

**TO: ENVIRONMENT, CULTURE & COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY PANEL
22 SEPTEMBER 2015**

**LOCAL BUS SERVICES - UPDATE
Director of Environment, Culture and Communities**

1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To update the Panel in respect of local bus service provision.

2 RECOMMENDATION(S)

2.1 That the Panel note the report.

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

3.1 To keep the Panel informed of issues surrounding bus service provision.

4 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 Not applicable.

5 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Supported Bus Services

5.1 Bus services which are financially supported by Bracknell Forest Council changed on 13 July 2015.

5.2 Under the 1985 Transport Act, the Council can secure bus provision where it is considered appropriate to meet a requirement which in its view would not be met by commercial operators. These services are provided through contracts with bus operators and typically these can be described as local bus services that provide communities with access to their daily needs. Supported services provide links between local communities and essential services such as health centres, workplaces, schools and colleges and food shops. As the Council is involved financially in these services, it has a role in setting the routes and timetables.

5.3 The existing supported bus contracts came to an end this year and the opportunity was taken to revise the bus network in order to maximise efficiency and secure value for money. Following a transparent procurement exercise all supported services are now operated by Courtney Buses.

5.4 Throughout this transitional period the Council has worked closely with Courtney's to ensure that the process was as smooth as possible. Along with updating the Borough's website pages, a leaflet was produced summarising the changes and advising people when and where to find more information. This information was widely distributed leading up to the start of the new contracts. A press release was also issued and a full-page feature was published within Town and Country.

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- 5.5 Some of the previous supported bus routes remain unchanged, some routes have changed and some are new. A table of the key changes along with a map of the routes is shown on **Annex A**.

Commercial Bus Services

- 5.6 Until recently First Beeline and Courtney Buses have operated the majority of the commercial services across the Borough. In many areas served by commercial services this resulted in competing First and Courtney Buses running along similar routes.
- 5.7 In June this year, First Beeline informed the Council that with effect from Saturday 29 August 2015 they would no longer operate these commercial services and would be de-registering all of their services apart from the Green Line. This service has been subsequently adjusted to run along the old 191 route and serve those residents wishing to travel to Windsor, Slough or London.
- 5.8 In response to the decision by First, Courtney Buses have made some improvements to their commercial services. These include:
- Service 171/2, the south circular serving Easthampstead, Great Hollands, Hanworth, Birch Hill and Crown Wood now has an increased frequency - every half hour in each direction - to give a combined 15 minute frequency, and buses start earlier and run later. The route is also diverted during off peak hours to serve those residents living at Farningham House who relied on the First service as access to the town centre. A Sunday service has also been reinstated;
 - Service 194, operating between Bracknell and Camberley will also have an increased frequency to operate every half hour and buses running earlier and later;
 - Supported 156 service has been diverted (at no cost to the Council) to include Ralphs Ride and Harmans Water Road.
- 5.9 Other bus operators have also expressed interest in filling gaps and as a result the 90 service which operates between Bracknell and Reading has been taken over by Reading Buses who began operating it on a like-for-like basis from 26 July. This service has now been rebranded as the 4 and x4 with a dedicated fleet of modern buses. Stagecoach also registered a service similar to the current 94 service, which runs between Bracknell and Camberley.
- 5.10 Regardless of the decision by First, the Council has worked in partnership with other operators and neighbouring authorities in order to deliver a positive outcome which has involved no additional cost to the Council and still provides residents with access by bus to many key services. Officers continue to have regular liaison meetings with operators to ensure a partnership approach.

Real Time Information

- 5.11 The Council has invested in a Real Time Information system (RTI) such that bus users can check when a bus is due to arrive at their stop. The system is dependent on operators being able to supply a feed real-time data from their buses. Currently, this data is received from Courtney Buses, who operate 13 of the 16 routes in Bracknell Forest, and discussion is on-going with Stagecoach and Reading Buses regarding their service data. Display screens have been installed within each bay of

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the new bus station, with additional summary screens on the approach to the bus station from the town centre and the rail station. There are also displays at key bus stop hubs in Great Hollands, Birch Hill, Crown Wood and Crowthorne.

- 5.12 The displays show real time information where available, and timetable information for the remainder of services. The displays are fitted with RNIB React technology which can audibly broadcast the information to sight-impaired bus users who have an RNIB fob. To complement the displays, there is a page on the Council's website which provides real time information for any stop in the Borough; ideal for users with portable internet-connected devices who will be able to access bus times on the move.

Bus Station

- 5.13 The bus station refurbishment is nearing completion. The central passenger waiting area has been repaved and upgraded with improved low energy lighting and waiting shelters incorporating RTI displays as mentioned. The remaining phase of construction work will see the realignment of the main access road, installation of cycle parking facilities and improved soft landscaping.

Town Centre

- 5.14 With the regenerated town centre due to open in April 2017 there is an expectation of increased interest from commercial bus operators regarding new or improved bus services, which could result in greater coverage and increased frequency. There is potential that services would run later in the evening serving both social and employment trips associated with a new night time economy.
- 5.15 Officers have already begun work on developing possible routes and timetables for evening and weekend services, focussing on access to the new town centre. If support is required for these services, developer contributions from major sites including Warfield, Town Centre, Amen Corner and TRL could be utilised.

6 ADVICE RECEIVED FROM STATUTORY AND OTHER OFFICERS

Borough Solicitor

- 6.1 Not applicable

Borough Treasurer

- 6.2 Not applicable

Equalities Impact Assessment

- 6.3 Not applicable

Strategic Risk Management Issues

- 6.4 Not applicable

Other Officers

- 6.5 Not applicable

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 Not applicable

Background Papers

O&S PANEL REPORT - 23 SEPTEMBER 2014 - SUPPORTED BUS SERVICE CONTRACTS 2015

Contact for further information

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