

**TONBRIDGE & MALLING BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**PLANNING and TRANSPORTATION ADVISORY BOARD**

**12 March 2013**

**Report of the Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure**

**Part 1- Public**

**Matters for Recommendation to Cabinet - Non-Key Decision (Decision may be taken by the Cabinet Member)**

**1 QUALITY BUS PARTNERSHIP SCHEME**

**Summary**

**Kent County Council are proposing a Statutory Quality Partnership Scheme (SQPS) for bus services along the A20 corridor from the Coldharbour roundabout in a westerly direction, to the junction with Aston Way (A228) and Castle Way. This would be a Partnership between the County Council, the local bus operators and the Borough Council.**

**1.1 Background**

- 1.1.1 The Quality Partnership Scheme model was introduced by the Transport Act 2000. Under such a scheme KCC, being the local transport authority (LTA), agrees to invest in improved facilities at specific locations along bus routes (e.g. bus stops or bus priority) and operators who wish to use those facilities undertake to provide services of a particular standard (e.g. new buses, or driver training standards).
- 1.1.2 The primary purpose of the SQPS is to enable a real focus on improving the reliability and attraction of bus transport to the benefit of local communities and to maximise patronage.
- 1.1.3 Only those operators prepared to provide services to the standards specified in the scheme are permitted to use the facilities. Whilst other operators are not generally prevented from providing local services in the area covered by the scheme, they cannot use the facilities provided by the LTA under it.
- 1.1.4 The SQPS model is intended to be used as a true partnership between consenting parties, and KCC has been working closely with Arriva who is the current operator in the area to design the scheme.
- 1.1.5 Unlike a partnership agreement this will actually be in the form of a "scheme" which is "made" by a LTA. Once the scheme is made, the LTA is under a statutory duty to provide the facilities identified in the scheme from the dates

specified, and to maintain those facilities for as long as the scheme is in operation. The Borough Council's role will be to continue to provide the services that it currently delivers, with a keen eye on the overall purpose of the agreement.

- 1.1.6 Any operator wishing to run local bus services along the Scheme Area must register with the Traffic Commissioner and ensure they meet the standards set out in the Scheme Document. The Traffic Commissioner can take enforcement action against any operator using the bus infrastructure facilities (priority signals, bus stops, bus lanes etc.) in the Scheme Area who fails to do this.
- 1.1.7 The SQPS provides the framework for a comprehensive package of improvements to public transport services in the Snodland, West Malling and Kings Hill areas and along the A20 Corridor to Maidstone. The package has been designed to ensure that the level of bus provision is able to accommodate the ongoing housing and employment growth in the Medway Valley area. Indeed some of the funding of improvements has been secured from the strategic development sites in this part of the Borough. It will contribute to improved air quality within three Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) and involve the setting of minimum service quality standards, thereby locking in the benefits of investment by all parties and ensuring maximum return on public investment.
- 1.1.8 This proposed SQPS would be the first in Kent and has been developed between Kent County Council and Tonbridge & Malling Borough Council. Kent County Council would be the lead authority and would manage the scheme. The Borough Council would be responsible for the enforcement of Traffic Regulation Orders (subject the ongoing agreement with County), the maintenance of bus shelters and street/footway sweeping within the scheme area in line with our statutory duty.
- 1.1.9 The main improvements that KCC would implement as part of the SQPS include:
- Improved Bus Priority Traffic Signals
  - Accessible Bus Stops
  - Bus Stop Clearways
  - Real Time Information Displays
- 1.1.10 The main service standards which operators must adhere to include:
- Minimum frequencies
  - Maximum fares
  - Presentation of Vehicles and Drivers
  - Punctuality

- Passenger Information
- Work with KCC to implement a smart travel product

## **1.2 Excluded Services**

1.2.1 The following bus services are examples of services excluded from the Scheme:

- Those that operate exclusively for carrying children to and from school
- Those operated on behalf of KCC as part of Kent's tendered bus network
- Those operating with a frequency of one service per day or less, for example Nu-Venture
- Community transport or dial-a-ride services which are restricted to use by preregistered passengers only
- Scheduled express bus or coach services not eligible for bus service operators grant
- Other scheduled coach services operated, marketed and branded as part of the National Express, Megabus or Greyhound coach networks or any successors thereto

1.2.2 These excluded services can continue to operate along the route and use the full facilities provided.

## **1.3 Looking forward**

1.3.1 On 14 March Arriva launch their fleet of eleven brand-new diesel-electric hybrid double-deck buses that will be running on Service 71 between Snodland, Leybourne, Larkfield and Maidstone from late March.

1.3.2 The buses cost nearly £300,000 each and part of the cost has been met by the Green Bus Fund and a substantial contribution from Kent County Council, in addition to Arriva's £2.5 million investment.

1.3.3 These new buses are the first hybrid buses in Kent and their combination of diesel and electric power will help to improve air quality along the A20 corridor.

1.3.4 The SQPS will take advantage of these new hybrid buses and other initiatives including the imminent improvements to the West Malling Station Forecourt.

1.3.5 In February, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA) confirmed an award for £150,000 towards the cost of retrofitting existing buses on this corridor with emissions reducing equipment. The SQPS will complement this

grant and the adapted buses will be able to make use of the facilities from this scheme.

#### **1.4 Legal Implications**

1.4.1 The Borough Council would be bound to provide the services summarised in 1.1.8. These really reflect the broad level of service that we provide in any event along this key transport route and the need will be for a continuing awareness and focus on key responsibilities rather than any increased resource requirements.

#### **1.5 Financial and Value for Money Considerations**

1.5.1 There are no additional costs for the Borough Council.

#### **1.6 Risk Assessment**

1.6.1 Not required

#### **1.7 Equality Impact Assessment**

1.7.1 See 'Screening for equality impacts' table at end of report

#### **1.8 Policy Considerations**

1.8.1 Community

#### **1.9 Recommendations**

1.9.1 That the Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure, in consultation with the Director of Central Services **BE GIVEN DELEGATED AUTHORITY** to enter into this agreement.

The Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure confirms that the proposals contained in the recommendation(s), if approved, will fall within the Council's Budget and Policy Framework.

Background papers:

contact: Mike O'Brien

Nil

Steve Humphrey  
Director of Planning, Transport and Leisure

<b>Screening for equality impacts:</b>		
<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Explanation of impacts</b>
a. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper have potential to cause adverse impact or discriminate against	No	The decisions sought are entirely neutral in terms of equality.

<b>Screening for equality impacts:</b>		
<b>Question</b>	<b>Answer</b>	<b>Explanation of impacts</b>
different groups in the community?		
b. Does the decision being made or recommended through this paper make a positive contribution to promoting equality?	N/A	See previous response
c. What steps are you taking to mitigate, reduce, avoid or minimise the impacts identified above?		

*In submitting this report, the Chief Officer doing so is confirming that they have given due regard to the equality impacts of the decision being considered, as noted in the table above.*