

Minutes of the Oxfordshire Parish Transport Representatives meeting held in the council chamber of County Hall on 6 September 2016

Present and Apologies, see separate list.

The meeting began with a question and answer session with Alexandra Bailey, Services manager for Oxfordshire County Council, and Cllr David Nimmo-Smith, OCC cabinet member for Environment with responsibility for transport. The two of them could only spare half an hour because they had another meeting to attend.

Alexandra Bailey (AB) confirmed that bus subsidies had now ended – but “quite a few” of the previously subsidised buses are still running because the operators hope to at least break even on the services. Her advice was that we use these marginal services to help them survive.

The Comet service was launched at the end of June and was making good progress (this is the not-for-profit service run by OCC using its fleet of minibuses between 10.15am and 2.30pm Monday to Friday – the downtime when the buses are not being used for taking children to school or the elderly to day centres). AB reported there are now 280 registered users.

- Leaflets are available to be distributed to publicise the service
- All vehicles are the same size – 16-passenger.
- It was recognized that the service would be better used if it operated for longer hours - during evenings and weekends and school holidays.
- Passengers pay £30 upfront – a system was needed whereby passengers could keep track of how much of their £30 deposit they had spent
- Bloxham PTR asked whether S106 money could be used for the Comet service. AB didn't know but would find out.
- Another PTR said the service was not satisfactory – the buses run late, they take an hour to get into town, you have an hour in town and then have to return
- Are there Comet depots in Banbury and Bicester?
Yes – 72 vehicles in all
- More details of Comet service available at <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/oxfordshire-comet>

Or ring 01865 323201 to register, buy credit and book journeys.

Other bus services

AB said she was still meeting with bus companies concerning the services that are continuing without subsidy – some with revised routes.

* A PTR said that buses on a Thame route were going past bus stops without stopping to pick up passengers.

* Concerning the T1 Thames Travel Service, a PTR wanted a detour so it would serve more passengers.

* Residents on an estate (not clear whether this is also on the T1 route) get down to the main road but there is no bus stop. Buses go straight past – how to make the drivers aware that they could pick up more passengers?

AB replied that all these questions and complaints should be directed to supported-transport@oxfordshire.gov.uk. The inbox is checked regularly and she and her team would do their best to trouble-shoot.

It was reported that Kidlington had asked for £50,000 of S106 money be spent on bus services and this had been refused by the planning authority, Cherwell District Council.

At this point Alexandra Bailey and Cllr Nimmo-Smith left the meeting.

PTR meeting

Election: Chris Robins was re-elected as chairman

The current vice-chair was standing down and would not for the time being be replaced.

The minutes of the last meeting were approved with a correction to the supported-transport email address.

Real time information: A PTR reported that the real-Time system is still not working from Reading into Oxford.

Others said real-time on several routes was now working.

It was pointed out that the system only works if the buses are equipped to provide the necessary information.

Emily Lewis-Edwards of Community First (formerly ORCC) informed representatives that Robert Savage, OCC's Fleet Operations Manager, was running the Comet service and could be contacted at

Robert.Savage@oxfordshire.gov.uk

She said that there were two minibuses per district available – far fewer than the entire fleet of 72. Wallingford does not have a service.

Dorchester-on-Thames parish council has made a block booking for a bus every Friday to go to Wallingford. The parish council distributes a ten-journey ticket, and the driver ticks off each journey. Eight other parishes are taking up Comet.

E L-E said there were discrepancies in pricing – for instance a parish council booking for 16 would cost more than an individual making a booking for him/herself and 15 friends.

She said it was up to parish transport members to promote the Comet service at parish level. If demand weren't there, the service would be at risk. A ticketing system was needed. The service was being run at marginal costing.

Maranda St John Nicolle of Blewbury said that seven villages were forming an email network to exchange news on what's working and what isn't with Comet. She suggested an email network could also collate information on what effect the bus cuts are having.

Comet pricing is a bit of a mystery, including the payment for waiting time.

With OCC looking to hand over some of their responsibilities to parishes, Community First could step in to provide some back-up. For instance, E L-E said she could provide the template of a contract between a commercial bus company and a collection of parishes who were planning to subsidise a bus service.

The chairman and the Blewbury PTR thanked Emily for this assistance. .

Witney town council is providing at least some subsidy to maintain bus services in place of Oxfordshire County Council.

What are the gaps in bus services? What is the best solution? A map of local knowledge would be very helpful, E L-E said.

Funds are still available for community buses. Both Chipping Norton and the Bartons have a community bus.

Meetings: Around half of the parishes contacted had responded about the future of the Parish Transport Representatives meetings and a majority of them thought the meetings should continue. Chris Robins said the meetings could be held every six months, and agendas could be shorter.

Mary Stiles of Thame said that we need officers for the pre-meeting surgeries. "There's no substitute for sitting down and talking to officers." In fact, invitations had been sent to the officers.

Future meetings should include a briefing on a particular topic. These could include:

- What does devolution mean?
- OCC's lawyer to explain S106 contributions – what is a legitimate use of them? (It was pointed out that the Community Infrastructure Levy may soon replace the S106 system)
- Experience of Comet so far

Anyone with other suggestions for topics to be highlighted should contact Chris Robins (crobins@foxdown33.freeserve.co.uk).

There was general agreement that representatives should be provided with microphones at future meetings. The acoustics at this meeting (without

microphones) were terrible and, said one rep, “It’s discrimination that a proper system is not available.”

Maranda St John Nicolle (Blewbury) said that Age UK were working with Volunteer Link-up to set up more good neighbour schemes in the county, these provide a range of services including help with essential transport. She would be happy to speak to people individually about this (maranda@ccow.org.uk).