

## **Appendix 1**

### **Towards an Updated Local Bus Strategy for Swindon Borough Council**

#### **Background**

Section 89 of the Transport Act 1985 gives local authorities, who are responsible for passenger transport, the power to procure bus services by tender; or, with an individual bus operator, set up a de minimis arrangement.

The bus services provided by a local authority are described as those that are considered socially necessary but not commercially viable. These services cannot be provided if they compete against a commercial bus service as local authorities cannot inhibit commercial bus services.

Section 106 of the Transport Act 1985 states that any authority which sees fit may make grants towards expenditure incurred in providing, maintaining or improving any vehicles, equipment or other facilities in facilitating travel for disabled members of the public.

The Transport Act 2000 required a local transport authority to prepare a document known as a bus strategy, which would be incorporated into the Local Transport Plan. Although this requirement has since been withdrawn, the Borough Council has continued to maintain and refresh a bus strategy to inform its decisions on providing financial support to specific routes or services that have not proven to be commercially viable.

The Council's bus strategy was last updated as part of the Local Transport Plan 3 (LTP3) in 2011 and was approved by Cabinet on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2011.

The current financial climate means that there is a pressing need to ensure that all Council expenditure represents value for money and supports achievement of agreed strategic priorities. As part of this, it is necessary to reassess the approach to securing affordable public transport solutions that best respond to customer requirements.

In order to secure this desired outcome, as part of an updated local bus strategy it is also proposed to include details of other community transport services. This will allow the Council to make best use of the full range of transport services in meeting individual passenger needs. This approach recognises that procuring transport contracts through the major bus operators may not always be the most ideal solution.

#### **Current Funding of Bus Services**

The Council currently provides a number of local bus contracts through two sources of funding:

Revenue support budget (Council Tax)	£437,100
Section 106 (funding from developers)	£633,000

The Council also provides annual funding totalling £293,500 to support a contract to provide demand responsive community transport services for those unable to use conventional buses. This service is presently supplied by Swindon Dial a Ride.

Bus services were last tendered in 2008 and this process achieved a saving of £15k. Since then £220k has been withdrawn from the revenue support budget.

Section 106 funding is provided by developers to mitigate the impact of new developments on the highway network. Obtaining Section 106 funding for bus services ensures that any new residential or commercial development has adequate access to public transport. Funding in practice tends to be for five years on the basis that after this period of funding the bus service should be commercially viable.

In order to assist this, where possible the Section 106 funding is used to extend or vary an existing route. A plan is implemented in consultation with the contracted bus operator to ensure that a commercial solution is reached or the service has been given every opportunity to achieve a commercial solution when the end of the five years have been reached.

The Council also provides a door-to-door, demand responsive local passenger transport service for those who are unable to use conventional public transport due to their disability. This service is supplied on a contractual basis and is subject to tendering.

The service is designed to be as similar as possible to a conventional bus service, but to reflect the special requirements of its users in its operation and in the facilities provided on the vehicle. The service is designed for driver-only operation, where operators have disability awareness and provide a high standard of customer care, including manual handling assistance.

This service has developed and broadened to cover:

- Demand responsive wheelchair accessible minibus;
- Demand responsive wheelchair accessible car;
- Shopperbus Service - wheelchair accessible, door to door service designed to enable passengers to do their weekly shop;
- Day trips out of the Borough;
- Community Transport - hiring minibuses to any voluntary group in the local area, e.g. Cubs; Scouts; lunch clubs; Stroke clubs;
- Access Car - offers wheelchair accessible cars for self-drive hire;
- MiDAS Driver Training – Minibus driver awareness scheme.

## Principles

In order to enable the development of an updated bus strategy for Swindon Borough Council, the following key principles have been identified as a basis for consultation with stakeholders and to inform the direction of further work:

- The development of a fully commercial bus network should be encouraged as a means of best securing a sustainable network of services for the medium to long-term;
- Bus operators should be challenged to fulfil their role in providing services in ways that best meet the needs of the local community;
- The Council should play an enabling role in supporting the development of commercial bus operations.

It is recognised that there will be instances where the commercial bus network is unable to meet the needs of all residents. In such instances, the Council may wish to secure alternative provision to respond to its strategic priorities. In doing so, the Council will have regard to the full range of transport services available in the Borough, including demand responsive community transport services and voluntary providers. Circumstances that may prompt the Council to intervene, subject to affordability and value for money, are in response to two in particular of the Council's strategic priorities:

- Right skills, right jobs, in the right places
- Together, find new ways to reduce vulnerability and improve health for all