
Minutes

Agenda item : 4
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**Minutes of the Consumer Affairs Committee meeting held on 17 November 2010
at 6 Middle Street, London EC1**

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Present

Members

David Barry (Chair), Terry Bennett, Daniel Francis (Vice-Chair), Sophia Lambert, Teena Lashmore, Sarah Pond, Sharon Grant (London TravelWatch Chair), Lorna Reith (London TravelWatch Vice-Chair)

Stakeholder Representatives

Matt Winfield Stakeholder Engagement Manager, Transport for London (TfL)

Secretariat

Janet Cooke	Chief Executive
Bryan Davey	Director, Public Liaison
Jo deBank	Communications Officer (for Item 10)
Sharon Malley	Senior Committee Administrator (minutes)

Minutes

1 Chair's introduction and pre-meeting announcements

The Chair welcomed members, officers and guests to the meeting and apologised for the slightly late start, caused by a delay on the Northern line.

2 Declarations of interest

There were no additional declarations of interest.

3 Apologies for absence

There were no apologies for absence.

4 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting on 15 September 2010 were approved and signed as a correct record.

5 Matters arising (CA060)

5.1 Website complaints and work of the Office of the Rail Regulator

The Director, Public Liaison had been liaising with the Office of the Rail Regulator on ensuring that complaints that occur because of the need to transfer between different operators' websites were captured rather than falling through the cracks. The Director, Public Liaison reported that he had raised this at a meeting with Nick Wortley at the ORR who was considering it along with a range of other website-related issues. It was agreed that London TravelWatch should seek an update on progress from the ORR in the new year.

Action: Director, Public Liaison

5.2 How to Complain leaflet distribution

The Director, Public Liaison reported that a distribution list had been prepared for the complaints leaflet that included MP's offices, transport officers at local authorities, Citizens' Advice Bureaux, London Assembly members and others. The leaflet could be sent to those on the list very soon. In addition, the leaflets would be available to send directly to potential complainants who contacted the organisation.

After this, some research work would be carried out on other potential recipients such as libraries or train stations and a further distribution would be carried out. It was agreed that the Director, Public Liaison would report to the next committee on where the leaflets had been distributed and would seek advice from members on whether any potential recipients had been overlooked. In addition, the Director, Public Liaison would report on the use of the online version.

Action: Communications Officer

5.3 Customer satisfaction questionnaire distribution

The Director, Public Liaison confirmed that satisfaction questionnaires were not issued to everyone who contacted London TravelWatch, for example they were not sent to those who were referred on to other organisations for assistance. These individuals were screened out manually and the questionnaires were then sent to everyone else.

5.4 Introduction of a new service standard

It was agreed that the casework team would consider implementing a new service standard to give complainants informal progress reports every 15 working days from April 2011 and this would be included in the workplan. A paper with the proposed new service standard would be produced for the next meeting.

Action: Director, Public Liaison

6 Actions taken (CA061)

6.1 Department for Transport

The Chief Executive reported on the meeting with the Department for Transport, at which the ghost bus issue and Thameslink were discussed. It was noted that several key contacts at the DfT would shortly be leaving and senior London TravelWatch officials would seek to meet the successors in the posts in order maintain continuity.

6.2 European Union

It was reported that the EU was putting significant emphasis on passenger rights and would be focussing on multi-modal representation over the next year. It was noted that this meeting had been held in London and that this represented an opportunity for the organisation to liaise with the EU at relatively little expense.

6.3 Risk register

It was noted that London TravelWatch was currently undergoing significant organisational change and that this represented significant additional risk, which the Chief Executive was managing through initiatives such as the internal review. The Director, Public Liaison noted that the risk register was primarily concerned with assessing the risk of deviating from agreed actions whereas the current position for London TravelWatch was that it was in a state of change therefore its agreed actions were no longer clear.

The Chair noted that the list of meetings was incomplete and that she had not been present at all the meetings indicated.

7 Casework report (CA062)

The Director, Public Liaison presented the Casework report and highlighted significant improvements in targets 1 and 2. Operators were performing more consistently, with target

3 showing relatively consistent response times. Outcomes for targets 4 and 5 had also shown improvement.

There was still a considerable number of enquiries relating to London buses, but a previous area of concern, Docklands Light Railway ticket machines, had been largely resolved as faults were being reported more quickly and more complaints were going directly to the operator.

Members welcomed the performance statistics and passed on their congratulations and thanks to the Casework Manager and members of the Casework team.

It was noted that a very high proportion of contacts in relation to London Buses were enquiries that did not lead to substantive work (973 out of 1,057). The Director, Public Liaison stated that many enquiries about buses related to issues such as lost property or arguments with drivers and the caseworkers were simply referring the enquiries on to the correct place. In addition, a large number of complaints about buses took place by phone on the spot and London TravelWatch's number was clearly available on buses and cheaper than that advertised for the bus company.

It was noted that it would be useful to understand more about the nature of the enquiries London TravelWatch received about buses to assist with targeting future campaigns, such as improving signage of lost property or lobbying about improving driver behaviour.

Action: Director, Public Liaison

It was agreed that the Director, Public Liaison would investigate the recording of complaints about the cycle hire scheme to ensure consistent reporting. In addition, he would review whether complaints about Oyster products were being reported in the Transport for London category or the Oyster Helpline category.

Action: Director, Public Liaison

Members noted that if complaints about National Rail services were removed from the casework report it would have a negative effect on the performance report and a knock-on effect on London TravelWatch's satisfaction surveys. It would be important to ensure that complaints data in future was compared like-for-like and this may need considering further at the end of the financial year when targets were reviewed as a whole.

Members discussed the possibility of publicising some aspects of the casework report. It was agreed that it might be beneficial to publicise response times for those operators who had, for example, more than five complaints a quarter and who were performing badly.

The Chief Executive reported that she would be meeting with David Brown at Transport for London shortly and would raise some of these concerns with him.

8 Stakeholder questionnaire report (CA063)

The Director, Public Liaison presented the findings of the stakeholder questionnaire report. He reported that overall the figures were positive and satisfaction levels were good.

There had been a reduction in response rates over the most recent period, which could perhaps be attributed to a change in working practices. At present, the questionnaire was issued separately to the case closure correspondence in the hope that it would reduce the possibility of bias within the questionnaire returns. However, this led to a gap between closing the case and issuing the questionnaire, which may have had the effect of reducing the motivation of recipients to return the questionnaires. Response rates were higher in the past when the questionnaires were issued at the same time as the final case correspondence and it was likely that this practice would be re-established in future.

Members discussed the demographic profile of the individuals who returned the stakeholder survey and it was noted that there was a continuing bias towards older men and commuters, and that anecdotally this would represent a fair snapshot of those using London TravelWatch's services.

Some of the disparity could perhaps be attributed to the difference in "basket price" between a rail season ticket and one-off bus fare, with people more motivated to complain about the more valuable service. In addition, rail passengers and season ticket holders have more rights than bus passengers. Given that the demographic of season ticket holders is different to that of the average passenger, this might to some extent explain the higher prevalence of older, male commuters among the complainants.

It was noted that London TravelWatch was a second-stage organisation and that it could only deal with complainants who had already exhausted the transport operators' own complaint procedures. It was therefore important to understand what operators already did in relation to inclusion and what the demographic profile of the operators' complainants was. Pressure could then be applied on the operators to improve inclusion.

It was agreed that although many of the reasons for the apparent mismatch between transport users and complainants were outside its control, London TravelWatch should work where it could to influence this area.

It was important that the How to Complain leaflet was distributed in a way that promoted inclusion and this should take place as quickly as possible. In addition, the Communications Officer should seek editorial in targeted periodicals (such as those aimed at people with disabilities or other target groups) based on the publication of the How to Complain leaflet. The bus surgeries presented another opportunity to reach under-represented complainants.

It may be worthwhile to pilot the production of a cheap How to Complain flyer and distribute it at one or two strategic interchanges to see if it increased complaint levels and improved inclusion in those areas.

It was agreed that there would be a report back to the next meeting showing progress in this area, particularly in relation to leaflet distribution.

Action: Director, Public Liaison and Communications Officer

9 Tariffed telephone numbers

9.1 Ofcom consultation

The Director, Public Liaison reported that the Ofcom consultation on the use of tariffed telephone numbers was due to publish recommendations in mid-December. The first round of consultation had brought many responses similar to London TravelWatch's, expressing significant consumer concern about the move away from geographic phone numbers.

9.2 TfL Equalities Impact Assessment screening on move to non-geographical number

In response to questions from London TravelWatch, Transport for London provided a copy of its internal Equalities Impact Assessment screening in relation to its move from a geographical number to an 0843 number for London travel information. The 0843 number was charged at 5 pence per minute from BT landlines but cost between 5 and 30 pence per minute from mobile phones.

Members welcomed TfL's willingness to share internal documentation with London TravelWatch and recognised that the screening and had not been prepared in the same way as documents intended for public view.

Nevertheless, members did note some concerns with the content of the document. It was noted that there was no assessment of the impact that the change would have on households with low fixed incomes and that the assessment of the impact on people with disabilities was somewhat shallow. Members believed the assessment should have been broken down into greater detail and that the screening suggested the need for a full Equalities Impact Assessment that had not been carried out.

Members noted that the screening report stated that consultation had taken place with London TravelWatch when in fact there had only been informal discussions on the subject. In addition, there was no indication on the screening document that London TravelWatch had raised any objection to the change. Matt Winfield of TfL suggested that some of the problem may be caused by the inflexibility of the form.

Members were concerned about the overall quality of the document and did not believe that a decision about equalities could have been made based on the information in the report. The report appeared to be more focused on the technical aspects of the scheme than addressing issues of equalities and inclusion.

Matt Winfield offered to arrange a meeting between London TravelWatch and TfL's Head of Equality and Inclusion to discuss some of the concerns members had raised. It was agreed that this would be beneficial once the Ofcom recommendations had been published and feedback had been generated about the impact of the loss of the geographical number.

Action: Director, Public Liaison

10 Website update

The Communications Officer demonstrated some of the changes that had recently been made to the London TravelWatch website. She explained that the main rationale for the improvements had been to upgrade the content management system and as a side-effect of the work there had been an opportunity to improve some of the customer-facing pages.

The home page now contained links to travel information and how to make a complaint, with the aim that passengers would be able to reach all relevant pages in no more than three clicks. A new consultation page had been created but was not yet complete and a consumer page, with information on how consumer could travel cost-effectively, was also in production.

The Communications Officer reported that some bugs remained and were on a list of things for the contractor to fix, including problems with viewing the drop-down menus in Internet Explorer.

It was agreed that there would be a further presentation about the website at the next meeting, focusing on the changes to the consumer pages.

Action: Communications Officer

11 Any other business

There was no other business.

12 Resolution to move into confidential session

The meeting resolved, under section 15(b) of schedule 18 of the Greater London Authority Act 1999, that by reason of the confidential nature of the next following item/s, that it was desirable in the public interest that the public should be excluded from the meeting.

In confidential session, members reviewed the meeting.