

Local Bus Services and Strategy Review

Cabinet

Date: 16th June 2016

Author: Cabinet Member for Sustainability, Highways and Transport and the Head of Highways and Transport

Wards: All

Locality Affected: All

Parishes Affected: All

1. Purpose and Reasons

- 1.1 To inform Cabinet of proposed revisions to the Local Bus Strategy (see Appendix 1) for Swindon Borough Council following the Council Budget Plans for 2016/17.
- 1.2 To inform Cabinet of bus service revisions and reductions being proposed in line with the proposed revised draft Local Bus Strategy required to meet revenue support funding budget pressures. This is following the Council's decision to remove £100k from the revenue support budget of £267k in 2016-17.
- 1.3 To inform Cabinet of the approach, in line with the proposed revised draft Local Bus Strategy for mitigating revenue support funding changes.
- 1.4 To inform Cabinet of proposed service revision and review of Dial a Ride and Community Transport following the Council's decision to reduce the Community Transport budget of £313.5k by £100k in 2016-17, in line with the revised draft Local Bus Strategy in Appendix 1.
- 1.5 To inform Cabinet that a single consultation document is being developed in order to consult on the strategy and its implications. The document is based on the revised draft Local Bus Strategy (Appendix 1) aligned with details of the Public Transport Contracts (Appendix 2) and Examples of the Proposed BusLink Community Transport Hub Services (Appendix 3). The urgency of revenue savings and the ongoing development of the BusLink hubs prevents a final consultation document being shared at present.
- 1.6 The revised draft Local Bus Strategy supports or affects the following elements of the Council's Vision :
 - 1.6.1 Priority One Improve infrastructure and housing to support a growing, low-carbon economy
 - 1.6.2 Priority Two Offer education opportunities that lead to the right skills and right jobs in the right places, and
 - 1.6.3 Priority Four Help people to help themselves while always protecting our most vulnerable children and adults.

Further information on the subject of this report can be obtained from Nigel Hale, Direct Dial 466211, nhale@swindon.gov.uk.

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2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 2.1 To note the draft revised Local Bus Strategy as set out in Appendix 1 and its implications for local bus services as set out in Appendix 2 and 3, for public consultation and to note the proposed service revision and its implications for Dial a Ride and Community Transport.
- 2.2 To authorise the Head of Highways and Transport, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Sustainability, Highways and Transport, to finalise the public consultation document and to carry out the public consultation on the draft revised Local Bus Strategy and its implications.
- 2.3 To agree that a report detailing the results of the public consultation be brought back to September Cabinet.

3. Detail

Summary

- 3.1 95% of Swindon bus services are already subsidy free; however, continued pressure on the borough's revenue has created an objective to have 100% of Swindon Bus Services commercially viable by 2020.
- 3.2 This will be supplemented by alternative approaches for those without a bus service with priority given for Commuter, Education and Hospital passenger usage.
- 3.3 The commercial network will form the core of Swindon's bus services.
- 3.4 Bus Services to the Town centre will be subsidy free.
- 3.5 'BusLink' hub services will bring passengers to local key points on the commercial network to provide access to commercial bus services
- 3.6 The Council will assist with transitional funding whilst the changes to currently subsidised services are undertaken and whilst the new BusLink hub service approach is embedded.
- 3.7 The Council will create a Community Transport Organisation creating the opportunity for involvement from local communities and parishes into the management and delivery of BusLink services.
- 3.8 The Council will work with the Community Transport Organisation to assess the ongoing viability of the BusLink services.

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Bus Strategy Draft - Principles

- 3.9 At its meeting on 12th June 2013, Cabinet approved a revised Local Bus Strategy following a consultation with stakeholders in December 2012 and January 2013 on the draft principles to underpin a revised local bus strategy (Cabinet Minute 73, 2012/13 refers).
- 3.10 The 2013 Local Bus Strategy has been reviewed in order to enable the Council to ensure that the Borough has in place a bus network that optimises the balance between the cost to the Council Tax payers and addressing passenger needs. This follows the approval of the Council's Budget for 2016/17.
- 3.11 A draft revised Local Bus Strategy is in preparation along the lines set out in Appendix 1 which responds to pressures on the revenue funding support for local bus services and the revenue funding support for dial a ride/community transport services. It is proposed the Council consults on this and its implications during June and July.
- 3.12 It is proposed that the Head of Highways and Transport will finalise the consultation document in agreement with the Cabinet Member for Sustainability, Highways and Transport.
- 3.13 It is planned to withdraw all revenue funding support for local bus services and the present dial a ride /community transport contract arrangements by 2020. The draft revised Local Bus Strategy attached in Appendix 1 reflects this decision and enables its implementation to be made.

Bus Strategy Draft - Key Points

- 3.14 The key points of the draft revised Local Bus Strategy are summarised as follows:
- 3.14.1 Council will work with the main commercial bus operators to support the bus charter principles as set out in the Local Bus Strategy.
- 3.14.2 A Bus Network Partnership Board will act as an advisory group to the Cabinet Member on bus issues.
- 3.14.3 The Bus Network Partnership Board will act as a liaison between commercial bus operators and the Council in the development of bus services, bus priorities and highway improvements to support a commercial bus operation.
- 3.14.4 Commercial operators will define the bus network as 95% of current local bus operation is commercial.
- 3.14.5 The Council will suggest commercial proposals where the need arises for consideration by commercial operators.

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- 3.14.6 The Council will work with local organisations including parish/town councils to develop a supporting network of BusLink services using a number of transport hub centres to enable passengers to connect with commercial bus services.
- 3.14.7 Initially three transport hubs will be identified in North Swindon (Orbital Retail Park), East Swindon (GW Hospital) and South Swindon (Old Town).
- 3.14.8 The Council will develop and create a Community Transport Organisation to deliver sustainable transport solutions and BusLink connecting services to the transport hubs.
- 3.14.9 A bus improvement plan for the highway will be established every year.
- 3.15 The revised strategy includes a commitment to working with the bus operators to improve the highway network to help deliver bus punctuality and the introduction of a Bus Punctuality Partnership. Since any surplus income that is forthcoming from the enforcement of bus lanes needs to follow the financial provisions laid out in Regulation 36 (paragraph 4 and 6) of the Bus Lane Contraventions, Penalty Charges, Adjudication and Enforcement (England) Regulations 2005, any net income on highway improvement works be used to assist buses as well as on more general highway maintenance.

Dial a Ride Services

- 3.16 It is anticipated that where viable this service will be incorporated into the community based BusLink Services or alternatively individual travel packages using travel vouchers will be evaluated. These options will be considered as a replacement to contract arrangements over the following 2 years.

Mitigation measures

- 3.17 The Council will setup a Community Transport Organisation to deliver sustainable transport solutions, which will run BusLink hub-based services that connect into the commercial network.
- 3.18 SBC will support the setup of BusLink hub services with transitional funding.
- 3.19 Transitional funding will also be available from SBC to pump-prime services to become commercially viable, and will support the development of new funding streams where these might be available and required.
- 3.20 SBC will work with the Community Transport Organisation to help ensure the continuation of local services where commercially viable or the Community Transport Organisation wishes to continue with service support and provision.

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- 3.21 The Council will continue to work with the Community Transport Organisation to secure Section 106 and any additional funding will be used to extend bus services, and contribute to BusLink hub services.

Review and Rationale

- 3.22 Where BusLink hub services fail to become commercially viable during the transitional support period, the Council will review the operation of the services with the Community Transport Organisation. Where this has resulted from the lack of patronage of the service and there is no strong community desire to backfill transitional funding, a decision will be taken to remove the hub service at the next contract break.

Timings

- 3.23 This Cabinet report signals the above direction of travel and the start of the consultation process on the draft revised Local Bus Strategy and the implications of this strategy.
- 3.24 The Council will commence consulting on the service changes for individual routes with a view to removing all revenue funding from October 2016 onwards or at the end of the contract.
- 3.25 It is anticipated that by July 2016, The East Hub Service pilot is setup to address existing known issues.
- 3.26 In September 2016, a report will be brought to Cabinet detailing the outcome of the consultation process and proposing the way forward, based on the outcome of the consultation.
- 3.27 Where routes are not commercially viable and funding sources have not been identified, then the Council will implement a phased withdrawal over the next 2 years when the current contracts end.

4. Alternative Options

- 4.1 Unless replaced, the existing bus strategy and criteria will remain the adopted policy of the Council and so the strategy needs to be revised in order to meet financial pressures and the budgetary framework agreed by Council.
- 4.2 A “do nothing” approach would commit the Council to continue to fund services with limited patronage and no commercial viability. The absence of a Community Transport Organisation would allow no alternative means of local community funding where communities would otherwise be willing to step in and support the service.

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5. Implications, Diversity Impact Assessment and Risk Management

Financial and Procurement Implications

- 5.1 There are financial and procurement implications arising from this report as £100k must be withdrawn from both the revenue support funding for local bus services and dial a ride/community transport.

Legal and Human Rights Implications

- 5.2 Legal and Human Rights considerations have been taken fully into account in compiling this report. It is considered that the recommendations of this report are compatible with Convention Rights.

All Other Implications (including Staff, Sustainability, Health, Rural, Crime and Disorder)

- 5.3 No other relevant implications have been identified in the preparation of this report.

Diversity Impact Assessment

- 5.4 A Diversity Impact Assessment (DIA) has been completed. No adverse or other significant impacts were found at this stage. Copies of the assessment can be obtained from the report author.

Risk Management

- 5.5 A risk assessment has been undertaken as part of the Highways and Transport Business Plan.

6. Consultees

- 6.1 The Board Director, Resources (Section 151 Officer) and Director of Law and Democratic Services (Monitoring Officer) are consulted in respect of all reports.

7. Background Papers

- 7.1 None

8. Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix 1 Draft revised Local Bus Strategy 2016
- 8.2 Appendix 2 Public Transport Contracts 2016/17
- 8.3 Appendix 3 Examples of Proposed BusLink Community Transport Hub Services.

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9. Key Decision/Decision in Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan

- 9.1 This is a Key Decision and is included in the Cabinet Work Programme and Forward Plan for June 2016.