

**TO: BRACKNELL FOREST ACCESS GROUP  
14 OCTOBER 2014**

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## **SUPPORTED BUS SERVICE CONTRACTS (2015) AND COMMUNITY TRANSPORT**

### **Director of Environment, Culture and Communities**

#### **1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To inform the Bracknell Forest Access Group of the planned changes to the supported local bus network and the forthcoming procurement of the revised bus contracts.

#### **2 RECOMMENDATION**

- 2.1 That the Bracknell Forest Access Group notes the report.

#### **3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION**

- 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 and provide communities with access to their daily needs.
- 3.3 In 2013 the Overview and Scrutiny Panel appointed a Bus Strategy Working Group to review and develop the emerging Bus Strategy to 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 being 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 Bus Strategy Working Group (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 key objectives in the Bus Strategy:
- i. Response to commercial bus service changes, where current commercial operations are limited and supported services are therefore required;
  - ii. A quality network that focuses the Council's supported routes to/from Bracknell town centre, improving connections between local bus services and maintaining access to important services such as employment, education and health, thereby supporting both the young and older populations;
  - 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;
  - v. Monitoring of performance/quality enabling the Council to better plan for future service changes.
- 5.2 As part of the current procurement exercise a Bus Network Review was undertaken to consider the priorities of the Bus Strategy, including current patterns of use; reasonable levels of service for most areas; consistency and equity, greater clarity of service and simpler routing patterns; establishing Bracknell town centre as both a destination and a transport hub; and providing 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 there was 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. Accessibility maintained 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;
  - ii. A consistent level of service with regularised half-hourly frequency of service achieved across the Borough where possible;
  - iii. Combined existing routes where appropriate, to improve reliability and reduce the overall number of buses required;
  - iv. Updated timetables and increased opportunities for connections between local bus services;
  - v. Access maintained to almost every bus stop on the existing network;
  - vi. Existing connections retained with rail services and improvements to these where possible;
  - vii. Improved access to health facilities, such as Brant's Bridge 'HealthSpace';
  - viii. Provision of services for new housing developments, such as Warfield;
- 5.5 Suppliers on the Framework Agreement have been given the opportunity to submit quotations against the proposed supported bus network, together with additional options for better quality

buses, Sunday services, evening services and vehicles compatible with the Council's Real Time Passenger Information (RTPI) system.

- 5.6 Bracknell Forest Council also currently has an Agreement with Keep Mobile on a not-for-profit basis. Services for Bracknell Borough residents who are unable to access conventional public transport services owing to their age, physical disability, sensory impairments, learning difficulties or mental health difficulties are subsidised by the Council under this Agreement. Those wishing to use the service become members of the Council's community transport scheme and are then able to call Keep Mobile to book journeys. The current funding under the Agreement enables Keep Mobile to offer group travel opportunities, together with dial-a-ride services for individuals to make door-to-door journeys. Currently, there are over 600 Borough residents registered with Keep Mobile and approximately 230 single passenger journeys are made each month. Users are charged a fare based on distance.

## **6 EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT**

- 6.1 The Bus Strategy was subject to a 12 week consultation (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.

An initial Equalities Screening Form was produced specifically for the procurement of the new supported bus services, which concluded that a full Equalities Impact Assessment was not required given that a withdrawal of bus services and no material change in service format was proposed.

### Background Papers

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

### Contact for further information

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