

Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee

SCOSC/09/... Supported Local Bus Services – Budget Pressures 2009/10

At its meeting on 15 September 2009 the Executive considered a report from Councillor David McVicar, Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities, outlining a strategy to avoid overspending on supported (subsidised) local bus services in the current financial year. The Executive also received comments from the meeting of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 1 September 2009. Following consideration the Executive had agreed to withdraw support for a number of selected poorer performing bus services with effect from 1 December 2009. The outcome of these reductions in subsidy would be a saving of £60,000 in 2009/10 and a further saving of £120,000 in 2010/11.

This decision of the Executive was subsequently called in by the Chairman of the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration by the Committee at its meeting on 29 September 2009.

The reasons given by the Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the call-in were as follows:

‘In the absence of a full review of bus services from Transport Officers, the Executive may not have been in a position to make a robust decision which fully considered (a) the impact of the (extensive) proposed cuts on residents, and (b) the use of alternative transport including, but not limited to, buses used in the mornings or evenings which could be used to provide alternative transport options.’

In response to the Chairman’s action the Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities emphasised to the Committee that it was necessary for reductions in subsidy to be made as soon as was possible in order to maximise savings within the current financial year and reduce the projected level of overspend. He stressed that it was not possible for a decision on this matter to be deferred until the outcome of a review. In connection with this the Committee noted that whilst a full review of existing service provision had been requested by the Executive this review would take between 12 to 16 months to carry out. It was further noted that the review would be presented to the Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee as part of the review process.

Following full debate on this matter the majority of the Committee made clear that they could not, themselves, give their support to the implementation of a reduction in subsidy to individual services without first considering the results of the review and indicated their support for the Committee’s original decision.

RESOLVED that the decision be referred back to the Executive for reconsideration with the following alternative recommendations;

That the Executive:

1a. Call for a full review of subsidised bus services prior to making a decision to cut services other than those services which are operated primarily or entirely outside of Central Bedfordshire and should be fully supported by other authorities;

or

1b. Call for a full review of subsidised bus services and, based on the existing information before them, consider a reduction in the overspend by cutting subsidies for a number of carefully selected services where the Executive are confident that this will have a minimum impact on Central Bedfordshire residents.

2. Consider the use of existing Central Bedfordshire Council transport services in place of (some) subsidised services and required detailed proposals regarding these alternatives.

NOTE: The report from Councillor David McVicar, Portfolio Holder for Safer and Stronger Communities considered by the Executive at the meeting on 15 September 2009 is attached at Appendix 1 for information.