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## **KIRKLEES COUNCIL**

### **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

**Monday 10th April 2017**

**Present:** Councillor Julie Stewart-Turner (Chair)  
Councillor Gulfam Asif  
Councillor Ken Sims

**Apologies:** Councillor Cahal Burke  
Peter Bradshaw – Co-optee

**In attendance:** Paul Kemp, Service Director for Economy, Regeneration and Culture  
Richard Hadfield, Head of Strategy and Design  
Neale Wallace, West Yorkshire Combined Authority  
Oliver Howarth, First West Yorkshire  
Alisa Devlin, La Fleur & member of Huddersfield Town Centre Action Group  
Gina Hanselman, Merrie England & member of Huddersfield Town Centre Action Group  
Paul Keighley, Bramleys & member of Huddersfield Town Centre Action Group  
Penny Bunker, Governance and Democratic Engagement Manager  
Alaina McGlade, Governance and Democratic Engagement Officer

#### **99 Membership of Committee**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Cahal Burke and Peter Bradshaw – Co-optee.

#### **100 Interests**

No interests were declared.

#### **101 Admission of the Public**

Agreed that all items be considered in public session.

**102 Huddersfield Town Centre Accessibility Project**

Following introductions, Cllr Julie Stewart -Turner, welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained the role of Scrutiny in relation to the Bus Gates project, including the terms of reference. Cllr Stewart-Turner advised that an evaluation of the scheme was being prepared and would be considered as part of the work of the Town Centre Working Group and would not be considered by scrutiny. An outline of the timeline of key events in the bus gates project was presented for the information of those present.

Each witness was asked to provide comments on the bus gates scheme in line with the terms of reference. Oliver Howarth of First Bus, West Yorkshire advised of his involvement in the processes leading up to the implementation of the bus gates. Mr Howarth explained that First Bus always consider customer impact as part of their business offer and advised that congestion has always been an important issue. First Bus had attended regular meetings with the Highways Service to be kept informed of current plans and priorities and also to provide advice and comment as appropriate.

Mr Howarth advised that in relation to the specific plans for the bus gates, he felt the scheme was a good way to reduce congestion in the Town Centre which would consequently reduce delays to bus services. He advised that First Bus had been consulted on the bus gates scheme when the proposals were first being considered and were satisfied that the location of the bus gates were appropriate to delivering the desired outcomes.

Neale Wallace of the West Yorkshire Combined Authority (WYCA) explained that the WYCA was the transport authority for West Yorkshire. It was formed by combining the Economic Partnership and METRO Transport Authority. He advised that the WYCA published a single economic plan last year which included the concept of good growth. Mr Wallace explained that the WYCA wanted to grow the economy in a way that helped people live and work in wider areas. Mr Wallace felt that sustainable modes of transport were important in achieving the ambition.

Mr Wallace explained that congestion levels in West Yorkshire had now exceeded the previous peak levels of 2007. Throughout West Yorkshire, there were monthly meetings held to consider the impact of congestion on air quality and bus services. Mr Wallace advised that the response of bus operators to congestion tended to fall within 3 categories:

- Removing services on particular routes
- Reducing the frequency of services on particular routes
- Reductions in journey speed ultimately impacting on customer numbers

In relation to air quality, Mr Wallace explained that buses were rated differently to cars but the new Euro Six buses were as efficient as turbo diesel cars.

Mr Wallace advised that the WYCA also attended and contributed to the quarterly liaison meetings with the Kirklees Highways Service.

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Cllr Sims questioned whether any research had been undertaken as part of the planning phase of the project to understand the number of car users and bus users within the Town Centre and the purpose of their journey. Mr Howarth advised that 60% come into the town centre by car, with 25% travelling by bus but explained that he did not have the breakdown regarding the purpose of the trip.

Mr Wallace explained that there was work taking place on wider congestion problems in the area including looking at A roads across West Yorkshire and investigations into the possibility of a single control centre for the area. It was confirmed that all the benchmark figures possessed by the WYCA would be provided to the Highways service as part of their evaluation of the bus gates scheme.

Alisa Devlin from Huddersfield Town Centre florist, La Fleur expressed a view that she felt the consultation process appeared to be biased towards bus operators and questioned whether businesses were included in the consultation. It was confirmed that all businesses had received a letter and brochure.

Paul Keighley of Bramleys Estate Agents stated that the only communication businesses in the Town Centre received was a letter advising them to attend the roadshows being delivered within the Packhorse Centre to comment on the proposals. He said that he did not feel this was consultation as the decision had already been made that bus gates would be installed but that comments were requested on which of the three proposals would be preferred. He also told the Committee that he had visited the Packhorse Centre exhibition but his comments were not included within the report to Cabinet.

Ms Devlin explained that the proposals were very ambiguous and at the point of consultation nobody realised what the impact on business would be. She explained that their initial concern was over the number of loading bays that would be available. Ms Devlin informed the Committee that since the original installation of the bus gates, amendments to the plan had been required due to the impact of reducing to a single lane on Westgate.

Paul Keighley questioned why a scheme had been developed that serves only 25% of users. He suggested that these users also had the least ability to spend money due to the difficulty in carrying goods on public transport. He advised that he didn't understand the Council's rationale behind the decision but felt it was motivated by finance as he had heard it said that the revenue made through the scheme had been a "good by-product".

Cllr Sims questioned whether research had been done on what the requirements of the businesses would be following implementation of the bus gates.

In response to points raised, Richard Hadfield, Head of Strategy and Design advised that he had provided the Committee with a comprehensive breakdown of the consultation undertaken at the last meeting. This had included a copy of the letter that was distributed to all businesses. He explained that all feedback received as part of the consultation was contained in the report to Cabinet and the decision to implement the bus gates was not taken until all of the consultation had been

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completed. He also advised that the statutory Traffic Regulation Order process was undertaken and only one formal objection was received. This was considered by the Cabinet and overruled.

In relation to navigating the town centre, Mr Hadfield explained that access was still available to every part of the Town Centre but the bus gates may require an alternative route to be taken. He advised that an increased number of loading bays had been made available as part of the scheme. He pointed out that the parking restrictions on Westgate had always been in place but had previously not been enforced by the police. The scheme had been installed at the same time as some essential gas works and had led to increased congestion until mitigating measures were taken. It was noted that it takes time for a scheme to embed and for road users to become familiar with a revised layout. However, in response to issues raised by businesses regarding increased congestion on Westgate, the layout had been altered.

Cllr Sims advised that when he was the Cabinet Member for Regeneration, some of the main factors for developing the Town Centre accessibility project were the development of a transport hub at St George's Square and the consideration of other regeneration schemes for the Town Centre; he highlighted that a number of these schemes had not been implemented. He therefore questioned why the accessibility scheme was still instigated when, what it was originally designed to support, had not been put in place.

Paul Kemp, Service Director for Economy, Regeneration and Culture responded that that it was likely that not all of the regeneration schemes would progress. However it was felt that the bus gates scheme would help address some ongoing traffic flow problems that existed in the town centre.

Paul Keighley highlighted the number of empty shops in the Town Centre. He acknowledged that this wasn't solely due to bus gates but that the economic climate had also contributed. He asked if it was possible to see the research that had been carried out into the potential impact of the bus gates so he could understand the rationale behind the decision. He explained that there was no point in prioritising buses through the Town Centre if it is just full of empty shops.

Alisa advised she was confident that numbers of Town Centre users had gone down and gave an example of the loss of business experienced by one of the neighbouring businesses to her florist. Oliver advised that bus user figures had not dropped and that he believed the bus gates would have a positive impact on the Town Centre, based on his technical expertise.

Cllr Sims outlined that he was concerned that scrutiny could not consider the impact of the bus gates scheme and advised that when the impact assessment has been complete, he hoped that, should some failings be apparent, the Council would hold their hands up to these and rectify them appropriately. He advised that the majority of the subsidies provided to bus companies came from car users.

Oliver Howarth explained that 97% of buses within West Yorkshire were not subsidised. Neale Wallace advised that there was a government levy applied to

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district councils which helped to subsidise the free travel for OAP's and bus shelters etc. He also advised that £19m of subsidised support helps to maintain rural and early morning bus services which tend not to be financially viable.

Cllr Julie Stewart-Turner advised those present of a number of written representations that had been received. In the main these focussed on issues that formed part of the evaluation work. It was agreed that copies of the submissions would be forwarded to officers for consideration as part of the scheme evaluation.

### **RESOLVED -**

- 1) That all those present who had shared their views with the Committee be thanked for their contributions.
- 2) That at the meeting of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee on 24 April 2017, the Overview & Scrutiny Committee consider the next steps for the bus gates work.

### **103 Date of the Next Meeting**

The Committee confirmed that the next meeting would be held on Monday 24 April 2017.