIN required due to previous multiple transactions.

DB mentioned this was more question for Stagecoach but noted that KCC under BSIP tranche 1 offered a ticket machine grant to SME operators to facilitate contactless payment.

SH will look into this and report back at a later date.

PB asked for a snapshot of how the rest of East Kent is setting up focus groups.

DB: Canterbury Ashford Swale up and running. Ashford has Member involvement.

JH: Asked about FHDC focus. Active travel funding across all. Will FHDC revenue support will be supported by capital injection?

Folkestone Brighter Future: 18 months of changes to bus station. Good things are happening but concerns that some of FHDC needs may sit under the radar.

DB: All projects linked to timescale. BSIP funding rolled out quickly to secure funding. FHDC has high level of funding support.

Stephen Pay: aware whole county benefit funding. Explained sticking to DfT rules.

JH asked if more funding was available for capital projects

SP explained KCC's 2025-29 plan.

JH asked about BSIP funding onwards with Brighter future project

SP explained flexibility of current programme based on DfT requirements.

DB stated lobbying to DfT on timescales. Gap between funding announcement and subsequent identification of initiative list was very short.

4. Stagecoach Reports

SH asked what the group would like to see as part of these sessions

PB suggested: Punctually, services timetables, planned services. No.16 Hythe to mainline train and other services.

SH will liaise with Commercial Manager (Katherine Jones) and will ask to attend future meetings.

PB asked if Daniel Millis will be attending?

SH confirmed he will.

JH: Mentioned the 102 service is often unreliable, either late or missing buses.

SH will take that away for an update.

SP asked what would the group like the report to cover. Stakeholders to mould questions and information gathered and communicated.

SP will relay information of developments of BSIP and County level. Suggesting the group know what is coming from Stagecoach so the group is aware of what's what.

SH Agreed

Contacts and email address will be provided in advance of the next meeting.

5. District bus services - User Reports

CR: 74 route. (Downs Road, Wear Bay Crescent, Harbour, Tontine Street, Broadmead) and the threatening KCC withdrawal of funding – would affect that area. It serves a walk-in centre, 2 GP surgeries and a health centre. The last bus is 14:08 – no more afterwards. A 16:08 service requested to help.

PB asked: What is best way to feedback?

SP: Future risk not presenting to withdraw. Concern is uncertainty of future BSIP funding. Reflecting challenge to existing routes. Funding secure to March 2025. Allocated to fund school buses. Funding comes at 12 month intervals. (51 services funded by BSIP) SP will raise 74 with Stagecoach. Explained after last service often vehicle used elsewhere.

AR asked what notice of funding do KCC get

SP Dft and trade bodies on behalf of operators and KCC. October spending review give an indication but not confirmed. New year more certainty.

LH 202 and 16 routes. Residents having difficulty meeting medical appointments or connecting trains. If no route reinstatement can the one ticket be used as a through ticket like you get with trains? Currently two tickets (and therefore fares) needed for Hythe to Folkestone, Folkestone to Canterbury.

SP KCC don't run this service – liaise with Matthew Arnold at Stagecoach.

PB Says has been brought up before but is important.

CR: Raised poor communications to passengers. Two bus stops closed due to roadworks. No info on website or social media platforms. Missing buses not detailed.

SH: shortfalls in app being looked at. App being looked at. Asked to look at two stops.

CR St Clements Court, Wear Bay Crescent

SH will look into this.

PB echo Jenni's comments on route 102.

JH Relying to link up. If late. Journey late. Final 16 from canterbury arrives after 102. Used to be a good service. Big impact.

PB 10 route. No Sunday service. NHS appts on Sunday. Matthew Arnold aware.

EH: Train takes longer plus taxi/bus to William Harvey don't tie in.

SH Will send on to Katherine.

6. **KCC Updates**

Already covered by DB and SP in item 3

7. **FHDC Planning Updates**

AS asked if place to give updates on major sites.

PB answered yes, for infrastructure and new developments

AS Otterpool funding S106 and phasing as an example of new developments.

JH Sellindge adjacent Taylor Wimpey scheme. Pentlands Etching Hill in progress. Policy: Phase 1 out to tender for Brighter Future. Phase 2 separate contract that KCC leading. Call for sites to consider housing. 6000 by 2029

DB glad planning officers on board.

PB agrees

JH Regarding S106 barracks funding; Asked **DB** if S106 variations were available. **DB** to check with Matt Hogben at KCC.

JH £886k to transportation. Shift in service needs. Taylor Wimpey bound to pay the 886k.

8. **FHDC Transportation Updates**

FM: Explained tender finished from replacing 49 Clear Channel advertising type shelters. 12 to be living roof shelters. Works due to commence 1st November 2024 and completion by November 2025.

PT explained small budget for maintenance of FHDC owned shelters.

9. Matters for referral to EPSMG

PB Is BSIP funding for Brighter Future?

DB if strategic then raise to EPSMG. If deemed concerned then raise to KCC board. DB can then provide responses.

PB When is next meeting of monitoring?

DB Last was end of August 2024. They happen every 3 months. Dates not confirmed of next meeting. Possible December. Confirmed forwarding on concerns raised.

CR What is EPSMG?

DB EPSMG tasks all authorities to capture what is in BSIP through these meetings and partnerships.

SP It is for stakeholders representation in each scheme area, a platform for district councils, like today's meeting.

10. AOB & Actions

FM: Has heard talk of councils taking back bus services. Has KCC heard?

SP KCC aware. Franchise power changes extending to all authorities to consider adopting a franchise. There would be a consultation phase. No discussion on how it would work or how funding applied as yet. More metropolitan area – income/profit across service. Not so much in rural services. How would model work for diverse areas within county/districts? KCC has no official opinion as yet.

JH asked: Is there potential underspend? Any funds available?

2nd future funding part or full funded?

SP Current funding has all been allocated. If any underspend this would be looked at the time. Funding can be both part or fully funded.

PB Thanking all involved. Asked for future agenda ideas for next time.

As meetings every 3 months the next would be 14th January 2025. Invites will go out in plenty of time to help ensure full attendance.