



OFFICER REPORT TO LOCAL COMMITTEE (TANDRIDGE)

TANDRIDGE BUSES 4U SERVICE

6 March 2009

KEY ISSUE

This report seeks to update Members on the development and progress of the Buses 4U service in Tandridge.

SUMMARY

Buses 4U was set up in February 2005 with funding from the Department for Transport's (DfT) Rural Bus Challenge programme. From August 2007 Surrey County Council took over responsibility for funding and East Surrey Rural Transport Partnership (ESRTP) contracted to run the service until 2010. This is therefore an appropriate time to report on the performance of the service.

OFFICER RECOMMENDATIONS

The Tandridge Local Committee is asked to:

- (i) note the content of this information report.

1 INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The Tandridge Buses 4U service started in February 2005. It's purpose was to provide a flexible on demand service to any member of the public who could not use conventional linear public transport because they were either too far from the route of a bus or train or because they had a physical mobility problem which prevented them from walking to/from a local bus stop to catch an ordinary scheduled service.
- 1.2 The service was funded by the Department for Transport's (DfT) Rural Bus Challenge programme. All set up costs and revenue funding for up to three years were included in the bid written by East Surrey Rural Transport Partnership (ESRTP).
- 1.3 The grant from the DfT finished at the end of July 2007, when Surrey County Council took over the funding. ESRTP tendered to run the service and were successful in winning the local bus contract to operate the service until August 2010.
- 1.4 The service operates throughout Tandridge every day of the year, excepting Christmas and Boxing Days. On schooldays, one bus picks up pupils for St. John's School in Caterham from Oxted, Hurst Green and Godstone. The other brings students into Oxted School from Tatsfield and then continues via Caterham and Chaldon to East Surrey College. From 0915 the bus is able to be booked by any member of the public who cannot use conventional public transport. This service continues till 2245 each night (excepting Sundays). There is a gap in the afternoon to take students and pupils' home from the schools and college.
- 1.5 On Saturdays, bank holidays and non-schooldays, the service is available without interruption from 0800 until 2245. On Sundays, one bus operates between 0800 and 1600.

2 CURRENT SITUATION

- 2.1 Bookings for the service are taken by the Mole Valley District Council Dial-A-Ride booking office in Leatherhead. Passengers can book a journey up to 7 days in advance. Extra time can be allowed for medical or health related appointments as well as group bookings when passengers need to know in advance that the required transport is definitely available. Several local primary schools without their own transport use Buses4U in this way to get to swimming lessons and field trips.
- 2.2 Tandridge Buses 4U is the only service that covers the whole of Tandridge District. East Surrey Dial-A-Ride (ESDAR) operates a members only service but only for the northern half of the district down to the Redhill to Tonbridge railway line. Unlike the ESDAR service, passengers on Buses4U are able to use their concessionary bus passes.
- 2.3 ESRTP, in consultation with SCC, are always looking for new ways to improve the service. To this end, we are investigating whether a local booking service would be able to provide a more effective scheduling service than currently exists. Currently booking staff are based in Leatherhead. Where they do not

know the area and have to rely on data from a computer package, inefficiencies can creep into the compilation of the drivers' daily work sheets. Unrealistic journey times are often cited by the drivers as being a frequent problem, which can lead to late arrivals for subsequent pick ups.

- 2.4 Buses4U has been used to establish the viability of running regular transport for a number of different areas in the district. From April until November 2007, a pilot service was run from Upper Warlingham Station to Warlingham and Chelsham and Farleigh both mornings and evenings for commuters. This resulted in a permanent arrangement being entered into between Metrobus and SCC Passenger Transport.
- 2.5 In November 2008, after research conducted by Tatsfield Parish Council, a shoppers service to Oxted was instigated twice a week which has been well used.
- 2.6 On the back of this, the parish council is working with ES RTP to introduce a fixed timetabled journey into Oxted on a Saturday afternoon for young people living in Tatsfield with a start date during the Easter holidays.
- 2.7 Through the Tandridge Local Strategic Partnership, ES RTP is working with other partners to develop a pilot service from Caterham Station after 1830 weekdays, up to Caterham on the Hill which will also allow access for young people from that community to the new youth centre in Caterham Valley.
- 2.8 The beauty of the Buses 4U service is the flexibility that it can afford. An example of this was over the summer holidays of 2008 when Alderstead Heath Caravan Park had many visitors who wished to travel by train to London but had no way of getting to either Merstham or Coulsdon Stations. Buses 4U was able to utilise spare time in its schedules (due to their being no school journeys) to provide a shuttle bus service both morning and evening for the duration of the holiday. On occasions, the buses provided up to the equivalent of 7 full bus loads both morning and afternoon! (110 passengers each way).
- 2.9 The current vehicles are approaching 200,000 miles. Their reliability is beginning to falter. A dedicated low floored spare vehicle is often too large to negotiate some of the narrow lanes of the district. ES RTP appreciates that it is their responsibility under the contract with SCC to provide suitable vehicles, but wishes to purchase new buses rather than 3 or 4 year old vehicles for the comfort of its passengers – hence the bid for Local Committee funding.
- 2.10 Current usage is around 29,700 passenger journeys per annum, inclusive of regular school transport.

3 CONCLUSION

- 3.1 ES RTP would like to continue to work closely with local communities to provide an increasingly popular and accessible bespoke service, as in Caterham and Tatsfield.
- 3.2 It is anticipated that the contract will be renewed in 2010 based on current performance as, on present performance, it meets the criteria.

- 3.3 Transferring the booking system to a local office in Tandridge will have a beneficial impact on efficiency and will make the service more attractive and accessible to local people which, in turn, is likely to lead to an increase in demand.
- 3.4 ESTRP is pleased with progress to date and feels that the flexibility offered by Buses4U, or similar services, offers a workable alternative solution to the limited linear services which not reach the majority of the local residents in rural areas.
- 3.5 ESTRP values the continuing support of the Local Committee in its efforts to offer a robust service to local communities.

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