

UK AIRPORTS NEED NOT FEAR THEIR CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEES, BUT RECOGNISE THEM AS TRUSTED CRITICAL FRIENDS

That is the key message for airports from the Chairman of UKACCs, the liaison group which brings together 24 airport consultative committees to discuss matters of common interest and to share best practice and concerns.

Colin Flack OBE, who is also Chairman of Birmingham Airport's ACC, told The Airport Operator that he sees his role as "trying to make sure that people in general don't see ACCs as a hindrance, because we are not; at UKACCs what we are trying to do is to get stakeholders at every level to think a bit more about their ACCs and what they can get from them".

Reflecting on his experiences at Birmingham, he said "I think it comes down to good leadership. Birmingham is incredibly lucky

because Nick (Chief Executive, Nick Barton) is exceptionally good and genuinely values the ACC as a forum. Through the ACC and its 40+ members he and his team are able to consult with over 3.5m people and businesses. If we can help in some way through the AOA to build the profile and understanding of AACs and UKACCs, then that is a brilliant result for us and for everybody else". Flack said that "front and centre of everything that ACCs do is that role of critical friend. It epitomises what the ACC is there to do".

All consultative committees depend

on their airports to provide facilities and financial support, but Flack insisted that robust independent committee chairmen and women ensure that there is no question of "he who pays the piper calls the tune". He said there is no evidence that airport companies seek to put pressure on their ACC - "I don't think it is in an airport company's best interests to be seen to be manipulating their ACC. It would just be counter productive".

Paula Street, the UKACC's secretariat lead officer, added that "ACCs work really hard to make sure that,

whatever they do, they are open and transparent in their work to actually build that trust and confidence across a wide and diverse range of interests that the ACC isn't the mouthpiece of the airport".

Nevertheless, she emphasised that "it is really important that ACCs have a good relationship with their airports and are able to work with their airports to fulfil the critical friend role. They need that relationship, and they need to be kept informed of what the airport is doing, what it has got coming through in their planning and engage with the ACCs, consulting them on their vision and plans for the future, as well as being upfront about the issues and challenges that they are facing and how they are looking to address them. Use the ACCs as a sounding board to help shape the airport's thinking".

Flack agreed that it is "absolutely critical to build the high trust environment in which both sides feel safe, so that the airport company can talk about things that are commercially sensitive or sensitive in other ways. From the committee's point of view it is about bringing your experience to act as that critical friend. If you can achieve that, then that is what ACCs are all about".

He and Street were also keen to stress that airport consultative committees consider a much wider range of issues than the noise and flightpath issues on which many assume they focus, given their role in monitoring airports' noise management performance. They said that committee agendas are wide-ranging and often cover issues such as the passenger experience, surface access and transport provision, air quality, sustainability issues, skills availability, local procurement and community support ("giving back to the community, being a good neighbour").

Turning to the role at a national



*Colin Flack
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level of the liaison group itself, Street said that UKACCs are able to provide mentoring, support and guidance to ACCs on a whole range of matters through the sharing of experiences and best practice of other ACCs. UKACCs is not a lobby group, but "if there are issues of common concern, common importance across our membership, then UKACCs can provide that collective voice at a national level in the various forums that we are represented on at the Department for Transport, the Civil Aviation Authority and the Airspace Change Organising Group (ACOG)".

She gave the example of land use planning and noise management. There is a consensus among many airport stakeholders that land use planning and aviation noise management is currently the least effective measure of the ICAO Balanced Approach. She noted that, since detailed national planning guidance had been withdrawn several years ago, planning authorities and developers no longer have clarity, making development planning difficult and major planning application processes uncertain, resulting in new housing being built close to airport runways and underneath flight paths.



*Paula Street,
UKACC
secretariat
lead officer*

Flack said "We are able to help corral support to say we have got to get something done. We have become more proactive over the last two or three years and as a consequence recognised as a sound source of advice and listened to more than ever before". He noted that the UKACCs has a monthly meeting with Department for Transport officials. "That is a very close, frank, candid debate that we have with them, which has gone from strength to strength. They trust us and likewise we trust them. There is a very solid relationship there and we have been able to shift the needle on a number of things".

The UKACCs currently has 24 airports in membership. Originally the criterion for joining it was that airports must have at least 600,000 passengers per year. That has now evolved to encompass both smaller airports of regional significance (like Exeter and Teesside) and civil airports with a specific number of fixed wing air traffic movements per year (taking in, for example, Farnborough). Street said "where there are airports that meet these criteria but are not currently in membership we are engaging with them to see if we can get them on board". ■