

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Review Title: The potential for a Bus Quality Contract Scheme in Bath & North East Somerset

A Task and Finish Group¹ review by the Communities, Transport, and Environment Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel

1. Background

At the Council meeting on 15th January 2015 on a motion proposed by Councillor John Bull, and seconded by Councillor Eleanor Jackson, it was resolved that:

1. Council notes that buses are a key part of the B&NES Transport Strategy yet the current services often do not serve the needs of residents and are viewed as expensive and unreliable.
2. Council further notes the powers contained within the Transport Act 2000, as amended, to set up a Quality Contract Scheme (QCS) which would allow the Authority to plan the bus route network, set the fares and award contracts to run services or local networks.
3. Council recognises, however, that under a QCS there is a revenue risk to the Council in that it would be responsible for meeting any shortfall in fares income to cover the operating costs of the contracts.
4. Council also recognises that where a decision has been made to proceed with a QCS in the North East, this has been a joint decision between multiple local authorities.
5. For the reasons outlined in 3 and 4 (above), Council believes that significantly more work is required to determine whether a QCS is the best way forward for the provision of buses in B&NES.
6. Council therefore asks, in the first instance, the Planning, Transport and Environment Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel to undertake further work into the potential, including advantages and disadvantages, as well as cost implications and any financial risk to the Council, of a QCS in B&NES with a report back to the new Council preferably by July 2015 but by the end of the calendar year at the latest.
7. The motion was supported by members of all political parties with three members abstaining. There was a cross party view that there was value in referring the issue to PDS review.

After the general elections in May 2015 the newly formed Communities Transport and Environment PDS Panel at their first public panel meeting on 13th July 2015 received an update on the new Government Bill on buses.

At this meeting Cllr Bull proposed that the Panel defer consideration of the new buses bill until the details of the Bill become clearer and proposed that a Task and Finish Group is set up to look at the potential for a Quality Contract Scheme for buses. This was agreed to be an internal working group.

¹ A Task & Finish Group is a small scale investigation into an issue, with the emphasis on gathering existing information rather than completing extensive new research. Officers may be asked to contribute towards the steering group, provide information, give a briefing and attend panel meetings

2. Purpose

To consider the initial advantages and disadvantages of a bus quality contract scheme in Bath & North East Somerset.

3. Objectives of PDS Review

The objectives of this Policy Development & Scrutiny TFG Review are to:

- 3.1** To review the current legislative framework for quality contracts schemes and ascertain whether conditions in Bath & North East Somerset are such that the requirements of the Transport Act 2000 (as amended) would be met.
- 3.2** To identify through existing available data the extent of problems with the current network of services in terms of:
 - Punctuality and reliability of services
 - Frequency of services in relationship to population density
 - Co-ordination of services between operators
 - Ticketing inter-availability and flexibility
 - Cost of travel (average fares)
 - Extent of bus priority measures
- 3.3** To consider to what a quality contract scheme could provide which would overcome the identified problems in the bus service network.
- 3.4** To consider the boundaries for a potential quality contract scheme and the extent of scheme coverage including:
 - The extent of service inclusion for different scheme boundaries
 - The relationship and overlap with other Local Transport Authorities (LTA) areas
 - Criteria for exclusion of services from the scheme
- 3.5** To consider the available financial information that identifies operating costs and revenues of services that operate within the potential scheme area(s), including the associated risks.
- 3.6** Review actions and progress made by other LTAs in respect of quality contract schemes.
- 3.7** This review will acknowledge the proposed Buses Bill that is expected to be put before Parliament in the current session and monitor its potential outcomes.
- 3.8** The outcomes of this work will potentially feed into current work on:-
 - The Joint Local Transport Plan
 - Joint West of England transport studies and
 - future discussions concerning devolved powers

4. Out of Scope:

- Home-to-school transport for entitled scholars will not be examined during this review except where this is delivered by registered local bus services.

5. Approach

The Panel will undertake the following activities to gather information:

5.1 Research

The steering group will need to consider existing data available on:

- Financial data published by operators
- Data on patronage provided by operators
- Punctuality and reliability data from surveys, Real Time Information systems (such as arrival timing data commonly seen at bus stops), and operator provided data
- Passenger satisfaction surveys undertaken by B&NES and Transport Focus
- Legislative requirements for quality contract schemes

Note: Data for this financial year will be used (if available)

5.2 Comparative analysis of other Quality Contract proposals

The steering group will need to analyse the process undertaken and current status of Quality Contract proposals in the public domain, from:

- West Yorkshire Combined Authority
- North East Combined Authority
- Sheffield City Region Combined Authority

6. Reporting

The panel will produce a written report and present findings to a future meeting of the Scrutiny Panel. (Anticipated to be the January 2016 CTE PDS public Panel meeting)

7. Outputs of this Review

- Notes and papers from public Communities Transport & Environment Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel meetings
- Report incorporating key findings, conclusions and recommendations, including financial and risk implications.
- Report and recommendations to be presented to the Cabinet (lead Cabinet Members are likely to be the Cabinet Member for Transport, Cllr Anthony Clarke and Cabinet Assistant, Cllr Matt Cochrane.
- The Panel may consider the future development of a full review and further consultation exercises with elected representatives, bus users, and operators on key issues identified through the initial findings of the Task and Finish Group work.
- Timely and relevant considerations that could inform future local transport strategies, as well as potential joint working at the West of England level.

8. Constraints

- The review must be managed within the budget and resources available to the Panel.
- The review research and findings will need to consider the requirements of the Equalities Act.

- The Task and Finish Group will report back on the findings from this review to the Communities Transport & Environment Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel at the January 2016 meeting.

9. Draft Outline Project Plan

Date	Stage / Activity	Meeting Type
Terms of reference		
13/08/2015	PDS Private briefing to discuss Terms of reference	Private
14/09/2015	Public agreement of TOR at CTE PDS	Public
Research		
October 2015	Research and briefing reports	Private
Report Writing		
Dec 15/ Jan 2016	Task and Finish group meeting to discuss Recommendations	Private
Jan 2016	Panel Meeting for Final Report and Recommendations	Public
14 th March 2016	Cabinet Response	Public

10. Project Team

Communities, Transport and Environment Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel	(Chair) Cllr John Bull (Vice Chair) Cllr Brian Simmons Cllr Steve Jeffries Cllr Mark Shelford Cllr Peter Turner Cllr Alan Hale Cllr Neil Butters Cllr Jonathan Carr
Task and Finish Group Members	Cllr John Bull, Cllr Brian Simmons, Cllr Neil Butters, Cllr Jonathan Carr
Directors:	Louise Fradd
Service Officers:	Andy Strong
Policy Development & Scrutiny Officer:	Donna Vercoe / Emma Bagley
Panel Administrator, Democratic Services	Michaela Gay