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**Secretariat memorandum**

Author: Richard Freeston-Clough

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Local engagement events

**1 Purpose of report**

- 1.1 To provide feedback on the transport user engagement events held in Bexleyheath and Edmonton Green and to determine whether any such events should be held in 2014/15.

**2 Background**

- 2.1 As part of its local engagement work over the last few years, London TravelWatch has held a series of transport user engagement events which were initially inspired by Bus Users UK's successful and long-running 'bus surgeries'. Whilst not statistically significant, what we learn from these events has contributed useful intelligence to our evidence base and helped us to remain connected with transport users on the ground.
- 2.2 In May 2013 the Board received a paper outlining the ways London TravelWatch engages with local user groups, community groups and specific groups of the travelling public. It agreed that the events planned for 2013/14 should go ahead and that there would be a review of the costs and benefits.

**3 Transport user events held during 2013/14**

- 3.1 Two London TravelWatch events were held in 2013/14; in Bexleyheath on Wednesday 30 October 2013 and in Edmonton Green on Saturday 22 March 2014. Both events ran between 10-2pm. We were based in Bexleyheath town centre for the first event where we handed out 130 surveys, with around 80 being returned while in Edmonton Green we were based on a bus parked opposite the station and we handed out around 250 surveys with 130 surveys returned to us either on the day or to our freepost address afterwards.
- 3.2 The purpose of the survey is to provide a snapshot of people's travel patterns but most importantly provide a framework for discussion that enables us to gather local views more widely.

**4 Key findings from the events held in Bexleyheath and Edmonton Green**

- 4.1 A large number of the people who returned the survey forms at both events, particularly freedom pass holders, commented that they were happy with public transport in the local area.

- 4.2 Both locations were reasonably busy throughout the time that London TravelWatch was there. People we spoke to were generally positive about transport in their area although people did seem less willing to stop and talk in Edmonton Green than at previous events. This may have had something to do with the fact that the weather was very cold and windy. However, those who did engage gave much more detailed feedback, particularly about buses, than perhaps has been the case at previous events.
- 4.3 Much of the feedback received at both events resonated with our 10 transport users' priorities, in particular '*A transport network open to all*', '*Enforcing the rules*' and '*A fair deal for travellers*', with some people complaining about the cost of travel and others complaining about the behaviour of school children on buses. Some passengers raised specific points about particular bus routes.
- 4.4 For the first time at Edmonton Green we informally asked people for their views on local bus services and survey feedback showed that although buses generally go where people want them to go, many people find buses overcrowded, especially users of the 279 and 149 buses which run along the Lea Valley corridor on Hertford Road.
- 4.5 The findings of the surveys circulated at Bexleyheath and Edmonton Green are examined in detail in the attached report which will also be sent to local councillors, Assembly members, MPs, TfL and operators in both areas.

## **5 Lessons learned from our transport events**

- 5.1 The focus of these events has changed over the five years we have been holding them as we have learned from our experiences, but they have always formed a useful means of better understanding local transport issues and maintaining general awareness. This is especially so if we go to areas with which the staff and Board are unfamiliar and have had few opportunities to visit. Several years ago we switched from using an area-specific survey form to using a generic one and began to focus more on having more detailed conversations with people as we filled them in.
- 5.2 The events have provided an opportunity to reach a wide audience with minimal demands on time and resources, to speak face-to-face with users of transport services helping us to keep in touch with the people that use public transport in London. They have an additional benefit of meeting the various local stakeholders and politicians, who regularly attend and have proved very supportive of our approach.
- 5.3 London is not necessarily homogenous in terms of its transport provision and needs, and local variations in service provision or quality will have a disproportionate impact on transport users' experiences. These events have helped us find out more about transport users' journey patterns and concerns in different parts of London. We have held events in areas with specific transport issues, for example, our event in Stratford allowed us to understand usage of the transport network in the main host borough in advance of the 2012 Games while our Harrow event gave us an opportunity to discuss changes to the Metropolitan Line timetable which we thought might be controversial.

- 5.4 Although we have learned a great deal from these events which can be applied to future events, one other important lesson is that however well prepared we are for these events, there are often local factors on the day which mean things do not always quite go as planned. For example, roadworks in Stratford meant we had to park the operator-provided bus we used as a base in a different place and it was very cold and windy in Edmonton Green and this, along with the location of the bus (as suggested by Enfield Council), may have contributed to the fact that fewer completed surveys were returned to us.

## **6 Financial and resources implications**

- 6.1 Holding our own engagement events requires more resources than attending events or meetings organised by others. However, experience of organising these events has improved our efficiency and the planning process now takes minimal time. On the day, we need four or five members of staff, including one Policy Officer and preferably the Communications Officer, supported by other staff and supplemented by staff from other agencies when appropriate.
- 6.2 Recent engagement events have each cost around £250 as we have bulk purchased generic survey forms and marketing materials to cut costs.

## **7 Risk implications**

- 7.1 Before 2011, when we had a larger Board (12 + Chair), we had a programme of regular annual meetings with individual London boroughs and/or attendance at local forums. This was seen as important to help inform our understanding of key transport concerns across London. The reduction in size of the Board and staff establishment meant it was no longer possible to sustain this level of local engagement although we continue to receive notes of many local transport forums.
- 7.2 Despite our emphasis on wider strategic issues, there are nevertheless risks associated with having reduced contact with local communities or user groups. The organisation would miss out on opportunities to engage with our key 'constituency' of transport users on the ground which can add credibility by helping to demonstrate that we are in touch and inform our wider work. We could also miss out on opportunities to increase local awareness of London TravelWatch's work.
- 7.3 There is a reputational risk if we get drawn into highly localised 'non-strategic' issues and if we do not properly use the evidence we gather to help inform our wider work.

## **8 Equalities implications**

- 8.1 Some of the events have represented an opportunity to answer questions about transport accessibility, especially in respect of buses, with disabled travellers who previously may not have considered travel by public transport as an option.
- 8.2 Our transport users' engagement events allow us to target areas where we might reach sections of the community which are hard to reach and who may not be represented in our casework enquiries.

## **9 Prioritisation criteria**

- 9.1 Edmonton Green is a major retail destination in North East London, is served by a busy rail station and has a bus station served by a number of routes covering a substantial part of North and East London.

9.2 Bexleyheath is a busy retail destination in South East London, is served by a busy rail station and also a significant number of local services which connect the area to a significant proportion of South London and North West Kent.

9.3 All the other locations we have visited were chosen for similar reasons.

## **10 Recommendations**

10.1 Members are asked to consider the attached report on the Bexleyheath and Enfield events and to agree the frequency with which similar events will be held in future. Possible locations to visit include Walthamstow and Ilford, which will be affected by the new Greater Anglia franchise, and Ealing or Southall, on the Crossrail route, and which would give us an opportunity to engage sections of the community which are harder to reach.