

Appendix 1

REPORT TO: SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE: 19 MARCH 2019

TITLE: IMPROVING THE PROVISION OF BUS SERVICES
IN HARLOW – FINAL REPORT

LEAD OFFICER: SIMON FREEMAN - HEAD OF FINANCE AND
DEPUTY TO THE MANAGING DIRECTOR
(01279) 446228

CONTRIBUTING OFFICER: MIKE KELLY, BUS STATION AND CAR PARKS
SUPERVISOR (01279) 446896

RECOMMENDED that:

- A** The Committee notes the outcomes of the review.
- B** Recommends to Cabinet that the outcomes of the Local Bus Consultation relating to future transport requirements in Harlow and wider areas be referred to the Garden Town Board.

BACKGROUND

1. The Council is not the regulatory authority for the provision of bus services in Harlow. That responsibility rests with the Eastern Traffic Commissioner (ETC).
2. Essex County Council (the County Council) is responsible for providing, through subsidy, any desirable routes that the private sector does not wish to operate. Whilst the Council has no direct control over the provision and quality of bus services in Harlow, the Council has the ability to exert influence.
3. The original scoping report for the review was agreed by the Committee and subsequent updates regarding progress have been provided at the Special meeting in April 2018 (which included full disclosure of the findings from the User Surveys), a verbal update at the meeting in February 2018 and an interim report at the meeting in October 2018.
4. The agreed aims of the review were to gather information on the level of services provided in Harlow and examine the customer/user experience in order that the findings can be relayed to both the service operators and service regulators to help influence and shape future service provision.
5. Further progress has been made following the presentation of the interim report to the Committee's April and October meetings using the research findings and key themes generated by QRS Market Research Ltd surveys to discuss key issues with bus service operators and the County Council.

ISSUES/PROPOSALS

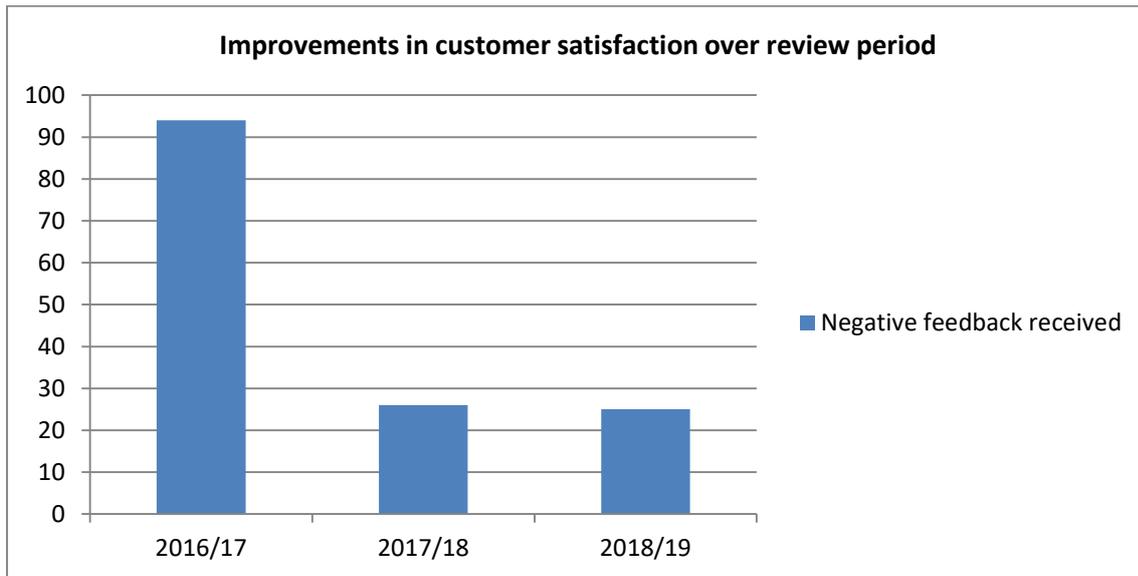
6. The aim of the review was to gather information on the level of services provided in Harlow and examine the customer/user experience in order that the findings of the review can be relayed to both service operators (the bus companies) and service regulators (ETC and the County Council).
7. The review also looked at the 2017 Buses Act which provides additional powers to top tier authorities such as the County Council. The Act has extended the range of powers for the transport authority and increased the duties placed on operators in regard to the provision of bus services. The most significant powers include:
 - a) Improved and enhanced quality bus partnerships
 - b) Bus franchising
 - c) The requirement on operators to produce open data available to the public. This would require operators and local authorities to publish open data digitally for buses in England (outside London). The aim is to make it easier for bus passengers to plan their journeys through access to routes and timetables data, fares and tickets data, and real time information.
8. The County Council is currently engaged in work to refresh its existing bus strategy and is also working closely with other local councils (including the Council) to address the impact of proposed development on the road, bus and sustainable travel networks.
9. The review has also considered compliance with requirements for accessibility, requested by the committee as part of the review, and it was found that all Harlow operators are complying with requirements for step free access to vehicles, improving accessibility to Harlow bus users.
10. Presentation of information on sustainable transport futures for Harlow is not included in this report as publication of the draft Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Transport Strategy was approved by Cabinet on 28 February 2019 for a 6 week period following elections in May 2019. The Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Board has approved the Strategy in principle.
11. Bus service operators, the County Council and the Council have developed a programme of implementable improvements and recommendations to address the key themes highlighted by the survey which are detailed in the table below:

Table 1 – Programme of Implementable Improvements

Theme	Action/Recommendation	Lead organisation
Viability of late/night services	Awaiting outcome of consultation	ECC - <i>Local Bus Consultation December 2018</i> runs until 22 March 2019
Understanding why reliability/frequency issues arise	Monitoring of services and timetable revisions where required to ensure routes are realistically timed and serviced.	Bus operators – implementation ongoing
Bus stop signage improvements/updates	Replacement of incorrect and damaged signage	ECC – site meetings with HDC staff as required to assist with 2019/20 programming of works
Links between Visitor Information Point at Bus Station/bus operators and local ‘shopping’ destinations (town centre and neighbourhood centres)	Officer review of Visitor Information Point to be carried out in 2019 in conjunction with Council’s Property Manager to identify any synergy between promotion of shopping destinations at the bus terminus and support of local businesses occupying HDC premises. Discover Harlow materials to be incorporated into terminus.	Harlow Council
Joint customer and driver engagement initiatives	Customer care training	Bus operators – implemented in part

12. It was agreed that the success measure for the review should be the improvement in customer/user satisfaction as agreed in the original scoping report. The Council records feedback from bus users via a standard form with a baseline taken at the start of the review and is basing the measure of success as the reduction in negative feedback forms received from the user surveys. Over the period of the review a 26.5 per cent reduction in negative feedback has been seen in 2018/19 to date as shown below:

Table 2 – Customer Satisfaction Levels



13. An extensive survey was commissioned as part of the review of bus services and in keeping with the original intentions and scope of the review. The outcomes have been constructive and helpful in determining an action plan as set out within this report and setting key themes which it will be important to continue to focus on as the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town Transportation Strategy is developed and implemented. Officers will continue to implement the actions and recommendations set out in the report and it is anticipated that there will be further improvements in customer satisfaction and feedback as a result of this work.

IMPLICATIONS

Place (Includes Sustainability)

The review of bus service provision is an important precursor to the development of the Harlow and Gilston Garden Town and the management of growth in and around Harlow. It will be important to be able to demonstrate that the whole town is well served by high quality public transport provision, not just the new developments, and also that the new developments have sustainable travel mechanisms built into them from the beginning to meet the aspirations and targets set out in the Local Plan.

Author: Andrew Bramidge, Project Director – Enterprise Zone and Interim Head of Planning

Finance (Includes ICT)

None specific.

Author: Simon Freeman, Head of Finance and Deputy to the Managing Director

Housing

None specific.

Author: Andrew Murray, Head of Housing

Community Wellbeing (Includes Equalities and Social Inclusion)

None specific.

Author: Jane Greer, Head of Community Wellbeing

Governance (Includes HR)

Harlow Council is not the statutory authority regarding bus services within the district but can refer matters to the appropriate body to try and influence how Harlow can be best served by public transport.

Author: Simon Hill, Head of Governance

Appendices

None.

Background Papers

None.

Glossary of terms/abbreviations used

ETC- Eastern Traffic Commissioner