

BOROUGH SERVICES POLICY AND REVIEW PANEL

Meeting held on Monday, 23rd March, 2015 at the Council Offices, Farnborough at 7.00 p.m.

Voting Members

Cr. Barbara Hurst (Chairman)
a Cr. A.M.J. Chainey (Vice-Chairman)

Cr. T.D. Bridgeman
Cr. M.S. Choudhary
Cr. A.M. Ferrier

Cr. C.P. Grattan

Cr. M.J. Roberts
Cr. M. Staplehurst
Cr. Jacqui Vosper

An apology for absence was submitted on behalf of Cr. A.M.J. Chainey.

20. **MINUTES –**

The Minutes of the Meeting held on 19th January, 2015 were approved and signed by the Chairman.

21. **COMMUNITY TRANSPORT –**

The Panel welcomed Mr. Ian Thomas, Transport Organiser at Rushmoor Voluntary Services, and Mrs. Terri Wilcox and Mrs. Sue Grocock, Farnborough Neighbour Care, who had been invited to the meeting to talk about the community transport provision in the Borough.

Mr. Thomas advised that Rushmoor Voluntary Services (RVS), a not for profit charity, currently provided the Dial a Ride Service on behalf of Hampshire County Council (HCC) in the Rushmoor area. The service was available to residents with mobility and sensory impairments and could be booked via the Hampshire County Council Passenger Transport Centre. Those wishing to book a ride would contact the Passenger Transport Centre, up to a week in advance of their journey, which would then liaise with RVS with the details. The three buses ran up to four days a week, including Saturday, and had carried in excess of 6,000 passengers in 2014. The clientele mainly consisted of elderly and disabled people and passengers with a concessionary fares bus pass could use them on the Dial a Ride Service. RVS then had to claim back the other half of the fare from HCC. It was noted that the concessionary fares scheme would be changing as of 1st April 2015 and passengers with a bus pass would only be able to travel at the reduced rate after 9.30am, the impacts of these changes would need to be monitored.

Mr. Thomas also advised of the Group Hire Scheme ran by RVS. There were currently 90 organisations, including scout groups, schools, societies

and religious groups, who hired the fleet of mini buses for a minimum fee of £20 (£1 per mile thereafter). The scheme had around 1,200 hiring's in 2014. RVS had a pool of volunteer drivers but it was noted that most organisations had their own drivers who had all completed a one day MIDAS training course. There were six buses in the fleet, all adapted for disabled passengers with removable seats and tail lifts. It was noted that the buses were safety and MOT type check every three months, the tail lifts/electrical steps were checked twice a year and after each journey the driver was expected to do a walk around inspection of the vehicle to check everything was in order.

The Panel was advised of the challenges facing RVS to run both services. It was advised that there was potential for reductions in funding from HCC both directly and to the organisations that used the Group Hire Scheme, increased fuel costs and the increasing age of the fleet could all have a negative impact on the services provided. It was noted that once a vehicle reached 12 years old or more the maintenance checks had to be carried out six weekly and normally, at that age, vehicles would be expected to be replaced. Vehicles cost in the region of £50,000 each (brand new), although second hand buses that were four to five years old cost in the region of £20-25,000. RVS were currently in the position to replace two of its fleet.

It was suggested that sponsorship could be considered to help fund replacement vehicles going forward. It was advised that sponsorship hadn't been considered to date, although, once the funding had been set for the new financial year, this option may need to be looked at in more detail.

The Chairman thanked Mr. Thomas for attending the meeting.

Mrs. Wilcox, advised that Farnborough Neighbour Care had been established in the mid-1990s to provide a friendly neighbour service to local residents with a flexible and attractive voluntary offer for those who wished to give back to their community. The charitable organisation had 30 drivers, six/seven office workers, 350 clients and carried out about 1,600 jobs per year. As part of the duty of care to both the drivers and the clients, each driver had a DBS/CRB check and all car insurance, MOT and driving licences were checked. The charity also followed Hampshire County Council's Good Neighbour Support Service guidelines.

The Panel was informed that clients were required to register for the service. Once they had done this they were sent a letter detailing how the service worked and the suggested rates for each journey; some journeys were bespoke and in these cases the price was determined before travel. Clients were required to telephone in to book their travel requirements and it was noted that a very successful paper system provided tracking information of the journeys for each day. Operations ran from offices in Devereux House.

Mrs. Wilcox stated that drivers carried a job sheet to record each journey and small envelopes were provided for passengers to place their donations in. Drivers could claim up to 45p per mile. However, it was noted that some of the volunteer drivers did not claim any mileage costs.

The Panel noted that, for several years, the charity had run with a subsidy of £300- 400 to keep the costs down. At the last AGM it had been suggested that the prices be raised in line with the increases in fuel costs and a small incremental increase had been made. It was noted that Farnborough Neighbour Care was a self-sufficient charity with no access to grants.

In response to a query, it was explained that word of mouth was a powerful tool for both clients and drivers. In addition an advertisement was placed in Arena on an annual basis and cards were available in local doctors' surgeries and hospitals. RVS also helped with the provision of drivers, directing willing volunteers to the charity.

The Panel discussed the logistics of dropping and collecting users from hospital appointments. It was advised that Frimley Park Hospital provided parking permits for free parking for the volunteers and on some occasions drivers waited with clients whilst they attended their appointments, those that didn't wait received a call when collection was required. Drivers were also advised that they weren't insured if injured whilst lifting wheel chairs in and out of vehicles, it was suggested that drivers used hospital wheelchairs when required.

In response to a query the Panel was advised that there was about a 60-40% split between male and female volunteer drivers. The service offered a simple flexible and effective formula with a strong sense of community.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Wilcox and Mrs Grocock for taking the time to attend the meeting to provide a valuable insight into the Neighbour Care service.

The Panel **NOTED** the presentations.

22. **COMMUNITY INVOLVMENT –**

The Panel welcomed Mr. Andrew Colver, Head of Democratic Services, who attended the meeting to report on the outcomes from the workshop held after the previous meeting of the Panel in January, 2015 and to give a presentation on localism and community involvement.

The Panel considered Report No. DEM1501 which detailed the outcomes of the workshop and suggested the way forward. The two main outcomes had broadly related to:

- the need to promote greater awareness and understanding of the community right to bid, build and challenge amongst elected Members and community groups
- review whether more could be done to achieve engagement with 'hard-to-reach groups' with a view to ensuring representative engagement. For example, whether enough engagement takes place 'in situ' rather than from the corporate centre.

The Report outlined the proposed way forward, which included a requirement for a greater understanding around the community right to bid and the need for some scrutiny work to be carried out to explore how other councils and organisations involved and engaged residents and communities with a focus on 'hard-to-reach' groups.

It was recommended that a Community Involvement Task and Finish Group should be set up at the meeting of the Borough Services Policy and Review Panel on 15th June, 2015 and that the draft Terms of Reference, set out in the Report, should be agreed in principle. It was noted that the membership of the group would be open to any interested non-executive Members, as well as the Panel Members. It was also suggested that, as a starting point, two areas could be identified to focus the initial scrutiny.

The Panel **AGREED** in principle to the draft Terms of Reference and **AGREED** that a Community Involvement Task and Finish Group be appointed at the first meeting of the new Municipal Year.

Mr. Colver continued by giving a presentation on Localism and Community Involvement – Moving the Agenda Forward. The Panel was apprised of the context of the Localism Act 2011 and noted that the key focus had been to empower, simplify and hand control to local communities to do things, in particular around safeguarding local assets, encouraging community run local services and by having a greater influence over planning. The main areas of involvement within the new rights and power for local communities were the right to bid, the right to challenge, the right to veto excessive tax rises and the right to build.

The Panel noted the specifics around each 'right':

- The Right to Build – Groups of local people could deliver a development that the community wanted. Developments could include a range of assets such as businesses, shops and playgrounds. The benefits of the development would stay with the community
- The Right to Challenge – Local groups, including employee groups, could express an interest in running a local authority service, with an aim to drive improvement and to generate innovation. Examples of this already happening in Rushmoor were social enterprises like the Community Matters Partnership and Skilled-Up.
- The Right to Bid – Aimed at land/property which were under threat, where the main use furthers the social wellbeing or interest of the local community or had done in the previous five years. Certain provisions were in place to allow community groups the time and framework to make a bid and Councils were required to maintain a list of Assets of Community Value (ACV).

The Panel was then advised of the requirements of an Asset of Community Value. Properties or land could be private, local authority or community owned and such assets included libraries, community halls, churches, shops, sports facilities and pubs. Assets had to be nominated by the community to be considered for the list. The process of becoming an ACV took eight weeks to decide. Once listed, assets must be registered on the local land charges register. It was noted that if a nomination was rejected it must be placed on a list of assets nominated but not listed and it was also advised that owners had the right to object to the nomination and could appeal the decision if they wished.

It was explained that, should the owner of an ACV wish to sell, the community must be notified. At this stage in the process a six week moratorium would be granted to allow time for the community to decide whether to express an interest to bid. If the community decided to bid a full six month moratorium would be granted to allow time to negotiate to complete a sale. It was also noted that an offer to purchase did not have to be accepted.

The Panel was informed of a number of ACVs. The Garden Gate pub in Aldershot had been the only property in Rushmoor to be listed at the time and was currently being monitored to assess its progress. It was noted, that enquires had been made on other properties in the area. The Panel noted a couple of case studies, The Norton, Cold Norton, Essex and The Three Horseshoes, Thursley, Surrey both of which were successful community run public houses.

It was noted that public houses were considered high profile assets where the community had become involved. Currently there were over 350 public houses in the UK listed as ACVs, with more than 50 pubs run by the community. However, there were a number of challenges facing to these localism initiatives which were: resource and time intensive, dependence on volunteers and the fact they could divide opinion within communities or receive criticism. In this part of the country, freehold premises were expensive and community run projects should not be considered a panacea, especially for loss making activities. It was also considered important to act quickly, as nominating an asset at an early stage provided more opportunity than waiting for the property to cease trading and close down.

The Panel was advised of the issues to consider when deciding if an asset was worthy of a community based project. The concept of localism was considered sound but the process was neither quick nor easy. It was important to consider the importance of local support, and what value would be offered by the community taking on a project. Partnership working and building relationships with councils, elected Members and community leaders was also an important part of the process.

The Panel **NOTED** the presentation.

23. **WORK PROGRAMME –**

The Panel noted the current work programme.

The Meeting closed at 9.03 p.m.

BARBARA HURST
CHAIRMAN