
Executive Minutes

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Agenda item : 5b
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Minutes of a meeting of the London TravelWatch Executive Group
held at 6 Middle Street, London EC1 on 18 March 2010, 2.25 – 5.00 pm

Present:

Sharon Grant (SG) Chair

David Barry (DB)

Gail Engert (GE)

David Leibling (DL)

Sarah Pond (SP)

Janet Cooke (JC)

Patti Tobin (PT)

Peter Ellis (PE)

Chief Executive

Director, Finance & Personnel

Senior Finance Officer (minute 5)

1. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from Lorna Reith (LR). David Barry (as Vice Chair of the Consumer Affairs Committee) attended as had been previously agreed because SP had not expected to be able to attend this meeting.

2. Minutes of meeting held on 22 February 2010

There was discussion about the wording of minute 9 in respect of the letter received from the Chair of the Transport Committee and it was agreed that, rather than amend the minute before signing, this particular minute should be redrafted and the minutes for the February meeting signed at the beginning of the April meeting of the Executive Group.

JC

Members agreed that from time to time it might be necessary to produce confidential minutes in order to record discussion which would not be appropriate to make public. JC agreed to clarify whether or not the formal business of the organisation could be conducted without the presence of officers.

JC

3. Matters arising

Database of local issues – JC circulated a briefing note prepared by the Communications Officer. This summarised the information which was collected about key contacts and transport issues in each London borough, as well as the information about statutory consultations which London TravelWatch now sends out to individual

boroughs as appropriate. As previously requested, the note included a summary of transport issues in Camden and Islington. SP asked to be provided with a similar summary for the boroughs with which she was linked. **JC**

Mayor's road management summit – JC confirmed that the Senior Policy Officer (Streets and Surface) had circulated details of the invitation we had received to all members of the Board in February. Teena Lashmore had attended, as well as DL who had been separately invited in his capacity as Chair of TfL's Red Route Forum. However, members had not been clear that this event was the much heralded road summit. Members requested that a system be established to ensure there was central co-ordination of such activity in future, and also requested that copies of the summary of the Mayor's 'Smoothing the Traffic' initiative which had been distributed at the event be obtained and circulated to the whole Board. **JC**

TfL communications – SG reported that, subsequent to the meeting that had taken place with TfL's Managing Director Marketing and Communications and a range of communications staff, we had been invited to chair the stakeholder meetings which London Underground were organising in order to consult on the arrangements for the closure programme for the Northern Line upgrade. This proposal was greeted enthusiastically by the Executive Group who agreed that SG should chair these meetings and that, associated with this, London TravelWatch should organise its own major campaign to find out the views of passengers. **JC**

Work with the NHS – SG announced that she wanted to discuss with JC and the Senior Policy Officer (Streets and Surface) how London TravelWatch might be able to have a more systematic input into working with the NHS on improving access to healthcare facilities. **SG**

Transport user surgeries – It was agreed that the Romford event had been a success. A press release had been issued subsequently to clarify the arrangements for renewing Freedom Passes as a lot of local people had not properly understood this. Arrangements were in hand for a wheelchair user who had not previously realised that buses in London were fully accessible to have an accompanied introduction to the network. This visit would be publicised as appropriate to encourage passengers with mobility difficulties to use buses.

Board issues – GE confirmed that she would be discussing with members of the Access to Transport Committee whether there was sufficient space in the 2010 workplan to do further work on the transport issues affecting young people. **GE**

4. Chair's update

SG updated members on meetings she had been involved in over the past month:

- **Peter Hendy** – SG and JC had had a constructive meeting with the Transport Commissioner, who had outlined the upcoming issues facing TfL in the current financial climate
- **Head of Marketing (TfL)** – SG and JC had had a useful meeting to discuss what London TravelWatch might do to raise awareness of its work and what kind of opportunities might be available in the current climate to generate income

- **Head of Research (TfL)** – SG, accompanied by Sophia Lambert and our Director of Research and Development, had met to follow up previous discussions about how we could have greater access to TfL’s research. TfL had agreed that we could have a question in its next omnibus survey to test public awareness of London TravelWatch.

SG also confirmed that the Olympics would be a key theme for the July Board meeting and speakers were being identified for this already. With respect to the draft Board and committee workplan which had been discussed at the February meeting, JC said that after consultation with committee lead officers this would be turned into a calendar for 2010-11 which would give a framework for agenda planning for the rest of the year.

5. Finance report and accounts for February 2010

PE introduced his report by pointing out that, although the final outturn position would not be known for a few more weeks, it seemed that financial forecasting had been fairly accurate throughout the year. Following discussion the report was noted.

PT said that he would make some amendments to the format in which the monthly accounts were presented to the Executive in the next financial year to make them easier to read by reducing the number of columns and increasing the font size. He also confirmed that a recommendation would be made to the next meeting in respect of whether any of the reserves should be earmarked for a particular purpose during 2010-11.

PE

In answer to a question, PT reminded members that the budget for next year against key expenditure heads had been agreed when the budget and business plan had been recommended to the Transport Committee in September 2009. Members requested that, once the detailed figures underlying these key headings had been recast to reflect current requirements, the 2010-11 budget should be presented to the Board.

PT

6. Chief Executive’s report

JC highlighted the key points of her report which updated the Executive with a number of staffing changes that had taken place over the past month, as well as describing the programme of training and development activity that continued to be delivered for staff. Her report also described the proposed arrangements for paying members’ travel expenses via prepaid London TravelWatch PAYG Oyster cards from April where possible, not only should this be more convenient for members it would also reduce considerably the amount of staff time needed to process such expenses.

7. Sickness absence management

PT tabled a confidential report which set out anonymised details of staff sickness where absence levels were causing concern, and described the measures that had been taken in respect of each case. The report also explained further changes to general procedures that had been put in place in recent months, such as asking job applicants about their previous sick absence record rather than relying on requesting this information when references were taken up, and by withdrawing flexi-time privileges from staff with long-term / persistent short-term sick absence. She confirmed that the

work being put in to address the long-standing problem of very high sickness rates was paying dividends but this was a very time consuming and lengthy process.

The report was discussed in some detail following which members requested that an external independent review be commissioned, using this report as a starting point, to consider whether there were lessons to be learned from the way in which staff sickness had been handled this year, and whether London TravelWatch's practices should be further amended.

PT

8. Communications strategy and workplan for 2010-11

DL opened discussion on this item by noting that the activities proposed by the Communications Officer now needed to be translated into a more detailed action plan, he also expressed his concern that communications activity should not focus too much on marking anniversaries as this could make the organisation look old fashioned.

SG added that communications activity needed to be more closely linked to business plan objectives, and that the plan presented lacked strategic direction. She remained concerned that the organisation's media work was too driven by the needs of the media rather than the experiences of the public. SG said she wanted the organisation to be less reactive and direct resources in the coming year to opening up the organisation to travelling public, so that in time we could better represent their views. Some work had been undertaken already - the local transport user surgeries were good and we needed to build on these as well as going out to local events organised by others. The new 'how to complain' booklet, the planned 'your rights as a passenger' document, as well as the re-vamped website would be valuable in this respect. We also needed to investigate ways of using social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter to obtain views from the public.

GE observed that having a couple of relevant campaigns would help to raise London TravelWatch's profile.

DL pointed out that London fell between two stalls now that the Metro and Evening Standard were the only London-wide newspapers, other than these there were only local papers which dealt with extremely local issues or the national press. He added that reporters did read local papers to pick up issues with a wider significance.

JC reminded the group that if the organisation wanted to raise its profile in the media it had to respond to current issues. Even if not all our press releases were picked up at the time they meant that London TravelWatch's view was publicised and we had evidence that journalists and others did refer to our archived news to find out our views on key issues, our views might be quoted at a later date. She confirmed that, whilst it was difficult to get coverage in the national papers as they were concerned not to be seen as London-centric, we did send out a lot of information to London's local papers. SG said she thought the effect of this was minimal.

It was agreed that, although we should keep issuing press releases as appropriate on major issues, we should not invest too much time in following these up.

It was also agreed that our involvement in the Northern Line upgrade consultation work presented a huge opportunity to find out the views of passengers and promote these

widely. This should be a major piece of work for the Communications Team over the next few months.

JC

9. London Assembly review of London TravelWatch

The Executive Group discussed the paper that had been put to the London Assembly's Business Management and Administration Committee and expressed concern that there appeared to be a lack of understanding of our role. For example, London TravelWatch is an appeals body rather than a complaints body and has a different statutory remit from that of the Assembly's Transport Committee. Concern was also expressed that having serving politicians on the Board, and having the organisation's business discussed in a political forum at the Transport Committee, might lead to London TravelWatch being perceived as a political organisation which could compromise its independence. Members re-affirmed that party politics had never featured in London TravelWatch's work.

It was pointed out that the review would, however, provide a good opportunity to publicly demonstrate how far the organisation had progressed in recent years.

JC reported back on initial discussions she had held with GLA officers about the practical arrangements for gathering evidence. SG expressed her disappointment that there had not been any opportunity to engage with the London Assembly about the parameters for the review, she also flagged up her concern about the time pressures the review would present for staff, and asked the Chief Executive to keep a note of the time taken on this.

The Executive Group agreed that the Board should be interviewed together rather than individually.

10. Evaluation report on 22.2.10 Awayday

It was generally agreed that the Awayday had been a very challenging day and, having raised expectations, it was important that the whole organisation should see changes as a result.

SG was concerned at the number of issues arising for the SMT during the hot seat exercise and was keen to see an action plan to address these. DL noted that the business plan should be the key focus for the Board and staff in working together.

11. Passenger Focus internal review of appeals function

DL's summary of the key findings of Passenger Focus's internal review of its appeals function was noted and it was agreed that it would be useful for him to discuss these in more detail with SP as well as with the new Casework Manager.

DL

12. Board issues –

- a) **Board meeting, 23.03.10** – SG noted that this meeting would look particularly at how operators communicated with passengers. There would be a

confidential briefing during the afternoon on the key findings to date of our bus research. (The July meeting had already been discussed, minute 4 refers.)

- b) **Committee report backs of key issues arising from meetings** – No reports were made other than as already raised in minute 3 above.

13. Any other business –

DL expressed his concern that some Board members seemed to be rather detached and did not always respond to requests for information, SG should not have to chase these up. It was particularly important that members report back when they had made contact with local authority transport leads in any way. This should be raised in the private session at the forthcoming meeting.

JC / 3.4.10