

NORTHUMBERLAND COUNTY COUNCIL

PETITION COMMITTEE

At a meeting of the **Petition Committee** held on Thursday, 28 October 2021 at 2.00 p.m.

PRESENT

Councillor R. Dodd
(Chair, in the Chair)

MEMBERS

Ball, C.
Cessford, T.
Flux, B.

Gallacher, B.
Reid, J.
Wallace, A.

OFFICERS IN ATTENDANCE

N. Easton
N. Turnbull

Public Transport Manager
Democratic Services Officer

1. MEMBERSHIP AND TERMS OF REFERENCE

The Membership and Terms of Reference, as agreed by Council at the meeting on 26 May 2021, had been circulated for information.

RESOLVED that the Petition Committee's membership and terms of reference, as agreed by Council on 26 May 2021, be noted.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Swinburn, Ploszaj and Wearmouth.

3. MINUTES

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of the Petitions Committee held on Wednesday, 30 July 2020, as circulated, be confirmed as a true record and signed by the Chair.

Ch.'s Initials.....

4. REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF REGENERATION & EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF ADULT SOCIAL CARE AND CHILDREN'S SERVICES

4.1 Petition Requesting a Review of Arrangements for Non-Statutory Transport to Schools

The Petitions Committee were requested to acknowledge the petition received requesting a review of arrangements for non-statutory transport to schools for rural communities and to agree the Council's response. (A copy of the report is enclosed with the signed minutes).

The Democratic Services Officer read out the wording of the petition. It was confirmed that the Lead Petitioner had been invited to the meeting, but she had been unable to attend.

Neil Easton, the Public Transport Manager provided a summary of the report and key issues. He explained that following receipt of a number of queries identifying issues with the 688 service timetable, which covered Hexham, Allendale and Allenheads, the route had been included as part of a wider review undertaken of Hexham based services, prior to receipt of the petition.

Discussions had been held with Go North East which had resulted in a number of alterations to services which had come into effect on 24 July 2021, prior to the start of the 2021/22 academic year. Changes to the 688 service included all journeys extending through to Allenheads to enable students to use the service to access educational establishments in Hexham.

Whilst the service was not free, an under 19 single journey costs £1.20 or an under 19 student weekly saver ticket was available for £12, which was extremely competitive when compared with journeys on other public transport providers elsewhere in the county. He added that the service was one of many which would not operate without financial support from the Council. No complaints had been received following changes to the 688 timetable.

The Public Transport Manager confirmed that wider discussions were being held with operators to improve public transport in rural communities. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and impact on bus passenger numbers, weekly meetings were being held with local bus operators to assess whether services met need.

Members of the Petitions Committee commented that:

- The Committee provided an opportunity for issues to be discussed more thoroughly at a dedicated meeting, to allow engagement with residents who had concerns and enable issues to be addressed.
- They were delighted that officers had been proactive and had resolved the difficulties identified with the 688 service which enabled students to travel between Allenheads and Hexham at the beginning and end of the school day.

- Information be included in future reports regarding implications, particularly procurement, carbon reduction etc.
- The current price of fuel, which was extremely high, was likely to lead to a switch to public transport and assist in reducing individuals carbon footprint.

In response to questions from Committee the following information was provided:-

- The £12 student saver was a 5-day ticket. There was also a separate 7-day ticket.
- The issue with the 688-bus service. Had addressed the issue that had been raised within this petition. However, it was acknowledged that accessibility was an issue across the county. When officers were made aware of an issue, they would determine the scale of the problem and whether action was warranted, particularly when on a supported service. They would lobby the operator if on a commercial route.
- Partnership working was particularly good with operators at the present time given the challenges presented by covid-19 and support the public transport sector was receiving from both local and national government. It was hoped that this would continue.

Members were satisfied that the issues raised in the petition had been addressed.

RESOLVED that:

- (a) The issues raised in the petition, be noted.
- (b) The changes to the 688-service timetable made in conjunction with Go North East to address the concerns highlighted in the petition, be noted.
- (c) The ongoing regional work on the establishment of an enhanced bus partnership and the associated funding and network improvement opportunities arising from the initiative, be noted.

5. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Wednesday 26 January 2022 at 2.00 p.m.

CHAIR _____

DATE _____