

CABINET – 29 JULY 2015

PROCEDURAL MATTERS

Public Questions

Question (1) from David Beaman:

Stagecoach have announced their intention to withdraw the section of bus route between Farnham and Alton from 30 August 2015 which will end the long established inter urban service that has operated for many years between Guildford, Farnham, Alton and Winchester.

To date this service has been operated commercially with the only financial support from local authorities being reimbursement for provision of free concessionary travel. The withdrawal of this section of route will affect the following 3 main groups of existing passengers viz:

- It will end the ability of passengers to make through trips from Guildford and Farnham to Alton and Winchester. A significant number of such long distance trips are made by the elderly for shopping and social purposes which helps them to remain active members of the community;
- Although the morning and afternoon college buses will continue to be operated to and from Alton College, there are a significant number of part time students living in Farnham who use the college buses in one direction only and use service 65 buses to make either their outward or return journey. These students will now face being stranded in Alton for several hours;
- In Farnham the withdrawal of service 65 will, associated with the proposed withdrawal of the 565 service between Coxbridge Business Park and Farnham which is being implemented from the same date, result in no public transport service being provided along West Street which will effect local residents living along this road and particularly the Chantrys Estate which already has a number of social problems.

In addition, Waverley Borough Council are currently considering a planning application as part of the proposed redevelopment of East Street to relocate the day facilities that are currently provided for the elderly at the Gostrey Centre in the centre of Farnham to the Memorial Hall which is located nearly 1 km from the town centre and in the Access and Design Statement the provision of the bus service is stated to be one of the reasons that allows this planning application to comply with NPPF guidelines for edge of centre locations for community use of buildings to be required to be accessible and well connected to the town centre.

It is also likely that there will be substantial new residential development at Coxbridge and this would fail to meet NPPF guidelines that all new residential developments should be sustainable if there is no public transport service.

The recent Surrey Rail Study identified the corridor between Alton, Farnham and Guildford as being one of strategic importance and proposed the introduction of a direct rail service.

The existing bus service already provides this direct link with journey times that are comparable with any proposed rail service since between Farnham and Alton the bus service uses the direct route via A31 whilst any rail service would operate via Aldershot.

Since this corridor is already identified as having such strategic importance the continued operation of the existing level of bus service be regarded as a strategic bus route that should not only be continued but improved rather than withdrawn.

Whilst appreciating that there are restrictions on local government expenditure with savings currently being sought in the level of subsidy paid for bus services will Surrey County Council working in partnership with Hampshire County Council provide the financial support necessary to ensure the continued operation of the existing bus service along a corridor that has already been identified as being of strategic importance?

Reply:

Surrey County Council is disappointed that Stagecoach intends to withdraw the section of route between Farnham and Alton on their bus service 65, for commercial reasons. The company considers that the number of people travelling on the Farnham to Alton section is insufficient to sustain the service from a revenue perspective. They consider that the train service between those towns caters for much of the overall travel demand.

For a service run without a contractual obligation to a local authority, national legislation gives the company the prerogative to make such a decision. The reduction in public transport travel choice now and in the future is recognised, as well as the potential impact on those residents located along West Street in Farnham.

However, both Hampshire and Surrey County Councils are currently assessing whether a replacement service of some kind could be obtained that would be sustainable in the future against current budgetary pressures. Discussions with operators are ongoing and cost option information is at this time still awaited, to allow any decision to be reached

Mr Mike Goodman
Cabinet Member for Environment and Planning
29 July 2015

Question (2) from Fran Morgan:

The question is as follows:

- We do not understand why the only proposed question in the public consultation is whether the council should agree a block contract with Surrey and Borders Partnership Trust to run the service. Parents do not care whether the service is paid for on a block contract or spot purchase basis only that they are able to continue to access the service at the Beeches. Can you specify how the potential answers to this question would influence the council's decision – how many people would need to agree that they wanted a block contract before the council would commission it?
- How does the council reconcile discontinuing local respite provision with their stated aim of helping children with disabilities to remain living at home and within their local community?
- What risk assessment has the council carried out to compare the current annual cost of keeping Beeches open (£565K pa on the current block contract) with the potential costs of having to take one or more disabled children into care (over £300k each pa)? To give an indication of the likely costs: with the current level of provision, 8 children from one of the local schools were taken into care during the last year.

Parents of 2 of the current Beeches users have indicated that they will not be able to continue caring for their child at home, if they lose their current respite provision.

- What regard has Surrey given to NHS Surrey's impact assessment 2012 that stated: "The original reasons for closure did not take into account the full health impact on families, their overall wellbeing and the preventative role played by Beeches." Why was this advice disregarded in Surrey's own joint strategic review passed by cabinet in 2014?
- There are 800 severely disabled children who currently meet the criteria for respite at Beeches and 161 at the 2 local SLD schools. Is it credible to cabinet that promises made by Caroline Budden and Ian Banner, that social workers would actively promote the Beeches as an option for all eligible families, should result in only 15 families being assessed for the Beeches?
- Using Surrey's own data, the spend on children with disabilities in East Surrey (in the parent panel meeting in 2014) was £47,856 less than in West Surrey, yet there are more disabled children in East Surrey. There are also less respite centres in East Surrey, with one of only two now planned for closure. How does the Local Authority justify this discrepancy between East and West?

Reply:

We thank Family Voice for their questions and comments, which raise a number of important issues. As you will see from the Agenda, Cabinet is considering a report this afternoon which recommends a further period of consultation on the provision of short breaks, and the questions raised will be referred to the officers responsible so that those issues can be taken into account in the consultation.

Mrs Linda Kemeny

Cabinet Member for Schools, Skills and Educational Achievement

29 July 2015

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