Action Plan For Reducing Cost of Supported Local Bus Services

The following pages itemise 31 individual contracts with bus operators for the provision of local bus services in Central Bedfordshire (including services contracted to a neighbouring authority to which Central Bedfordshire makes a financial contribution).   This is not the complete list of supported services, but rather the 40% of "worst performing" services identified by the Bus Service Evaluation Toolkit (BSET).   The BSET (as recalibrated by TAS) scores services according to the following criteria:

Criterion	Definition	Weighting
Accessibility	Services are scored according to whether they carry people to the shops, to work, to school/college or to hospital/surgery.	18%
Congestion	The total number of passengers carried per annum, as a proxy for each service's value as a sustainable alternative mode of transport.	18%
Affordability	The annual cost of each service – expensive services score lower than those which cost less.	18%
Value for Money	An effective measure of whether a supported service represents good value for money.	46%

According to the score awarded, each contract falls into one of the following categories:

BSET Score [Col. K]	Category [Col L]	Explanation
20+	A - OK	Service performs well, helps towards council's policy objectives and requires relatively modest financial input to maintain viability.
12 - 19	B - Watch	Service meeting policy objectives, but costs may be higher, or patronage lower, than we would expect. Some form of improvement called for, such as re-marketing or merger with another service.
0 - 11	C – Action Needed	Service performs poorly and fails to give value for money. Service needs thorough reassessment, as a prelude to curtailment or merger with another service.

The BSET has therefore been used to produce an initial list of targeted services.   The list contains all of the contracted services in categories B and C.   It also contains a small number of services in category A, because the total value of all category B and C services on the list is insufficient to enable the Council to make the required savings.

A secondary filter has been applied to the list of targeted services.   The results of the bus user survey have been analysed, and the list has been re-ordered to reflect the priorities stated by survey respondents.

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On the survey questionnaire, bus users were asked to tick which they believe to be the three most important types of bus service that the Council supports, from a list of ten options:

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Column	Q2. Which three types of bus service do you think are the most important for the council to support (Please tick three boxes only)	Tick Count	% of all ticks
M	Buses from rural villages to the nearest small town	231	18.22
N	Buses from rural villages to the nearest regional centre (e.g. Bedford, Luton, Milton Keynes)	198	15.62
O	Buses from rural villages to a place where you can catch another bus to the nearest big town	139	10.96
P	Buses linking big towns together (e.g. Leighton Buzzard to Milton Keynes, or Bedford to Luton)	92	7.26
Q	Peak-hour bus services to get people to work	99	7.81
R	Bus services to schools and colleges for young people not entitled to free school transport	46	3.63
S	Bus services to hospitals, doctors/dentists surgeries or health centres	180	14.20
T	Local town services	127	10.02
U	Buses on Sundays and Bank Holidays	75	5.91
V	Buses in the evening (after 6:30 pm)	81	6.39
	Total Ticks	1268	100.00

These are the scores returned by respondents who ticked the box to state that they are Central Bedfordshire residents (425 questionnaires). A further 243 questionnaires have been analysed from bus users who either live outside the district or who forgot to tick the box. The results of analysing this additional set of questionnaires indicate that the ranking of services is broadly in line with the responses from Central Bedfordshire residents, and amalgamation of the two sets of preferences would not have altered the outcome significantly.

All of the contracted local bus services on the list of targeted services have been scored according to the extent to which they fit with the preferences expressed in the survey. Consequently bus routes which, for example, provide peak-hour services linking rural areas with regional centres, and which are convenient for hospitals and schools, score much more highly than evening, Sunday or purely school-oriented services.

The list is sorted according to this final score, with the lowest-scoring contracts at the top. A thick black line indicates the point at which the necessary £400,000 savings can be made, subject to all of the detailed recommendations in column [E] being accepted. Any decision to reprieve services above the line will necessitate moving the line downwards to ensure that the equivalent value of savings are made.

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EXPLANATION OF TABLE

Column	
A	Description of the service, or part of service, that operates under contract.
B	Days of operation. In some cases, there is a commercial service on other days of the week.
C	Neighbouring authority, with whom there is a shared support agreement.
D	Potential impact of complete withdrawal. Withdrawal is deemed to be serious if there is no alternative service, moderate if there is another bus service or bus journey at a different time of day, or different day of the week.
E	Officers' recommendation, which may be either complete withdrawal, merge with another service, retain with modified timetable or retain in present form. It may or may not be necessary to re-tender a revised timetable, depending on the extent of the changes proposed.
F	Passengers per Annum. Total patronage, as report to us by the operator, or as established by survey.
G	Passengers per day.
H	Cost per Passenger. Current contract cost per annum divided by passengers per annum.
I	Current contract cost per annum.
J	Projected Saving. Officers' estimate of how much can be saved in a notional full year by (a) withdrawing service, (b) negotiating service reductions with the operator or (c) re-tendering. As per column (E).
K	BSET Score – taken directly from the Bus Service Evaluation Toolkit.
L	BSET Category - taken directly from the Bus Service Evaluation Toolkit.
Columns **M** to **V**: the ten service types which survey respondents were asked to rank, by ticking the three types which should deserve highest priority for continuing Council support.	
W	Total score, calculated by adding up the user preference ratings (see above)
X	Cumulative savings, showing the point at which the required £400,000 savings can be reached.