

County Council Meeting – 16 October 2012

CABINET MEMBER STATEMENT

Emerging Countryliner situation

We learned late on Monday last week (8 October) that Countryliner Sussex Ltd. had gone into administration. This affected a total of 10 Surrey bus routes funded by this Council.

I am pleased to report that thanks to decisive action taken by this Council we have delivered a near normal service on bus routes formerly provided by Countryliner. A number of contingency arrangements with other local bus companies were put into place for Tuesday and Wednesday last week; the aim being to minimise the impact on the travelling public. This action meant that several hundred school and college students who relied on Countryliner services could still get to and from their place of learning, whilst many more of our residents could continue to get to work and go about their daily business.

These temporary arrangements with Abellio, Stagecoach and Coaches Excetera are expected to remain in place until this Council, working with bus operators, can put in place long term solutions. This could take some months. Our contingency arrangements clearly demonstrate that we can work effectively together and we will build on this collaborative working, as we did with our hugely successful Surrey Bus Review, to implement solutions to give certainty to bus users in Surrey.

I am delighted that we have been able to operate an almost normal service for our residents and I would like to praise the efforts of officers here, as well as staff at Abellio, Stagecoach and Coaches Excetera, who worked late into the night to help us put our contingency plans in place.

Countryliner continued to run service 479 on Mondays to Saturdays (Epsom-Ashted-Leatherhead-Fetcham-Bookham-Horsleys-Clandon Crossroads-Merrow-Guildford). This is a "commercial" service not under contract to SCC. There has been a great deal of uncertainty and concern expressed by bus users about whether the 479 would continue to run and there have also been reports that it has been running more unreliably than usual.

On Friday 12 October respected local bus operator Epsom Buses (Quality Line) decided to provide a service on the 479 on Mondays to Saturdays, using the same timetable as Countryliner. They have taken this step to ensure that Surrey bus users are provided with a complete and reliable service. Quality Line has an excellent reputation in the Epsom area and we support their endeavour to safeguard the interests of the travelling public. A service registration has been submitted to VOSA and Quality Line has confirmed that their initiative is long term in nature.

VOSA has also received a service registration from Sunray Travel Limited for service 479. We believe that this is a "covering" move to allow Countryliner Group to have continuing involvement in the service. Officers have requested a copy of the registration and have expressed disappointment to Sunray that the company felt

unable to discuss their intentions prior to a registration being submitted. We are also seeking further information on the ownership of the vehicles to be used on the service, where they will operate from and which company will be employing the drivers and paying their wages.

Until the service registrations are dealt with, neither company can charge a fare to users. The full picture is likely to become clearer in the next day or so.

The Sunday service 479 between Epsom and Bookham Station operated by Coaches Excetera, is not affected and will continue unchanged.

John Furey
Cabinet Member for Transport and Environment
16 October 2012

Supporting detail if needed - The bus services previously operated under contract to SCC and now withdrawn are below; schools served are in brackets:

- 10 Guildford Boxgrove Park Bushy Hill (George Abbot) – now operated by Abellio Surrey
- 11 Farnborough to Camberley (Tomlinscote) – now operated by Stagecoach
- 24 Guildford Shalford Bramley Elmbridge Village (Glebelands) – now operated by Coaches Excetera
- 25 Guildford Peaslake Cranleigh (George Abbot, St Peters, Tormead, Lainsborough) – now operated by Coaches Excetera
- 43 Cranleigh Shamley Green Bramley Shalford Peasmarsh - Godalming College – now operated by Stagecoach
- 45 Busbridge to Rodborough – now operated by Stagecoach
- 73 Woking Horsell Mimbridge Chobham – now operated by Abellio Surrey
- 81 Woking - Barnsbury Estate – now operated by Abellio Surrey
- 87 Chobham - Collingwood College – now operated by Stagecoach

Contracts for the above have been awarded until the end of May 2013, which aims to:

- deliver stability for users until new permanent contracts are awarded
- ensure that we achieve a reasonable contract price by offering contracts for a 7 month duration prior to an open tender – the financial impact to maintain these services in the short term is being negotiated
- provide a window to tender permanent solutions and quantify likely costs with new permanent contracts starting on 3 June 2013, ie after half term