
Minutes

Agenda item: 4
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Minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 15 September 2020 virtually over Zoom

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Present

Members

Jackie Ballard, Alan Benson, Arthur Leathley (Chair), Karen McArthur, Laura Osborne, Abdi Osman

Guests

Paul Harrison	Data Analyst (Item 9)
Billy Quinn	Managing Director, The Rail Ombudsman (Item 9)
Judith Turner	Deputy Chief Ombudsman (Item 9)

Secretariat in attendance

Tim Bellenger	Director, Policy and Investigation
Mike Brown	Casework Officer
Richard Freeston-Clough	Operations and Communications Manager
Emma Gibson	Director
Shahid Mohammed	Finance Manager (Item 10)
Luke Muskett	Committee and Public Liaison Officer
Anthony Smith	Chief Executive (Item 1 – 7)

1. Chair's introduction and pre-meeting announcements

The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting.

2. Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence but Safia Iman was not present.

3. Declarations of interest

There were no additional declarations of interest to declare.

4. Chair's activities and Transport Focus update

The Chair stated that it had been a busy time for London TravelWatch and Transport Focus. He and the Chief Executive had appeared before the London Assembly Transport Committee to give them an update on the organisation's work. He remarked that they had had a good, open discussion and members of the Committee had praised London TravelWatch several times, especially on the research they had done to prevent the removal of Zip Cards from young people. The Chair commented that after that meeting he had also had several discussions with Assembly Members regarding the GLA's future budget and the impact of that on London TravelWatch.

The Chair said that there had been some positive meetings with Transport for London (TfL) and that London TravelWatch was meeting with them more regularly than had been the case in the past, which was resulting in positive results for passengers. He added that the partnership between London TravelWatch and Transport Focus was progressing well and that staff from both organisations were increasing their collaboration with one another.

5. Minutes of previous meetings

The minutes were approved by the Board and would be signed by the Chair at a later date.

6. Matters arising (LTW627)

The Chair said that the outstanding item would be covered in a paper which would be reviewed by the Board in the private session of the meeting. All other items were confirmed as completed.

7. Director's report (LTW628)

The Director stated that the several things in the dashboard graphic at the top of the report had changed colour from amber to green, which demonstrated that things were moving in the right direction. Two items were still flagged as red: one was about the office move which hadn't been able to happen due to the pandemic and the other was around starting a campaign on buses which had also put on hold since the lockdown. She commented that the team might return to the bus campaign depending on how the Covid situation developed.

The Director said that London TravelWatch had received lots of positive feedback about the work they had been carrying out from their sponsors at the London Assembly and from stakeholders such as Transport for London (TfL). She stated that some of the work the organisation had carried out over the previous quarter included:

- Pressuring TfL to improve its website which had resulted in better communications and information for passengers
- Launching a 'Have Your Say' guide to inform transport users how they can get in contact with their local authority and/or TfL to give them feedback on the recent street changes that have been introduced
- Launching a digital campaign and so far registering nearly 2,000 people to become part of an online community who we could contact in future to understand their travel habits
- Producing a report on the impact of removing Zip Cards from young people following meetings with several youth councils, which has been very positively received
- Pressuring Eurostar to make their refunds policy clearer which they subsequently implemented
- Releasing a map showing both Thameslink stations and London Underground stations together to illustrate an alternative way to travel around the capital
- Persuading TfL to introduce a trial of 24/7 bus lanes on its network – something the organisation had called for over many years
- Hugely increasing London TravelWatch's media profile
- Feeding into discussions about London's future transport and ensuring that the voice of the passenger is heard in those meetings

The Director remarked that in terms of internal projects, the IT migration over to the same system as Transport Focus was completed and was already enabling staff to collaborate and work more closely together. She remarked that as well as this the appraisal objectives for staff had been set and there had been a lot of progress in creating a wellbeing plan for the team.

In terms of building relationships with key stakeholders, the Director commented that the collaboration work with Transport Focus was getting stronger each month. The relationship with TfL was continuing to improve with meetings happening several times a week and she and the team received updates from them daily. She remarked that there had been increased contact with London Assembly Members and their support staff, and London TravelWatch was keen to provide as much information and assistance to them as possible.

The Director said that London TravelWatch had successfully taken over the casework responsibilities from Transport Focus and that all work by the organisation had been delivered within the expected budget.

8. Impact of our influencing activity report (LTW630)

The Operations and Communications Manager said that the organisation had achieved a number of successes through their communications work. This included warning TfL about the information they were providing to passengers prior to the reopening of pubs and restaurants which resulted in them changing their guidance. London TravelWatch got a good amount of coverage following the fares increase announcement, which included a piece in *The Guardian*. The Director had taken part in a number of broadcast interviews for radio and television, and the organisation's profile was higher than it had been for many years.

The Operations and Communications Manager said that website views seemed to be mirroring the gradual increases of people returning to using public transport. On social media, the team had been publishing travel hacks each day on both Twitter and then replicated this on Facebook. He remarked that the active travel campaign was progressing well and were averaging adding 100 users per day to their new digital community. A member said that the use of the word 'forced' in the report when it mentioned TfL's preparedness for the July re-openings might be interpreted in the wrong way and should instead be amended to say 'persuaded'. The Operations and Communications Manager acknowledged the point and said he would ensure that future communications took this suggestion into account.

ACTION: Operations and Communications Manager

9. Billy Quinn, Judith Turner & Paul Harrison, The Rail Ombudsman

Billy Quinn, Judith Turner and Paul Harrison gave a presentation to the Board on the current state of the Rail Ombudsman. Mr Quinn put on record his thanks to the Head of Casework for all the assistance she had provided him and his staff since the organisation had been set up at the end of 2018.

A member asked how frequently the Ombudsman produced data and how this was shared with the Rail Ombudsman Scheme Council. She also asked how that information was shared with the industry to drive improvements in complaints handling. Mr Harrison replied that they published the data publicly in line with the ORR, and that there was a six-month delay between when the information was recorded and when it was published. Mr Quinn said that the Ombudsman regularly sat down with all Train Operating Companies (TOCs) that had had a case raised against them to try to get them to improve their practices, and data was shared with them on a near daily basis.

The Director asked whether a dashboard with a number of headings that was recommended in the RedQuadrant review into the Ombudsman would be included in future data reports. Mr Quinn replied that the Board of the Rail Ombudsman had been concerned with implementing the immediate recommendations from the report but were now at a stage where they could look at more medium/long term changes such as the implementation of a dashboard in their reports.

A member asked whether the Ombudsman had set a target level of satisfaction with passengers and TOCs to ensure the organisation was fair and impartial. She added that increasing the number of case studies that were displayed on the Rail Ombudsman website would help to inform the public of how they reached their decision in cases. Mr Quinn said that they did not have an internal target for satisfaction but were concerned about increasing the perception with both passengers and TOCs that the organisation was transparent and impartial. He added that he agreed that increasing the number of case studies on their website was a good idea and something they would be implementing.

A member asked what steps the Ombudsman took to go beyond the individual concern of a passenger to look for systemic problems within the industry. Ms Turner replied that they were collating the data from the various individual cases to try and use that to try to implement a broader change amongst operators. She remarked that she had spoken with London TravelWatch's Head of Casework about setting up a working group to help facilitate greater learning and to share their findings amongst their stakeholders.

A member said that he had seen some negative comments including some one- and two-star reviews of the Ombudsman by people online. He asked whether such things were followed up on by their staff. Ms Turner replied that if there was an issue in terms of the process such as not being able to get through to the Ombudsman over the phone, they would follow up on that. However, given the nature of being an ombudsman, typically one party would be happy with the outcome of a case whilst the other would not, which could result in negative reviews. Mr Quinn added that there would be no ombudsman that would have either a four-star or five-star review on average.

The Casework Officer said that the team had received cases labelled out of scope from the Rail Ombudsman which, when looking deeper into the case, would have elements that the Ombudsman could act upon. Ms Turner asked if some examples could be shared with her for the team to take a look at and see how this could be remedied. Mr Quinn added that they had asked for their remit to be revisited so that more things could be considered within their scope.

ACTION: Casework Officer

The Chair asked whether the Ombudsman was looking proactively at potential issues that would likely be coming along or were rather waiting until they had received a significant number of cases of a said issue and then going to the industry in order to resolve it. Ms Turner said that the organisation could only make recommendations to TOCs based on what they had received in casework. The Chair suggested that when the Ombudsman received an uptake in cases surrounding a particular issue that they be shared immediately with operators so that they can be acted upon. Mr Quinn remarked that the information that David Sidebottom at Transport Focus was providing them and the discussions with the Head of Casework was helping to improve their understanding of current and upcoming issues.

The Chair asked whether with hindsight it would have been better for the Rail Ombudsman to have started under the umbrella of the Office of Rail and Road

(ORR) rather than the Rail Delivery Group (RDG). Mr Quinn said that it would not have been possible to have foreseen how the Ombudsman would have developed over the two years it had been in operation, but it was a welcome change that the ORR was taking a more central role in overseeing the organisation.

10. Casework report (LTW629)

The Director said that the London TravelWatch had achieved a number of positive results for passengers despite the types of cases they had received becoming more complex and taking longer to resolve. Fewer than 25% of cases had an unsuccessful outcome, which given that many of the types of cases the team were handling were to do with policy issues rather than simpler cases was very good. The Director remarked that the Casework team had received an unusually high level of positive feedback from passengers thanking them for the work they had done on their behalf.

The Director said that there had been a drop in the number of cases received in May but that had been steadily rising since, with a high proportion of the complaints involving Eurostar. The closure rate of cases within 30 days continued to be very high. In terms of the types of cases they had received, there had been a significant proportion related to refunds and particularly passengers failing to get a response from the operator.

A member said that the data in the report was not as current as she would like. She stated that collecting the data up to the end of August should allow enough time for the Head of Casework to then write it up into a report. Another member commented that he believed that some of the data in the report was from external organisations such as TfL, which was why the report could not be produced earlier. The Director said she would speak to the Head of Casework to see if information in the report could be more recent than the current quarterly model.

ACTION: Director

A member stated that on page 3 of the report she was having difficulty seeing the different coloured segments of the pie chart. She asked if there was an alternative way of displaying the information, so it was easier to read.

ACTION: Head of Casework

11. Finance report (LTW631)

The Finance Manager said that the GLA had provided funding for the first half of the year. The next payment would go into London TravelWatch's bank account on 1 October 2020. With regards to expenditure, most costs were in line with forecast, with a slight variant on IT which had a positive variant of £8,000 to date. He said that the reason for the variant was because it had been assumed that the IT migration would have happened earlier in the year, but this would balance out once that money had been accounted for.

The Finance Manager stated that it was highly likely that the GLA would request in-year savings from London TravelWatch. In the latest budget review the organisation had identified savings of £12,000 as well as £4,000 they would be willing to give back from the reserves, making a total of £16,000. Also, in the current budget it was assumed that there would be a £10,000 spend on an office relocation and a £10,000 contingency for that. In terms of future year budgets, London TravelWatch had submitted figures to the GLA of a 10% to 50% cut in its budget and were expecting clarification from them on this in either October or November 2020.

The Chair asked whether the financial audit had been completed. The Finance Manager replied that it would be taking place the following day and it was hoped that by the end of the month it would be signed off. He added that this would be dependent though on London TravelWatch having evidence of being a going concern from the GLA.

A member asked how the payment received from the GLA would be affected by the requirement to make in-year savings. The Finance Manager replied that unless stated otherwise London TravelWatch would expect to receive their entire budget allocation and then would pay money back to the GLA if asked for them to do so.

12. Any other business

There was no further business to discuss.

13. Resolution to move into confidential session

It was resolved, under section 15(2)(b) of schedule 18 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999, that by reason of the confidential nature of the item(s) to be discussed, it was desirable in the public interest that the public should be excluded for a section of the meeting.