

Elderly Citizens Liaison Forum

A meeting of Elderly Citizens Liaison Forum was held on Friday, 19th January, 2007.

Present: Cllr M Frankland (Chairman), Cllr Mrs J Beaumont, Cllr W Noble, Cllr F G Salt, Mrs M Cooper (University of the Third Age), Mrs D Fairhurst (Stockton Residents & Community Groups Association) and Mr L Stanley (Royal Navy Associate)

Officers: Mr Kavanagh (DNS) and Mrs T Harrison (LD)

Also in attendance: No other persons were present

Apologies: Cllr M Cherrett, Cllr K Faulks, Cllr K Leonard; Alderman Wood (Age Concern Teesside), Mrs D Rose (Age Concern), S Neal (Teesside Pensioners), Mr and Mrs Parker (Retired Member's Association TGWU), R Put (Stockton International Family Centre) and Mrs E Chapman

1 Minutes of the meeting held on 19th December 2006

Members considered the minutes of the meeting held on 19th December 2006.

CONCLUDED that the minutes of the meeting held on 19th December 2006 were agreed as a true record and would go to the next Council meeting.

2 Transport Issues

Oral Presentation from Mr Kavanagh (Senior Engineer - Transportation)

Mr Kavanagh informed Members on issues relating to transport.

Members were advised that Officers were in the early stages of negotiations with bus operators in relation to concessionary fares for April 07 - March 08.

Bus fares had substantially increased which meant that operators would be seeking a substantial increase in payments to cover costs. The total allocation to councils to fund concessionary travel in 2007/08 was being increased by 5%. This put Officers in a difficult position in the negotiations as they did not want the increases to impact on the enhanced scheme allowing concessionary pass holders to travel free before 9.30am and across council boundaries locally; however they were also trying to negotiate the best deal for tax payers.

Officers were negotiating on behalf of Stockton-on-Tees Borough, Middlesbrough, Hartlepool and Redcar & Cleveland Councils, which demonstrated the intention of the councils to retain the enhanced scheme allowing cross boundary travel and journeys before 9.30am in all four councils.

The Government had announced the planned introduction of a national free travel scheme from April 2008, which would allow those currently entitled to free concessionary travel to go anywhere in England. It was not known whether the scheme would allow travel in Wales and Scotland as these were entirely separate schemes. Details of the scheme were still being determined, including how authorities would be allocated funding. The scheme could put further pressure on the councils, for example the scheme could mean extra buses having to be provided on cross boundary services like those to Newcastle or popular summer destinations like Whitby and Scarborough.

An offer was made by Transport Officers to bus operators based on the

additional allocation being made to travel authorities and retaining the enhanced Tees Valley scheme, but the offer was likely to be rejected as some operators were seeking increases of up to 20%.

However, Officers took the view that payments should also reflect the quality of the service provided. The only new buses that had come into the area for three years were those provided as a result of Urban and Rural Bus Challenge grants won by the Council. Officers endeavoured to ensure that the quality and standard of the services reflected the value of the subsidies provided to the bus companies by the Council and their efforts to provide facilities like low floor platforms at stops.

A major scheme bid for government funding to improve the bus network in the Tees Valley was being submitted. The Connect Tees Valley scheme would provide new low floor buses; better waiting facilities and other improvements within the busiest areas along designated 'super core' and 'core' routes. If the bid was successful improvements might not be in place for at least two years. In the mean time Stockton was making every effort to improve services using its existing resources.

Stockton Borough Council spent more on supported bus routes than most authorities. Officers made every effort to spend available funds effectively and efficiently which meant getting value for money for bus services. The council could not afford to pay to replace every commercial bus service withdrawn by the bus companies or for buses that ran empty.

Mr Kavanagh was pleased to advise that after three years trying to get support, a daytime bus service had been re-introduced to Teesside Park. It was the first time that a bus service had received financial support from the private sector, which was very welcome. The bus operator had made a three-year commitment to providing the service, which it hoped would continue on a commercial basis.

A Member requested a better route for the Teesside Park bus as Teesdale residents had to travel to Teesside Park first to get to Stockton High Street. Mr Kavanagh advised that they had planned the route to try and maintain levels of service to Riverside College and the Durham University campus after the 525 Shuttle service had been withdrawn. The routing of the new service would be kept under review.

Members were advised that bus services were expensive to provide and it could cost well over £100,000.00 to set up a service like the one to Teesside Park. The Council therefore did not have the funds to replace all services removed by the bus companies.

A Member queried why users of the concessionary fares scheme could not continue to pay the 35 pence fare and was advised that people had complained about paying a contribution to the fare, but many had also demanded free travel. Councils were legally prevented from being able to charge for concessionary travel.

Members were informed of a Community Lynx Service which had been introduced but was not presently fully operational because system management software was not yet fully installed and a second bus was being ordered. The

service took people door to door for which the user would pay a charge of £1.50 per journey within your own town and £2.00 per journey for trips that crossed a town boundary. Empty scheduled buses were not environmentally friendly and did not make good money sense. A 'demand responsive' service like Community Lynx was better for the environment and better all round value for money. There was a 9.00pm time limit on the service but if more funds were obtained it was hoped to extend the time of the service.

Members were informed about the bus shelters that were being replaced, including those at the north end of Stockton High Street. The new shelters would have seating with arms to aid those with leg or back problems and would prevent people sleeping in the shelters. The shelters would also have low cost LED lighting, real time displays and CCTV systems in high-risk areas. Touch screen displays to provide journey planner facilities and various other items of information were also being proposed. The council wanted bright attractive waiting facilities.

Some Members raised concern at having such items in bus shelters but were advised that research had been carried out in other areas and the feedback had been good. Mr Kavanagh had visited other towns that had real time displays and information kiosks and these had proved to be popular with the public.

Mr Kavanagh showed the meeting a mock-up of how the new shelters with display screens would look and requested Members' input as to which end of the bus shelter they preferred to have the real time screen. Member's advised that they preferred to see the bus arriving and therefore wanted the display to be on the 'non arrival' end facing the arriving buses.

CONCLUDED that the report be noted and that Mr Kavanagh be thanked for presenting the information.

3 Work Programme

Members were requested to provide topics they wished to be future items on the agenda's which were in line with the terms of reference set out for the Elderly Citizen's Liaison Forum.

Members were advised that if there were no topics meetings could not take place.

Councillor Mrs Beaumont informed Members that she was the Chair of Environment and Regeneration Select Committee. The Select Committee were undertaking a scrutiny review of cemeteries and they wished to consult with people regarding matters related to cemeteries. Councillor Mrs Beaumont enquired if Members of the Elderly Citizen's Liaison Forum would be happy for some of the Members of the Select Committee attended a meeting of the Elderly Citizen's Liaison Forum to discuss matters related to cemeteries with the Members.

It was suggested that the Town Centre Manager (Sue Burgess) be invited to provide a presentation to the Forum regarding the proposed Markets improvements as long as the time of the meeting fitted in with the improvement plan.

Meetings would be considered up to the Election in May.

CONCLUDED that:

1. A meeting will take place in February to discuss matters regarding Cemeteries with Members of Environment and Regeneration to assist in their scrutiny review.
2. The Town Centre Manager (Sue Burgess) will be invited to attend a meeting of the Forum in March to provide information regarding the Markets Improvement Plan so long as it fits in with the improvement plan.
3. Dates of the February and March meetings will be confirmed and Members will be notified prior to the next meeting.
4. Work Programme will be on the next agenda to enabling Members to provide another topic if they wish, for March.