

Rother District Council

Report to:	Cabinet
Date:	3 October 2022
Title:	Future of Rail Station Ticket Offices
Report of:	Malcolm Johnston
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Sue Prochak
Ward(s):	Not applicable
Purpose of Report:	To inform Members of concerns around the future of rail ticket offices and to propose a course of action should these concerns be realised.
Decision Type:	Non-Key

Officer

Recommendation(s): It be **RESOLVED:** That:

- 1) the Chief Executive be requested to write to the train operating companies asking that the Council is kept informed of any proposed changes to ticketing arrangements within the district; and
- 2) should information be received that changes are planned, the matter be referred to the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a recommendation that representatives from the rail operators are invited to attend a Scrutiny Meeting at the earliest possible opportunity to discuss future plans for staffing at railways stations across Rother.

Introduction

1. Ticket offices at railway stations are operated by the train operating companies – in the case of the Rother District, Southern and Southeastern.
2. COVID-19 has had a major impact on the rail industry and the Council has been made aware of potential changes to the provision of rail ticket offices across the country, including those within the district, as part of the rail industry's response to the post-COVID-19 situation.
3. This has arisen following discussions between the Department for Transport and the Rail Delivery Group, alongside changes to the Government's guidance relating to ticket office opening hours.

Discussion

4. It is understood that no decisions have been taken at this point in time, but several Members have raised concerns that the Council needs to be in a position to respond should the need arise.

5. Although it is clearly understood and accepted that technology has a role to play in providing information to train travellers and allowing them to purchase tickets, it is also recognised that ticket offices provide a vital service to residents in Rother. Having a clearly sign-posted place in the station for people with ticket enquiries provides certainty and confidence for customers who may struggle to otherwise locate station staff.
6. Furthermore, not all residents are able to use station ticket machines or have the means to book a ticket in advance. Complicated journeys involving connections are likely to require human assistance to ensure customers purchase the most appropriate and cheapest tickets, and do not incur penalties from mis-booked tickets.

Proposed Way Forward

7. It is proposed that the Chief Executive be requested to write to the local train operating companies, Southern and Southeastern, asking that the Council be kept informed of any proposed changes to ticketing arrangements at railway stations within the district.
8. Furthermore, the Council has very good links into the transport field through the local Rail User Group (Bexhill Rail Action Group (BRAG)) as well as local MP, Huw Merriman, who is Chair of the Transport Select Committee. It will be important to ensure close working with these parties should the need arise to put across the Council's views on the issue.
9. The process for making major changes to ticket office opening hours is set out in the Department for Transport's Ticketing and Settlement Agreement (TSA). Schedule 17 of the TSA lists all those stations/ticket offices that are regulated and on which the industry must consult if it wishes to make any significant change to opening hours. This list can be found at:

<https://www.raildeliverygroup.com/our-services/rdg-accreditation/ticketing-settlement.html>
10. Ticket offices operated by Southern are on page 34, and those under Southeastern on page 38 of the document in the above link.
11. In the event of any changes to opening times of ticket offices, and a part of the consultation period required, it is proposed that the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee be requested to invite representatives from the rail operators to attend a meeting of that Committee to discuss the future plans.

Conclusion

12. At this time, other than note the situation, there is little for the Council to do. If that situation changes, the measures outlined in this report will give a mechanism whereby the Council can feed into any consultation process.

Risk Management

13. There are no risks at this stage of the process, but it is important that the Council responds if and when there are any further proposals.

Other Implications	Applies?	Other Implications	Applies?
Human Rights	No	Equalities and Diversity	No
Crime and Disorder	No	External Consultation	No
Environmental	No	Access to Information	No
Risk Management	Yes	Exempt from publication	No

Chief Executive:	Malcolm Johnston
Report Contact Officer:	Malcolm Johnston
e-mail address:	malcolm.johnston@rother.gov.uk
Appendices:	none
Relevant Previous Minutes:	none
Background Papers:	N/A
Reference Documents:	N/A