

TELFORD & WREKIN COUNCIL

CABINET - 23rd MARCH 2010

RESPONSE TO SCRUTINY REPORT ON BUS SERVICES

REPORT OF CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND RURAL AREA

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet Members of the proposed response to the Scrutiny report.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 2.1 **That the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Commission are noted and the response set out in Appendix 1 is approved.**

3.0 SUMMARY

- 3.1 This report summarises the response to the recommendations made by the Scrutiny review into bus services, which are operated in the borough by Arriva Midlands. The review undertook an in depth consultation with users and non-users including groups such as the Bus User Group, Senior Citizen Transport Action Group, Disability Forum as well as speaking with Arriva management, other operators for example in the West Midlands and officers from Shropshire Council and staff in the Council's Transport Service Delivery Unit.

4.0 PREVIOUS MINUTES

None.

5.0 INFORMATION

- 5.1 Members were aware of concerns raised by ward residents about bus services in the borough. The review had four main objectives;
- To address immediate and future issues of reliability and quality of provision and to improve the bus services in Telford & Wrekin
 - To review the Quality Bus Partnership between the Council and Arriva
 - To identify the needs of Telford & Wrekin with regard to bus services and assess whether the current provision meets these needs

- To change perceptions of the bus services and increase bus patronage
- 5.2 A major concern for regular and infrequent passengers alike is the punctuality and reliability of services. The reason for poor punctuality may lie either with the bus operator, the local traffic authority (the Council), or a combination of the two, however performance against national indicators has improved in the last two years from 76% to 80.5% of buses on non frequent services running on time. By improving dialogue and procedures better information relating to road works could be shared between officers and information supplied to the bus operator would improve punctuality and reliability.
 - 5.3 Within the borough there are a number of commercial routes which are operated and funded solely by the bus operator and subsidised routes which the council chooses to fund in order to provide access to services for people who either do not have access to a car or who choose to travel by sustainable transport. The recommendations in this report will help formulate the forthcoming route review which is being undertaken by Arriva in order to refresh the network, address concerns raised by users and Members and through the introduction of a bus subsidy policy, provide an efficient bus network. Future procurement will be widely advertised through the OJEU process and be timed to try and encourage other operators to the area; but it is acknowledged that Telford is not big enough to support more than one operator.
 - 5.4 The report coincided with a review of transport being undertaken by Northgate Kendrick Ash, which focuses on best value improvements and cost efficiencies to be derived from Council owned assets and Council funded services across all wheeled transport. However, some recommendations are interlinked and the development of a bus subsidy policy and a new proposed demand responsive transport system will ensure transport provision is improved in the borough within available budgets. Consideration of a transport interchange in Telford town centre is identified as a priority and this will be considered as part of the Telford Central Development Action Plan.
 - 5.5 A barrier for some people to use public transport is the bus stop infrastructure as if this is in a poor state of repair it will affect resident's perceptions of the public realm. The report recommends funding be allocated to the cleansing, provision and maintenance of bus shelters.
 - 5.6 Bus services were de-regulated and taken out of local authority control and into private ownership in 1985. Bus operators are now registered and licensed to operate individual routes and regulated by the Traffic Commissioners, completely outside local authority control. Telford & Wrekin Council and Arriva Midlands have a Quality Bus Partnership which is a voluntary agreement to work together and a commitment to provide reliable, affordable, high-quality services. The Council undertakes through its Local Transport Plan to provide infrastructure

improvements such as bus lanes, traffic management, bus shelters and accessible kerbs, whilst Arriva provides vehicles maintained and operated to a high standard, fast frequent services and trained staff. The importance of senior management support from both organisations is essential to ensure a strong commitment from both parties and a willingness to invest in order not only to improve services for residents, but address the future growth of the borough e.g. rural, neighbourhood priority areas, key services and borough towns.

- 5.7 The partnership initially had great success resulting in a reversal of a 3% p.a. decline in bus patronage during the 1990s, to a 20% growth from 1999-2006. However, in recent years bus patronage has declined nationally and locally and reflects a lack of investment in routes. BV104 (customer satisfaction) in 2007-08 showed that 59% were satisfied with local bus services overall, and 18% were dissatisfied. This figure is within 0.3% of the average of Telford & Wrekin's family group of comparable authorities, ranking 4th in the group of 14 authorities.
- 5.8 Transport access to the Ironbridge Gorge World Heritage site will be included in the development of the Council's next Local Transport Plan (LTP3). An integrated rail/bus/museum entry ticket is intended to be launched for the 2010 tourism season.
- 5.9 In April 2009 the concessionary fare scheme for eligible people was extended and made available from 9.00a.m. This extension has provided additional access to services for card holders and has cost an additional £110,000. As from April 2010, the Department for Transport will be requiring authorities to provide a breakdown of costs of the scheme identifying expenditure for the core scheme and any enhancements the Council chooses to offer. It is envisaged this will be used to ensure appropriate grant payments are paid. It is recommended that no further extensions to the scheme are considered at this time.

6.0 BACKGROUND

6.1 Equality & Diversity

Concern was raised by users regarding the provision of low floor easy access buses on all routes. In January 2010, Arriva introduced a new fleet of fourteen buses on the 44 route, which has enabled some of the buses previously used to be cascaded onto other routes. The government has set a target of all buses to be fully accessible by 2017, but Arriva is confident the network will soon be 100% easy access.

6.2 Environmental Impact

As the Arriva fleet is renewed better, more efficient carbon friendly vehicles are introduced reducing the carbon footprint. When routes are re-tendered prices are received for low emission, low floor access buses and a decision on affordability has to be made.

6.3 Legal Comment

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report, however, legal advice will be provided when required in respect of procurement and contractual issues that may arise.

6.4 Links with Corporate Priorities

Bus services support sub-priority 4 “Improving Access, Mobility and Public Transport” of the Council’s Priority Plan for “Maintaining a High Quality, Attractive and Sustainable Environment”-

- Design and manage a transport network which supports sustainable economic growth and promotes sustainable travel
- Reduce social exclusion and optimise accessibility to local facilities including healthcare, education and employment in Telford Town Centre, Borough Towns and the rural area
- Increase public satisfaction levels with public transport

6.5 Opportunities & Risks

- 6.5.1 Members are reminded of the efficiencies and financial savings identified in the Transport Review undertaken by Northgate Kendrick Ash with the need to deliver the Service Improvement Programme. Failure to invest in bus services could leave areas within the borough where there is low car ownership devoid of access to key services. Extension of the concessionary fare scheme to 24 hours a day could mean the Council will have to fund the purchase of buses on certain routes due to over loading as under the scheme the bus operator can be no better or no worse off.

6.6 Financial implications

- 6.6.1. The budget strategy for 2010/11 includes £600,000 savings to be delivered from efficiencies identified through a review of the Transport service being led by Northgate Kendrick Ash. This review will consider a number of areas which are included within the Scrutiny review, and the recommendations of the two reviews need to be viewed concurrently in order to avoid duplication or conflict.
- 6.6.2. The response to the Scrutiny review as detailed in Appendix 1 agrees to review a number of areas which, if adopted, may increase spending

within the Transport Service – in particular the allocation of a budget for the repair and maintenance of bus shelters, and the consideration of an extension to the current concessionary travel scheme

6.6.3. The budget for concessionary travel in 2009/10 is £1,780,300 – which is net of Concessionary Travel Grant income of £539,000. In addition, the extensions to the concessionary scheme in 2009/10 to allow travel between 9.0 am and 9.30am will increase the concessionary travel spend by £110,000. As the Concessionary Travel Grant can only be used to fund travel within the core hours, all of these additional costs will fall against the base budget. Any enhancements to the concessionary travel scheme to further extend the hours of operation will increase expenditure and would not be eligible for Concessionary Travel Grant funding. There is no capacity to absorb any additional costs within the existing transport budgets.

6.6.4. In view of the budgetary position of the Council, and the requirement for the Transport service to deliver ongoing savings, it is recommended that any increased costs in service are at least offset by identifying corresponding savings within the service area.
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6.7 Ward implications

The report relates to all wards in the borough.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Scrutiny Review of Bus Services January 2010

Appendix 1 Cabinet Response to Scrutiny Review of Bus Services.

Report prepared by Helen Hill, Transport Business Manager x 84606