

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MANAGEMENT BOARD
7th February, 2013

Present:- Councillor Whelbourn (in the Chair); Councillors Currie, Dalton, Falvey, J. Hamilton and G. A. Russell.

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gilding, License and Whysall.

Also in attendance:-

RMBC Cabinet Members: Councillors Hussain, Lakin, Rushforth, R. S. Russell, Smith, Stone and Wyatt (with apologies from Councillors Akhtar and Doyle)

RMBC Directors : Karl Battersby, Clair Pyper, Dorothy Smith and Joyce Thacker.

SYPTTE and bus operators Rupert Cox, Paul Flanagan and Gilly Greensitt

RMBC Officers – Steve Parry and Caroline Webb

Youth Workers : Shaukat Ali, Lisa Duvall and Sarah Bellamy

Chief Inspector Richard Butterworth (South Yorkshire Police)

Young people in attendance:-

Josh, Greg, Wendy, Lewis, Ellie, Josh, Tom, Ashley, Josh, Brad, Paige and Oliver.

112. ELEVEN MILLION TAKE-OVER DAY

Councillor Whelbourn explained that the meeting had been arranged to facilitate discussions between representatives of the Rotherham Youth Cabinet and Members of the Council. This meeting should have taken place on the Eleven Million Takeover Day, on 23rd November, 2012, but had been delayed in order to maximise the attendance of young people and invited guests.

As part of 11 Million Takeover Day, Greg Bulmer (Youth Cabinet), assumed the Chair for the meeting.

Greg welcomed everyone to the meeting and, as an icebreaker, individuals were invited to introduce themselves and to say a few words about themselves.

The principal issue of the meeting was young people's use of public transport.

Youth Cabinet Member Oliver Blake gave a presentation about young people's use of public transport. The presentation included information about:-

- : the recent Lifestyle Survey of young people;
- : safety on public transport and when waiting for public transport;
- : the (non)availability of public transport in certain areas;
- : costs of travelling on public transport and the availability of reduced fares for young people; young people feel that there have been no improvements in services since the increase in fares; there is an annual increase in fares;
- : delays young people experience in obtaining bus passes;
- : experience in other areas (eg: North Yorkshire).

The subsequent discussion expanded upon the subjects raised in the presentation, including travelling on buses, trains and trams. Young people feel much more threatened when travelling late in the evening and at night and in the inner city areas. Elected Members and other guests welcomed the opportunity to discuss these issues, as well as those issues raised in the Lifestyle Survey and to consider ways of addressing them positively.

Reference was made to the “see something, say something” confidential reporting telephone system, currently being advertised on a number of buses.

It was noted that the Ticketmaster scheme will be introducing a new travel pass for young people, for use during the schools’ and colleges’ Summer holidays.

In future, young people will be continuing their education or training (“staying-on”) until the age of 18 years and travel passes, enabling them to travel to places of education, need to reflect that change.

Council Members asked for copies of the presentation, which they will report to future transport meetings.

The meeting noted that the provision of ‘free’ transport was not viable. The costs of transport were already subsidised from public funds and if the subsidy was increased, fewer resources would be available to allocate to other services.

(At this point in proceedings, the meeting divided into discussion groups on: (A) transport safety; (B) accessibility and fare prices)

After the discussion groups had ended, the following feedback was provided about these transport issues:-

(1) the approach of the Rotherham town centre Safer Neighbourhood Team and of the Police has been changed as a direct result of feedback from the recent Lifestyle survey; it is important to obtain feedback from the public, which will enable the services to respond to incidents effectively;

(2) the need to ensure public safety at transport interchanges and bus stations is paramount;

- the importance of the protocol between the Police, transport and other public services, involving young people, to try and increase safety on public transport
- safety concerns increase, again, late in the evening; there appears to be an under-reporting of incidents which occur in bus stations etc.;
- young people asked who they should contact to make complaints and information will be provided by the SYPTE (it was suggested that this information could be made available in schools);
- the SYPTE has created an 'On Board' Internet web site, which includes useful information about transport; details of the complaints' service telephone numbers could be provided alongside bus service information available in bus stations
- the large, electronic signs at the side of the main highways could be utilised to advertise the appropriate transport numbers;

(3) there needs to be more awareness of how to make a complaint or raise concerns about poor service;

- it was suggested that telephone numbers and text messaging details could be printed on tickets or advertisements to use when reporting incidents;

(4) insulting and racist remarks suffered by people on public transport, especially by people from minority ethnic communities;

- such behaviour was not tolerated by the bus companies;
- bus drivers receive periodic training in dealing with such issues; many buses have closed circuit television systems and recordings are sometimes used as evidence in legal proceedings; badly-behaved young people cannot be ordered to leave a bus; instead the Police have to be called to deal with the incident;

(5) sometimes young people are reluctant to report incidents and to call the Police;

- it was suggested that young people may use social media (such as Twitter) to record or report incidents as they are occurring, however some caution was expressed about how different organisations adapt and respond to new technologies;
- bus operators' response times are improving; however, caution should be exercised about reporting an urgent problem which the services are not resourced to meet; the emergency 999 telephone number should be used by people in immediate danger;
- incidents can now be reported by use of Internet web sites;

- the Police will treat racist incidents as 'hate crimes' and will investigate such incidents;

(6) bullying by fellow pupils can also be an issue on public transport;

- incidents should be reported to the driver or if in immediate danger to the Police, and in addition such concerns should be raised at schools or with a trusted adult;

(7) travelling is sometimes difficult, late in the evening, because of the behaviour of people who are drunk (or the fear or perception of such behaviour) and because bus and train services are reduced at that time;

(8) the operators use overt methods (eg: uniformed inspectors checking tickets and responding to incidents) and also covert operations by inspectors in plain clothes; to assess risk and to tackle inappropriate behaviour;

(9) serious problems (lateness arriving home, safety etc) are caused when the 'last bus' does not arrive late in the evening and when a particular scheduled bus does not arrive at its usual time; sometimes, the problem is caused by buses breaking down;

- operators are examining the age of buses and several new buses are being provided in Rotherham and Sheffield during 2013;

(10) a suggestion for a unified travel ticket system was made, (perhaps to be entitled YOUR CARD), where young people could purchase a ticket which will be valid for a lengthy period of time and used on any public transport;

(11) the raising of the school leaving age to 17 years in 2013 and to 18 years in 2015 needs to be reflected and the criteria for bus passes changed; young people (16-18 years) also highlighted they do not receive subsidised travel in the summer holidays, despite being in full-time education;

(12) fare prices may be difficult to afford, especially for families with several children or who are on low income;

- there is the need for SYPTE and transport operators to communicate the range of concessionary fares available;

(13) concerns about the capacity of buses on busy routes and problems are caused when buses travel past a bus stop without stopping to collect passengers;

(14) concerns that the Dearne Valley transport consultation was not sufficiently advertised or clear about its target audience;

(15) it was suggested that a 'consultation panel' be established to provide a forum, in the future, for discussion and the exchange of views about safety issues on public transport :

- the “mystery young passenger” system (similar to mystery shoppers) could be used to obtain the views and opinions of young people (subject to the required risk assessments);
- young people are invited to contact the First Group at the Midland Road depot, Rotherham, for discussion with management about transport issues;
- Councillor Smith and Councillor R. S. Russell invited young people to attend the Bus User Group meetings.

(16) the transport operators stated that it was extremely useful to receive feedback from young people; an invitation was extended to the Youth Cabinet members to attend the Sheffield young people’s transport day, to be held on Saturday, 27th April, 2013; this will be a consultation event, enabling young people to state their requirements from public transport in South Yorkshire (especially buses); hopefully, one outcome of the day will be the establishment of a “young people’s transport advisory group”, which could possibly meet at least three times per year and integrate with each local authority’s Transport Liaison Group, also enabling the voices of young people to be heard; the SYPTE would fund the young people’s bus and/or rail travel to the event on 27th April, 2013;

Agreed actions for consideration by the Council, the Police, the SYPTE and the transport operators:-

(a) each organisation shall examine how communication can be improved, throughout the Rotherham Borough area, informing young people about public transport services; where and how they may report incidents of concern which threaten their safety when travelling and how to raise comments or concerns about service standards;

(b) to investigate how young people can be involved in influencing decisions concerning transport (for example becoming members of the Bus User Group “mystery young passenger” system or a Youth Forum),

(c) to examine ways of improving safety for the public waiting at passenger interchanges and bus and rail stations, especially late in the evening;

(d) to inform young people of the range of concessionary fares available and consider introducing a new concessionary transport ticket which will be valid throughout the year and be capable of use on any form of public transport across South Yorkshire;

(e) to consider how the transports needs of young people can be met in the light of the raising of the participation age in education and training to 17 years in 2013 and to 18 years in 2015;

The Youth Cabinet members expressed their thanks to everyone who had attended the meeting, both for their comments and views and willingness to participate.

In conclusion, Councillor Whelbourn thanked everyone for their attendance and contributions to the meeting. He stated that it was important that the various organisations represented today should respond positively to the issues raised and that appropriate feedback be provided which would be reviewed at a further meeting to take place in about six months' time.