

## **Scrutiny Review - Southern Rail Ticket office closures and general levels of service**

### **Report by the Director for Digital and Resources**

#### **1.0 Summary**

- 1.1 This report provides a briefing to assist the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JOSC) in undertaking its review looking at proposed changes to Southern Rail Ticket offices operating procedures. The Committee also wish to discuss the recent problems with the general level of rail services being provided by Southern Rail which are adversely affecting local residents, businesses and visitors to the area. JOSC has the ability to review public services and make recommendations only with a view to influencing outcomes. JOSC, however, does not have the power to make the rail company act in a particular way. As part of its fact finding/investigative role, JOSC will have the opportunity to put questions to GTR/Southern Rail representatives and to the RMT representatives.

#### **2.0 Background**

- 2.1 As part of its Work Programme for 2016/17, JOSC has agreed to undertake an indepth review/themed meeting to examine the proposals by Southern Rail to change ticket office operating procedures at local stations in Adur and Worthing and also to examine the general poor level of service provided by Southern Rail during recent months. The Committee assessed the suitability of this item for review in accordance with the 'PAPER' assessment criteria. This particular issue has a large public interest but the Committee has the role of gathering information and asking questions on behalf of the public to find some answers to the issues.
- 2.2 There has been been significant media coverage on the impacts of service levels on the Southern network for the Adur and Worthing Community. Concerns about ticket office opening arrangements have focused on safety and service level, in particular for vulnerable members of the community. Service disruption have had significant impacts, affecting people employment, opportunities for local investment, connections with family and the community, and the Adur and Worthing's reputation as a places to live, visit, work and invest.

## **Proposed changes to Southern Rail Ticket offices operating procedures**

- 2.3 In February 2016, Southern Rail/Govia Thameslink Railway (GTR) undertook a public consultation on its plans to change the ticket office opening arrangements affecting 51 stations across London, Sussex and Surrey including stations in the Adur and Worthing areas. Under these proposals some ticket office windows are to be closed and others would only be staffed at peak times. Plans would also be put in place for ticket office staff to operate on the station concourses as station hosts in a range of changes aimed at improving customer experience.
- 2.4 The RMT Union have said that the proposals will have a 'devastating impact' both to the safety and service offered to passengers. It has said that there will be fewer staff to help passengers while some staff will be left alone, often late at night, carrying money from ticket sales which could make them vulnerable to attack. The Union has also claimed that 130 jobs are at risk but that has been denied by GTR. The Union are also concerned that GTR revised station modernisation plans announced in the consultation document on 9 June 2016, include plans to cut hours or close ticket offices at a number of stations across the Southern Network, including Lancing, Shoreham and Worthing. RMT members working as ticket office and station staff were balloted by their union in July over industrial action and a majority voted for this action with a date set in early September. However, following progress in talks between the RMT and GTR, the union suspended the strike action.

## **General level of rail services being provided by Southern Rail**

- 2.5 Following a ballot of its Conductor grade members in April which found an overwhelming majority of Southern Conductors were in favour of industrial action, the RMT members have taken nine days of industrial action over a six month period since April against Southern GTR's proposal to extend Driver Only Operations. The Union claims that this proposal would see passengers lose the present guarantee of a second member of staff on their trains, with an increase in the number of Southern passenger services which would only have a driver on board and on other services the On-Board Supervisor would not have the same level of safety critical training that the Conductor currently has. The most recent industrial action on the role of the Conductor and Driver Only Operations was held on 7 and 8 September. GTR has stated that all Southern services currently having a conductor on board will continue to have a second person rostered for the service, whilst having the ability during disruption to avoid cancellations if on board staff are not present.
- 2.6 On 9 August 2016, the RMT offered to suspend planned industrial action over the Conductors and Driver Only Operations extension dispute on the condition that GTR and the Department for Transport used the offer given to the Union by ScotRail as part of a similar dispute with the Union in Scotland but that offer was rejected.
- 2.7 On 30 August 2016, Southern Rail announced that it would reinstate 119 of the 341 daily train services it had cut when introducing an Emergency Timetable for Southern Services from 11 July. The 119 services came back into its timetable with

effect from 5 September 2016 and are almost exclusively on London Metro routes. Prior to the emergency timetable being put in place, a Remedial Plan for Southern services had been agreed between GTR and the Department of Transport and introduced in February.

2.8 More recently, on 1 September, the Government announced that it would provide a £20m fund and create a review board in order to improve Southern Rail services to 'get to grips' with problems with the network. The Transport Secretary, Chris Grayling, has said that the review board will explore how to achieve rapid improvement for the public. The Board will be headed by former Virgin Rail Chief Operating Officer, Chris Gibb and the Board will also have a passenger representative. The £20m fund will aim to tackle problems on lines:-

- £2m will be provided for rapid response teams to fix faults more quickly,
- £2.5m will be provided for accelerated train maintenance,
- £0.8m will be provided for extra signal supervisors, and
- £0.9m will be provided for measures to minimise the impact of bridge strikes.

2.9 The Transport Secretary said that the railway is not running well enough and that there was a need for the Unions and Southern Rail/GTR/Network Rail to work together to ensure that there were real tangible benefits for passengers.

### **3.0 Consideration by the Joint Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

3.1 The Committee has requested that these matters be considered as part of the Work Programme on behalf of local residents.

3.2 JOSOC has the ability to review public services and make recommendations only with a view to influencing outcomes. JOSOC, however, does not have the power to make the rail company act in a particular way.

3.3 As part of its fact finding/investigative role, JOSOC will have the opportunity to put questions to GTR/Southern Rail representatives and to the RMT representatives.

### **4.0 Proposals**

4.1 The Committee should receive/review the information relating to rail services in the area from GTR and the RMT Union and consider, having regard to the facts presented, what recommendations can be made to improve the general level of rail services in Adur and Worthing.

### **5.0 Legal**

5.1 In accordance with the Council's Constitutions JOSOC has the ability to review issues which affect Adur and Worthing residents and the services that they receive and where appropriate can make recommendations for improving those services.

5.2 Section 1 of the Localism Act 2011 provides a Local Authority to do anything that individuals generally may do (subject to any current restrictions or limitations prescribed in existing legislation).

## **6.0 Financial implications**

6.1 There are no known financial implications for the Councils arising from this report although there may be financial implications from any recommendations which the Committee proposes.

## **7.0 Recommendation**

**7.1 That the Committee consider the questions raised and the facts presented during the meeting and agrees a priority list of both Member and public concerns to be put to Southern Rail with a view to influencing improvements to the Service generally on behalf of the public.**

### **Local Government Act 1972**

#### **Background Papers:**

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## **Schedule of other matters**

### **1.0 Council Priority**

1.1 Matter considered and issues related to Council Priorities identified.

### **2.0 Specific Action Plans**

2.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

### **3.0 Sustainability Issues**

3.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

### **4.0 Equality Issues**

4.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

### **5.0 Community Safety issues (Section 17)**

5.1 Matter considered and no direct issues identified.

### **6.0 Human Rights Issues**

6.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

### **7.0 Reputation**

7.1 Matter considered and no issues identified for the Councils.

### **8.0 Consultations**

8.1 Matter considered and no direct consultations have been undertaken as part of this report.

### **9.0 Risk assessment**

9.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

### **10.0 Health & Safety Issues**

10.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

### **11.0 Procurement Strategy**

11.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.

### **12.0 Partnership working**

12.1 Matter considered and no issues identified.