

1. Executive Summary

1.1 The Overview Scrutiny Committee agreed to undertake a review of local Bus Services. A Task Group consisting of five members of the Scrutiny Committee carried out the review. A member, James Oliver, from Gravesham Youth Forum was co-opted onto the Task Group to bring a young persons perspective to the review.

1.2 The Terms of Reference of the Review were:-

- To examine the provision of bus services in the Borough of Gravesham, including availability, delivery and quality of the service;
- To identify what measures are needed to improve them in terms of speed, frequency and reliability;
- To consider County and local transport plans and policies in regard of current and future delivery of urban and rural bus services and how these plans fit in with central government's ten year Transport Plan which has an aim that "everyone should live within 13 minutes walk of at least an hourly bus service";
- To examine whether the governments proposed changes to the current bus service registration rules would bring about the development of innovative, flexibly routed, demand responsive services to meet the needs of the urban/ rural communities in the borough.

1.3 The context in which the review was undertaken was a perceived lack of reliability in the provision of bus services in the borough.

1.4 Three evidence gathering sessions were held with witnesses from Age Concern, Gravesham Access, Arriva and Kent County Council. A survey amongst local bus users was also undertaken.

1.5 Conclusions:

- Gravesham Council has little or no influence on the provision of commercial bus services in the borough, though the establishment of a Quality Bus Partnership may go some way to addressing this situation;
- More money means more services and better buses. More money comes from more passenger revenue or more subsidy. More passenger revenue requires more and better services. A classic "catch 22".
- Improved communication is need between user groups, Arriva and Kent County Council through the setting up of some sort of liaison group between all interested parties;
- Gravesham is perceived as receiving a good level of service from Arriva in its urban areas;
- Alternatives are of the demand led, pre-booking, dial-a-ride type of service. Is there a demand for this type of service in the borough? Can this type of service survive without being subsidised? Can this type of service be self financing with fares that people can afford?
- Does a service like the Gloucestershire County Council taxibus, using 8 seater people carriers, offer a way forward. This two and a half year pilot scheme starts in August 2004 and if it is successful will be expanded to cover a wider area.

- 1.6 Recommendations to Cabinet are:-
- 1.6.1 **Establish a liaison group that would bring together user groups, parish councils, bus service providers, the police, community groups and Kent County Council to exchange information on transport issues.**
 - 1.6.2 **Arriva be requested to consult with Gravesham Borough Council on issues surrounding changes to the timetable of any service operating within the Borough.**
 - 1.6.3 **Where a bus route is 'easy access', Arriva be asked to keep the use of non easy access vehicles to a minimum.**
 - 1.6.4 **That the Cabinet write to the Department of Transport with concerns that there are franchise agreements with other transport providers e.g. train operators but there are no such agreements with bus service providers. Therefore they operate as they wish and can withdraw services with nothing more than the required 56 days notice.**