

## Rother District Council

<b>Report to:</b>	Overview and Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date:</b>	11 September 2023
<b>Title:</b>	Rail Ticket Office Consultation
<b>Report of:</b>	Chief Executive
<b>Ward(s):</b>	N/A
<b>Purpose of Report:</b>	To update Members on proposed changes to ticket office services at train stations within the Rother District.
<b>Officer</b>	
<b>Recommendation(s):</b>	It be <b>RESOLVED</b> : That the report be noted.

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### Introduction

1. On 3 October 2022, Cabinet considered a report regarding possible changes to the rail ticket office arrangements in the district (Minute CB22/36 refers). It was agreed that the Chief Executive write to the train operating companies asking that the Council is kept informed of any proposed changes to ticketing arrangements within the district. On 31 October 2022, the Chief Executive wrote to Southeastern Railway requesting that, at the appropriate time, a representative be sent to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to explain the changes and hear the concerns of Councillors.
2. It was also agreed that 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.
3. On 11 July 2023, the Chief Executive invited the Managing Director of Southeastern Railway to discuss the proposed changes at a Member's Briefing. The Managing Director advised that, as of 29 August 2023, no date had been set for the consultations that will affect train stations in Rother.
4. This report updates Members on the proposed changes to the ticket office service provision at train stations within the Rother District. It also sets out Rother District Council's response to Southern Rail's proposed changes and the next stages of the consultation process.

### Background

5. The rail industry has proposed changes to many rail station ticket offices in England. Rail operators are seeking views on proposals to improve and modernise the experience for passengers by moving staff out from behind the

ticket office screens and onto station concourses and platforms. By making staff more visible, rail operators hope to provide support to passengers where they most need it and help to those who cannot or do not want to use contactless or digital tickets. No final decisions have been made, as the industry is currently at local public consultation stage. Each train company has produced its own proposals, so there are 13 separate consultations running.

6. There are two train operators within Rother that will be affected by these changes; they are Southern and Southeastern.
7. Southern Rail has set out how proposed changes will affect Bexhill, Cooden Beach, and Pevensey and Westham stations. A public consultation on the proposal ran from 5 July 2023, with an initial deadline of 26 July 2023 that was extended to 1 September 2023. Passengers were invited to contact transport watchdog Transport Focus with any comments. Southern advised that no stations that currently have staff will become unstaffed and station opening hours will remain the same. Full details of the proposed changes are set out below:

Station name	Current ticket office hours			Proposed ticket assistance hours		
	Weekday	Saturday	Sunday	Weekday	Saturday	Sunday
<b>Bexhill</b>	06:10 - 19:35	06:10 - 19:35	08:10 - 15:45	06:00 - 20:00	06:30 - 20:30	09:00 - 16:00
<b>Cooden Beach</b>	06:15 - 18:30	06:15 - 18:30	08:00 - 16:00	06:30 - 13:30	09:00 - 16:00	09:00 - 16:00
<b>Hurst Green</b>	05:40 - 19:20	06: 45 - 13:35	07: 55 - 16:10	05:40 - 19:20	06:35 - 13:35	07:45 - 16:25
<b>Pevensey &amp; Westham</b>	06:30 - 10:40	Closed	Closed	06:30 - 10:40	Closed	Closed
<b>Rye</b>	05:40 - 19:05	08:10 - 15:45	08:10 - 15:45	0600 - 1300	0600 - 1300	Closed

8. Southeastern rail has provided an overview of proposed changes:
  - At 14 of the busiest stations on the network, Travel Centres will be provided, offering a combination of information and ticketing solutions.
  - At medium and larger sized stations, where it is agreed that ticket offices are no longer required, they will be closed. Overall, these stations will have fewer staff, but they will receive enhanced training.
  - At smaller stations, where the only staff currently on the station is the person in the ticket office, if agreed that the ticket office will be closed, staff there will be available to provide a wider range of customer support.
  - At 18 of these smaller stations, where vacancies have resulted in a temporarily unstaffed station, these stations will be restaffed as staff are deployed where they are most needed.
  - At 27 stations which are unstaffed stations, customers will continue to have a mobile assistance team (to provide accessibility support).
  - Every station currently staffed will continue to be staffed.

9. Southeastern started the first phase of public consultations on 40 ticket offices in the Metro area; this period ended on 1 September 2023. Proposals for changes at a further 90 stations including Stonegate, Etchingam, Robertsbridge, Battle, and Crowhurst will be updated in detail and consulted on in a future phase, likely the end of 2023.

### Response to Southern Rail’s consultation

10. On 26 July 2023, the Chief Executive wrote to Southern Rail following engagement with Bexhill Rail Action Group (BRAG) and the Equality and Diversity Steering Group. The letter noted the following:
- The original timing of the consultation, which allowed only 21 days to respond, did not provide adequate time for organisations, including Parish Councils, to meet and formulate a response. *The consultation period was subsequently extended to 1 September 2023.*
  - The impact of proposed changes on disabled customers and older people who are digitally excluded.
  - Ticket offices help travellers to develop journey plans and get the best price. Without these, complex fare structures and ticket machines may detrimentally impact customers.
  - If ticket offices are closed and due to be repurposed, engagement with local councils and community groups on their future use should take place.

### Conclusion

11. The Council will continue to monitor and feedback updates on the ticket office consultations.
12. Depending on the timing of the next phase of consultation, it is proposed that the Managing Director of Southeastern Railway be invited to attend the next Overview and Scrutiny Committee or a Member’s Briefing.

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	No	Exempt from publication	No

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Appendices:	None
Relevant previous Minutes:	CB22/36
Background Papers:	None
Reference Documents:	None