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## Minutes

Agenda item: 4  
Drafted 20.05.20

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### Minutes of the meeting of the Board held on 23 April 2020 virtually over Zoom

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#### Present

##### Members

Jackie Ballard, Alan Benson, Safia Iman (From Item 8), Arthur Leathley (Chair), Karen McArthur, Laura Osborne, Abdi Osman

##### Secretariat in attendance

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

## **1 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.

## **2 Chair's introduction and pre-meeting announcements**

The Chair welcomed those present to the meeting.

## **3 Apologies for absence**

There was an apology for absence from Safia Iman who would be slightly late.

## **4 Declarations of interest**

There were no additional declarations of interest.

## **5 Chair's activities and Transport Focus update**

The Chair said that he had been in regular contact with the Chief Executive and Director and that they were developing plans for the future. He commented that there was plenty of activity going on, particularly the joint working between London TravelWatch and Transport Focus. He passed over to the Chief Executive to give some more detail.

The Chief Executive remarked that it had been a strange few weeks though against that backdrop it had been productive period for both London TravelWatch and Transport Focus. He stated that in some ways the situation had accelerated the amount of joint working between the two organisations more than would have been the case if the lockdown had not been put in place. The Chief Executive commented that Transport Focus would be doing some insight work to track what people were thinking with regard to returning to travelling. He added that the two organisations had put a lot of work into staff welfare and ensuring that the teams were looked after as best as possible. He concluded that Transport Focus would be taking the opportunity to redesign their website, which would be done in conjunction with London TravelWatch.

The Chair asked the Director if there were any particular thoughts among the team. The Director replied that she believed morale was okay, though people had different living conditions so they would have to manage that. The Director, Policy and Investigation asked the Board how things had affected them. A member commented that she expected that it would take a long time for people to return to using modes of transport they perceived as high risk, such as the Underground and buses. She added that there would likely be a modal shift away from those forms of transport to walking, cycling and increased car use.

Another member remarked that he believed things will have changed for the long term. He added that there would also be financial implications for the various transport operators which would likely result in a reduction of service levels and

staffing to cut costs. Another member suggested that Crossrail 2 would be at risk. The Chair agreed and said that projects that would have been financially viable a year ago may no longer be justifiable in the current climate. A member commented that he expected that there would be much more home working to prevent people from cramming onto trains as they had previously done so.

The Chair said that London TravelWatch would be hosting a webinar to discuss the future of transport as we emerge from the lockdown. He stated that one of the opportunities of the current situation was that they were able to book speakers that usually would not be able to attend, such as one of the speakers who would be dialling in from Germany.

One member commented that the organisation would have to go back to the drawing board in terms of what a future joint office with Transport Focus should look like. She added that it would make sense to plan for three to four different scenarios of what a future work environment might look like.

## **6 Minutes of previous meetings**

The minutes from the Board meeting on 18 February were agreed by the Board and signed by the Chair as a correct record. A member commented that she would like to see a risk register. The Director replied that due to the current situation things had been delayed slightly. However, a meeting had been arranged with Jon Carter and Michelle Jackson (Transport Focus) to discuss this.

**ACTION: Director**

## **7 Director's discussion paper on the year ahead (LTW618)**

The Director said that she was now three months into her role. She remarked that it had been a challenge to identify a complete range of goals for the organisation given the current situation with the COVID-19 lockdown. Things which had been targeted at the start of the year, such as the bus campaign, had become less of a priority and new objectives were presenting themselves on a weekly basis. She commented, however, that there were certain things that the organisation would need to be doing regardless of how things changed over the coming months.

The Director said that London TravelWatch would need to continue to build its relationship with the London Assembly (GLA), carry on with its casework, implement IT changes, and make changes to its HR, among many other things. She commented that the biggest uncertainties going forward would be the advocacy and campaign work and, therefore, the organisation's workplan would have to be dynamic and reactive given the amount of unknowns at the current time.

The Director stated that London TravelWatch would be doing work around ticket refunds as well as some joint media and insights work with Transport Focus. They would also be hosting an online seminar in due course and she would be writing a blog to be released alongside that. The Director said that she had set out 14

objectives in her report but wanted to know from members whether these were correct and which ones should be prioritised.

A member commented that she felt numbers 5 and 6 were significant and needed to be prioritised. She added that completing casework should also be non-negotiable, and that numbers 10 and 11 would help a great deal with improving the campaigning side of London TravelWatch's work. Another member commented that there were certain things under the organisation's control, such as building the relationship with the GLA and Transport for London (TfL). However, there would be some unknowns that could not be planned for, and he suggested it would be wise to allow the organisation to have the flexibility to react to things as and when they came about.

Another member stated that building the relationship with the GLA was crucial, particularly demonstrating to the Assembly what can be achieved with the grant that had been allocated to them. The Chair commented that the wellbeing of staff was a key element, and agreed that showing London TravelWatch's worth to the GLA would be fundamental going forward. The Director replied that she was very mindful of ensuring the relationship with the GLA was maintained and strengthened, and that she and the management team were in regular contact with Assembly Members and their staff.

A member commented that building partnerships with other organisations such as the GLA, Transport Focus and Transport for All should be part of the key priorities going forward. The Director replied that she completely agreed and although she had not written it as a specific priority she saw it as a strategy to make London TravelWatch's work more impactful. One member remarked that London TravelWatch should be careful not to partner up with organisations simply because members of its board work or have some association with it. She stated that the partnership should always be justified as being important to achieve an objective in its own right. The member added that London TravelWatch could also reach out to certain advocacy groups, such as in cycling.

The Chief Executive said that the next few months would be the biggest opportunity for London TravelWatch and Transport Focus to make their mark and prove their worth to their sponsors. He agreed that forming alliances with certain groups would be very useful and suggested doing some insight work to discover which organisations would be best to partner with.

A member commented that developing London TravelWatch's social media and digital content should be prioritised. She added that she was aware that a tender had been put out for someone to develop a digital strategy for the organisation which she felt would be very welcome.

The Chair thanked everyone for their comments on the paper. He suggested that given the current climate that the priorities not be set in stone and that they could be changed if and when a new situation arose, and that they should continue to discuss it over the coming months.

The Casework Manager stated that her casework team had now started to take on cases from Transport Focus and that staff were learning how to process them, which was slightly different to the way London TravelWatch handled appeals. She said that all of the team were registered on the Transport Focus time management app 10,000 feet though for some this would be easier to input than others. The Casework Manager said that transferring over to the new CRM database system to handle cases had caused a number of IT issues which had increased the workload on the team.

In terms of the sorts of cases that had been received, the Casework Manager commented that they had received a lot of contact from Eurostar passengers. This was likely due to the fact that the company was issuing vouchers rather than cash refunds for unused tickets. With regards to COVID-19, she remarked that the industry had asked for an extension to the period by which cases had to be referred to the Rail Ombudsman as they had less staff available. Although the operators had originally asked for an extra 30 days both she and David Sidebottom at Transport Focus had resisted that. Instead operators would only be granted an extension by special request and the data would be monitored in order to scrutinise it as and when necessary. She said that the eligibility criteria of the Ombudsman should also be looked at.

The Casework Manager remarked that during this quiet period she had noticed that people had more opportunity to listen to London TravelWatch, particularly people at the Assembly. She said that she and the Senior Caseworker were continuing to stay in touch with their contacts at the various train operators to gain an understanding of what the situation was like under the lockdown. She added that she wanted to thank the Policy Team for supporting them.

A member asked how the takeover of incoming calls to the company Ventrica had gone. The Casework Manager replied that the transition had gone very well and that their staff were regularly in contact with her team. She stated that they had picked up how to handle the calls very quickly and were processing cases onto the system correctly. In terms of the database, the Casework Manager commented that the old system was outdated and continuously failing resulting in staff having to duplicate their work and was very time consuming. She said that by upgrading the Transport Focus system this had saved them a considerable amount of money and in the long term would mean that the issues they were having previously would no longer happen.

A member asked whether it would be beneficial to have a representative from the Rail Ombudsman attend a future London TravelWatch Board meeting to understand the issues they are having from their end. The Casework Manager remarked that the work the Ombudsman was doing was adequate - the problem was that it was restricted in terms of its remit. She suggested that the eligibility criteria should be changed so that cases were signposted to them within 20 working days as they used to do under London TravelWatch rather than the current eight weeks.

The Director stated that she wanted to thank the Casework Manager and her team for all the work they had done through the transition to the new database system in

very difficult circumstances. The Board also expressed their thanks for the efforts of the Casework Team.

## **9 Impact on our influencing activity report (LTW620)**

The Operations and Communications Manager said there had been a number of successes in the final quarter of the financial year in terms of influencing. London TravelWatch had managed to meet with representatives of three of the candidates for the Mayor of London and they had been very keen to incorporate the organisation's ideas into their manifestos. He remarked that a series of videos were produced to coincide with these meetings, and one in particular got over 3,000 views thanks from a retweet from Rory Stewart.

The Operations and Communications Manager said that London TravelWatch had been very proactive with regard to the Coronavirus situation. The team had been quick to put the most up-to-date information on the website so that it was readily available for passengers, and this was being updated regularly. The number of people visiting the website had held to around the same number as previous months in January and February but dropped down in the second half of March. He commented that this was likely due to the lockdown being put in place and fewer people using public transport.

## **10 Budget summary 2020-21**

The Finance Manager stated that he was still finalising the numbers for the finances for 2019/20 though it was looking like there would be a surplus of £4,000, which would be put into the organisation's reserves. In terms of the budget for 2020/21 this had now been agreed by the GLA. It contained a £10,000 cost for an office move, which may or may not be needed. He remarked that overall there was £74,500 that had been unallocated. However, some of that money would go to costs that had been unplanned. This included the delayed transfer of HR responsibilities to Transport Focus and delays to the IT migration. The Director commented that these additional costs had been triggered by the lockdown and she was working with colleagues at Transport Focus to try to reduce these as much as possible.

A member asked whether the £10,000 for office relocation included paying rent and service charges at the existing premises if no one could be found to rent out the space. The Finance Manager said that there had been no contingency for that in the figures. The Director commented that London TravelWatch would not be able to move offices without subletting their existing offices. She said that she was in conversations with the GLA about them possibly moving into the building. However, as had been stated previously, given the current situation, there may have to be a rethink around the whole idea of a shared office between London TravelWatch and Transport Focus.

The Chair asked the Finance Manager whether he knew when Transport Focus would be moving out of their premises. The Finance Manager replied that it had been originally slated for quarter 1 of 2021. However, this had been planned before the COVID-19 outbreak, and it was likely that this date would be postponed.

## 11 Any other business

A member asked what impact the lockdown was having on people's productivity. The Director replied she had been discussing this with the Chief Executive and that a staff survey would be sent around to people at both organisations to get their feedback about this. The Operations and Communications Manager said that he was feeling more productive than normal and that virtually everything that would have done in the office he could do at home. He added that he also felt healthier and less tired than normal. The Committee and Public Liaison Officer said that there were some positive things to working from home, particularly not having to do the daily commute. However, overall he said he preferred the social interaction of working in an office.

The Director, Policy and Investigation said that his team were not as productive working from home as they were not having in person meetings or the regular informal chats that normally took place when working from Europoint. He added that the team were also missing out from using the transport network and gaining intelligence of the current situation on the ground.