

## ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE

Minutes of a meeting of the Environment Select Committee held on  
8 February 2011 commencing at 7 pm

Present: Cllr. Walshe (Chairman)  
Cllr. Ryan (Vice-Chairman)

Cllrs. Abraham, Mrs Cook, Cooke, Dibsdall, McInnes, Mrs Purves and Mrs Sargeant.

Apologies for absence were received from Cllrs. Grint, London, Scholey and Waller.

Cllr. Mrs Hunter was also present.

Officers: Mr Wilson, Head of Environmental and Operational Services; Mr Craddock, Senior Planning Officer; Mrs Beaumont, Democratic Services Officer.

### 39. MINUTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

Resolved: That the minutes of the meeting of the Environment Select Committee held on 7 December 2010 be approved and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

### 40. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest on any matter discussed at the meeting.

### 41. FORMAL RESPONSE FROM THE CABINET FOLLOWING MATTERS REFERRED BY THE COMMITTEE (Report No. 3)

- a) Local Development Framework – Annual Monitoring Report (Cabinet 13.12.10)

The response was noted.

- b) Draft Budget and Savings Proposals 2011/12 onwards (Cabinet 13.12.10)

The response was noted.

### 42. ACTIONS FROM PREVIOUS MEETING (Item No. 4)

There were no actions from the previous meeting.

### 43. FUTURE BUSINESS AND THE WORK PLAN 2010/11 (Report No. 5)

The Committee noted the contents of the Work Plan. No changes were made.

### 44. RAILWAYS AND TRAINS (Item No. 6)

The Committee heard from various representatives whom the Chairman welcomed to the meeting.

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Mike Gibson, Public Affairs Manager for Southeastern, informed Members of work undertaken over the last year. He noted that a new timetable had been introduced in December 2009 which had successfully increased the level of service to Sevenoaks station. During the spring, summer and autumn customer satisfaction had been at its highest level. Unfortunately, the adverse weather conditions at the end of 2010 had caused a very low level of performance for three days. Mr Gibson felt that serious questions needed to be asked about the ability of Network Rail to clear snow and ice from the tracks. The rail regulator was assessing the situation and an action plan for Network Rail's performance in Kent was expected. Mr Gibson apologised for the failure in service saying that it was partly because of a communication failure between Southeastern and Network Rail. All compensation claims were being considered with season ticket holders receiving a gesture of goodwill. Mr Gibson drew Members' attention to a briefing note which explained the level of fare increase. He explained that the amount of Government subsidy was due to decrease which resulted in an increase in passenger fees. He also noted that the National Station Improvement Programme for Sevenoaks station was underway and work would begin in the summer. An additional 200 cycle and motorcycle bays would be provided, toilets would be refurbished and the station forecourt would be expanded along with a number of other improvements.

Yvonne Leslie, Stakeholder Relations Manager for Southern railways, explained that Southern was one and a half years into the current franchise which would continue until July 2015. She noted that Southern had planned a number of improvements, including customer information screens, self-service ticket machines and help points at stations across the District. All stations would also be linked to 24 hour CCTV. Ms Leslie noted that the National Passenger Statistics scores showed an 82% level of customer satisfaction. Southern had implemented stringent targets in order to improve upon this score. Ms Leslie also commented that Southern experienced some of the same performance issues as Southeastern during the snow at the end of 2010. A "Delay Repay" scheme was in place for compensation. Due to the Government policy to reduce subsidy to railways, fares had increased on average by 7.8%. However, Value Fares were advertised on the Southern website along with a "rainy day" guarantee which had proved very popular. December 2010 saw alterations in the timetable for the Uckfield line and platform lengthening on the East Grinstead line. In the future Southern were considering an Oyster style smart ticket system which would allow much more flexible types of ticket. Changes to services following the 2012 Olympics were also being considered.

A representative from Sevenoaks Rail Travellers' Association commended Southeastern and Network Rail for admitting to the failure in service during the snow and noted that the Managing Director of Southeastern would be looking for substantial improvements in Network Rail's infrastructure. Southeastern had provided the Association with an explanation of the fare increase. The Association was concerned that there was no opportunity to increase capacity in Sevenoaks until at least 2019. The refurbishment of London Bridge following the Olympics would have a serious impact for travellers from Sevenoaks. The refurbishment of Sevenoaks station was welcomed and the Association requested they be consulted on it. They also urged the Council to make submissions on behalf of the District to the Kent County Council Rail Action Plan and Network Rail's London and South East Route Utilisation Strategy. They felt it was very important that the view of the community was made clear.

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A representative from Edenbridge and District Rail Travellers' Association noted that Edenbridge suffered shortages in service following the snow while a train was being repaired. The Association was concerned about the alterations at London Bridge and the effect this would have on services. It was noted that commuter services to London were overcrowded in the morning. The representative asked a number of questions which were answered by the representatives of the rail companies later in the meeting.

A representative of Sevenoaks Town Council encouraged the Council to respond to the Kent County Council Rail Action Plan consultation. He noted that Maidstone Borough Council had been very active in their responses which would be to the detriment of the Sevenoaks district. He also felt that it was important for the views of the Town Council to be considered favourably by the District Council with regard to Sevenoaks station improvements and asked that Southeastern involve all parties in consultation on the refurbishment. The Town Council were grateful that Southeastern and Southern had admitted to failings and suggested ways to improve. The representative was concerned that unless the District Council lobbied to maintain and improve services within the District, future improvements to Ashford and the links they provided to London would be more attractive to possible residents of the District.

A representative of Edenbridge Town Council felt that extension of the Uckfield line to form a second mainline from Brighton would greatly improve local overcrowding issues. Many commuters had begun using the Uckfield line as it provided a better service.

Mr Gibson explained that Southeastern hoped to report back within three months to the Sevenoaks Rail Travellers' Association regarding an action plan from Network Rail. He also agreed with comments about the District Council responding to consultations and emphasised the importance of this.

In response to earlier questions, Ms Leslie commented that there were several days in December 2010 when services on the Uckfield line had been suspended. Southern would aim to have as many lines as possible going through London Bridge during the alterations. Ms Leslie noted that there was a shortage of diesel rolling stock. It was therefore unlikely that any more would be obtained. However, Network Rail did have an electrification scheme running in the North, which may free up diesel rolling stock. With regard to fares, the average increase was 7.8%. She did not have the details of areas where fares were decreased.

Two representatives from Sussex Community Rail Partnership were in attendance. They gave a brief explanation of the work of the Partnership which included lobbying for improvements at stations and increasing public transport to stations. Their main role was to re-link the community with the railways ensuring all consultations were well supported. They were currently working with Kent County Council and Hever Castle to promote tickets to local attractions. The Partnership welcomed the arrival of customer service screens and CCTV at stations and were keen to make sure that smaller stations also received the same treatment. The Partnership also encouraged local communities to improve their stations through an Adopt a Station scheme which promoted gardening and artwork at stations.

The Committee wished to extend an invitation to First Capital Connect and Network

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Rail to attend the next meeting of the Committee where trains were discussed.

In response to concern relating to facilities at Swanley station, Mr Gibson explained that disabled access was controlled by Network Rail with the majority of funding from Government. He noted that work to provide disabled access at the station was not due to begin until 2014 and felt that this was unacceptable. However, he noted that all networks had assisted travel services where disabled passengers would be met and assisted onto platforms and trains. If the service was not available at a particular station, networks would meet the cost of a taxi to the nearest serviceable station. Mr Gibson also noted that improvements to the toilets at Swanley station were subject to a long standing drainage issue. Network Rail had been requested to address this issue. Southeastern had not been successful in recruiting an operator for shop facilities at the station.

Following a query, Mr Gibson commented that it was difficult to justify a 12% increase in fares during the current economic climate. Currently 70% of funds were provided through passenger fares and 30% by Government. Unfortunately, due to the reduction in Government funding passenger fares would be required to increase.

It was noted that Network Rail owned the infrastructure and were therefore responsible for keeping the lines clear in adverse weather conditions.

Cllr. Walshe moved and Cllr. Abraham seconded a motion which was duly voted upon and was unanimously agreed:

Resolved: That Cabinet be requested to adopt a policy of forceful lobbying on behalf of rail travellers in the District to all consultations which influenced the future of rail services in Kent.

### 45. STREET CLEANING SCHEDULES FROM APRIL 2011 (Report No. 7)

The Head of Environmental and Operational Services explained that the 2011/12 budget for street cleaning was due to be reduced by £162,000, approximately 10%. As a result the service would lose one large mechanical sweeper operation, one small sweeper operation, two manual litter pickers and a Supervisor. The existing street cleaning arrangements and the revised street cleaning schedules, moving to a 'zonal' cleaning method were outlined in the report. The aim would be to keep the impact on cleaning standards to a minimum with many frequencies remaining as existing, but cleaning of residential roads would need to be reduced from a 30 day to a 40 day cycle. A local indicator, based on National Indicator (NI) 195, would continue to be monitored in order to give an indication of the effect of the reduced frequencies. A "hit squad" would also be maintained to respond to issues between scheduled cleans.

The Head of Environmental and Operational Services explained that, if it had not been swept away already, sand on the roads from gritting during the snow in late 2010 would be removed during scheduled cleans.

It was noted that a reduced service was provided on weekends but would respond to emergencies such as glass in a children's play area.

In response to a comment, the Head of Environmental and Operational Services explained that from April the sweeping of rural roads would only take place once a

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year instead of the current frequency of twice a year, unless there was a particular safety requirement for more frequent sweeping. It was pointed out that highway safety was the responsibility of Kent Highways Services. Due to health and safety reasons, volunteers could not be used to assist with the cleaning of any highways.

Currently 900 monitoring inspections are required to be carried out each year with regard to NI 195. From April NI 195 is being discontinued. Under the new local indicator monitoring will continue, utilising existing staff resources, but on a reduced number of inspections.

Resolved: That the report be noted.

46. UPDATE FROM THE MEMBERS' DEVELOPMENT CONTROL AND PARKING WORKING GROUPS (Item No. 8)

There were no reports from Working Groups.

The Chairman announced that, following the examination of the Local Development Framework Core Strategy by the inspector, the aim to promote local listing had been included in the Strategy. He undertook to write to the relevant parish councils as had been planned by the Committee in April 2010.

THE MEETING WAS CONCLUDED AT 8.49 P.M.

Chairman

