

**TO: ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL
23 SEPTEMBER 2014**

**SUPPORTED BUS SERVICE CONTRACTS 2015
Director of Environment, Culture and Communities**

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To inform the Overview and Scrutiny Panel of the planned changes to the supported local bus network and the forthcoming procurement of the revised bus contracts.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 **That the Overview and Scrutiny Panel notes the report.**

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 The Council's Local Transport Plan (LTP3) sets out the Council's role regarding bus service transport in the Borough. This includes 'procuring socially necessary services that are not provided by the free market, subject to external funding'. These services are delivered under the 1985 Transport Act, which allows the Council to 'secure the provision of such public passenger transport services as the council consider it appropriate to secure to meet any public transport requirements... which would not in their view be met apart from any action taken.'
- 3.2 Bus services funded by the Council are termed 'supported services' and are provided through contracts with bus operators. Typically these can be described as local bus services that provide communities with access to their daily needs.
- 3.3 In 2013 the Overview and Scrutiny Panel appointed a Bus Strategy Working Group (BSWG) to review and develop the emerging Bus Strategy which would provide more detail on the practical implementation of bus passenger transport across the Borough. Following a consultation exercise with the general public, bus users, bus operators, representatives from stakeholder groups and neighbouring local authorities, a Bus Strategy was developed and formally adopted by the Executive in January 2014.
- 3.4 This Bus Strategy reflects the Council's aims and principles and ensures that future bus passenger transport is delivered effectively across the Borough. The associated Action Plan sets out the headline tasks required to implement the strategy. An important element of the Action Plan is to introduce new supported bus services, whilst working in partnership with commercial service operators to improve current services, extend commercial operations, and potentially facilitate changes to services in order to better serve local amenities.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1 The BSWG was of the view that the Council should continue to support bus provision where most needed; however, it felt that the Bus Strategy should seek to support services evolving to become commercial services over time, to reduce reliance on Council funding. The option to reduce bus subsidy was not supported at that time, but instead a view put forward that services should be provided where needed, subject to value for money considerations.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 5.1 The future bus network in the Borough will be shaped by the objectives set in the Council's Bus Strategy which focuses on the following key points:
- i. A response to commercial bus service changes, where the current commercial operations are limited and supported services are therefore required;
 - ii. A quality network that focuses the Council's supported routes to and from Bracknell town centre thereby supporting both the young and the older populations. It improves connections between local bus services and maintains access to important services across the Borough, such as employment, education and health, including key facilities such as Wexham Park Hospital and Brant's Bridge 'HealthSpace';
 - iii. Steps to ensure that new developments are served, including the regeneration of Bracknell town centre and new residential developments, such as Warfield;
 - iv. Promotion of partnership working with neighbouring local authorities and local bus operators; and
 - v. Monitoring of performance, thereby enabling the Council to monitor quality and better plan for future bus service changes.
- 5.2 As part of the current procurement exercise a Bus Network Review was undertaken and the following aims were considered:
- i. Reflect the priorities of the Bus Strategy;
 - ii. Recognise current patterns of use;
 - iii. Maintain reasonable levels of service for most areas;
 - iv. Provide consistency and equity, with greater clarity of service and purpose, with more simple routing patterns;
 - v. Reduce required resources;
 - vi. Focus on Bracknell town centre as both a destination and a transport hub; and
 - vii. Provide the best opportunity for more commercial services across the Borough.
- 5.3 There were no obvious gaps in the commercial services that needed to be plugged by the revised supported network. Accessibility checks showed that the proximity of residential areas to a bus service gave good coverage. There were few adverse comments received regarding the routing and timetabling of existing services. Therefore no need for wholesale change but instead a review was undertaken to see how the network could be enhanced and provided more efficiently.
- 5.4 As a result, the key features of the Revised Bus Network are set out below:
- i. Maintained accessibility to/from Bracknell town centre and other key destinations, such as Wexham Park Hospital and the supermarkets, in particular Warfield Tesco and the surrounding local amenities;

Unrestricted

- ii. A consistent level of service and frequency across the Borough;
- iii. Combined existing routes where appropriate, to improve reliability and reduce the overall number of buses required;
- iv. Updated timetables and increased opportunities for people to make connections between local bus services;
- v. Retained existing connections with rail services and improvements to these where possible;
- vi. Improved access to health facilities, such as Brant's Bridge 'HealthSpace'; and
- vii. Provision of services for new housing developments, such as Warfield.

5.5 **Appendix 1** highlights the route coverage of the current commercial and supported bus network for the Council.

Table 1 summarises the proposed changes to the supported bus network.

The proposed routes are shown on the plans attached at **Appendix 2**.

The existing routes are shown on the plans attached at **Appendix 3**.

5.6 The proposed changes address the principles and objectives set out in the Bus Strategy. These changes could not be dealt with by a piecemeal approach, or by small-scale service changes. A more comprehensive review was therefore undertaken to maximise resources and achieve efficiencies. The suggested changes and proposed routes were presented to the Framework Agreement Suppliers (Courtney, First and London United) for their comments.

5.7 All Members were informed of these proposals by letter and invited to an Open Evening which was held on 24 July 2014 at Easthampstead House, Bracknell, where Council Officers were available to answer questions. One Member attended the event; over the course of the consultation three positive Member comments were received regarding the proposals.

5.8 Suppliers on the Framework Agreement have been given the opportunity to submit quotations against the proposed supported bus network. The following options for price submission are available to the suppliers:

- i. A base price against x 9 proposed routes;
- ii. A combined price against one or more of the listed proposed routes;
- iii. An innovative bid; enabling Suppliers to link the proposed supported bus network with a commercial service(s) of their own choice, if viable; and
- iv. Additional options have also been identified and Suppliers have been asked to quote for better quality buses, Sunday services, evening services and vehicles compatible with the Council's system for Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI).

5.9 The analysis of the Request for Quotations will ultimately be determined by the availability of budget. It is intended that contracts will be awarded for a term of three years, with two possible extensions of one year each. Approval by the Executive is planned for January 2015. Contracts will not be awarded if the costs cannot be

accommodated within existing budget. Any changes to the existing public transport budget would need to be agreed through the Council's usual budget process.

6 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 6.1 The Bus Strategy was subject to a 12 week consultation which took place between July and October 2013. Conclusions supported the proposed objectives/principles set out in the Bus Strategy by highlighting the importance of local bus services to the older population and people with health problems.
- 6.2 The Bus Strategy will have a positive impact on older people and people with health problems, and also have the potential to encourage more young people to travel by bus.
- 6.3 An initial Equalities Screening Form was produced specifically for the procurement of the new supported bus services and this concluded that a full Equalities Impact Assessment was not required given that a withdrawal of bus services is not proposed and that no material change in service format will result.

7 COMMENTS FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 7.1 The Borough Solicitor's comments and advice have been incorporated in this report.

Borough Treasurer

- 7.2 Proposed changes to bus routes may result in budgetary pressures or savings depending upon the outcome of the competitive tendering exercises under the Framework Agreement. Once the costs are known any impact on the budgets will be fed into the Council's budgetary process.

8 CONTACTS FOR FURTHER INFORMATION

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