

Central Bedfordshire Council

EXECUTIVE

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Passenger Transport Strategy

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This report relates to a Key Decision

Purpose of this report

1. This report sets out the information to help inform members to take a decision in relation to the adoption of a Passenger Transport Strategy for Central Bedfordshire Council

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Executive is asked to:

1. **adopt the Passenger Transport Strategy for Central Bedfordshire as set out at Appendix 1.**

Overview and Scrutiny Comments/Recommendations

2. The Passenger Transport Strategy was considered by Sustainable Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 26 September 2016. Recommendations from the meeting will be tabled at Executive.

Background

3. On the 5 April 2016 Executive gave permission for a public consultation to take place regarding proposals for subsidising public bus routes, use and renewal of concessionary passes and funding for dial ride providers.
4. The twelve week consultation was undertaken between the 19 April 2016 and the 12 July 2016. There were 1,526 responses to the public consultation. 541 were returned in paper form with 985 completed on line. The survey responses are attached at Appendix 2.

5. A telephone survey of residents in Central Bedfordshire was undertaken over a period of a month ending on the 15 August 2016. This survey provides a benchmark of the general population. The survey responses are attached at Appendix 3.
6. The responses received have been used to inform the strategy at Appendix 1.

Issues

7. Central Bedfordshire Council does not currently have a Passenger Transport Strategy. The aim of the Passenger Transport Strategy (PTS) is to deliver transport services that are safe, effective and fit for purpose and provide a framework for decision making processes in relation to all PTS services.
8. The PTS will be developed alongside and sit within the Central Bedfordshire Local Transport Plan (LTP) which is also currently under review.
9. The Strategy sets out the Council's objectives for passenger transport in the Central Bedfordshire area and will be supported by relevant policies and best practice.
10. The Strategy refers to users of road based public transport such as commercially operated local bus routes and community transport as well as fleet transport for the provision of home to school transport and home to day setting transport for vulnerable children and adults.

Scope of the Strategy

- Subsidised Public Transport
- Concessionary Fares
- Community Transport
- Home to School Transport – Available Walking Routes
- Fleet Services and Operations

Information used to inform the Strategy

11. In addition to using the responses to the various consultations undertaken other surveys and market research have been used.
12. In the latest Central Bedfordshire Household Travel survey undertaken in April 2016 it is noted that the usage of public bus services in Central Bedfordshire has declined 68% of residents never or rarely (i.e. not more than once a year) travel by bus, compared to 65% in 2014 and 56% in 2012. This decrease in bus use also appears consistent across different journey types.

13. In terms of national comparisons, local bus use compares less favourably, with nationally 27% of respondents saying that they use a bus at least once a week (compared to 13% locally). 47% said they use a bus less than once a year or never compared to 68% locally (Department for Transport (Sept 2015), National Travel Survey 2014).
14. 18% of residents said they are not interested in using public transport, which suggests amongst some residents there is simply a lack of propensity to use public transport. The groups more likely than other residents to say they are not interested are:
 - Residents aged 65 and over (cited by 27%)
 - White British residents (18% of White British residents compared with 10% of non-White British residents).
 - Residents in lower social grades (cited by 21% of C2DE residents compared with 14% of ABC1 residents)
 - Men (21% of men compared with 14% of women)
15. In some of the open-ended comments, residents also said they preferred to drive or that it was more convenient for them to use their own car, suggesting that access to a car and ease of driving may act as a barrier to using public transport. Also, a small number of comments were received in which elderly or disabled residents said they do not use public transport because it is not practical for them. For example, wheel chair access is an issue or they feel uncomfortable travelling on public transport due to being partially sighted or blind.
16. Market research was undertaken early in 2016 amongst users of community transport, Dial a Ride and CBC Fleet services to establish what residents were using the transport for. The outcome of this market research can be found at Appendix 4.
17. Public consultation was undertaken from the 4 January 2010 to the 19 February 2010 and this was used to inform the Home to School Transport policy adopted by Executive on the 9 March 2010. This policy is reviewed annually and was last approved by Executive on the 4 February 2014. Minor amendments to the policy have been delegated to the Executive Member for Children's Services in consultation with the Director of Children's Services.

Other Considerations

18. As Central Bedfordshire Council does not have a PTS from the outset consideration has been given to how we best support our residents to have access to the form of transport they require to meet their needs.
19. In order to establish what alternatives are available to public bus routes meetings were held with various groups to establish what offer they already provide in relation to transport for residents.

20. There are a number of Village Care Schemes across Central Bedfordshire that have a transport provision within them. Residents can access these schemes on an ad hoc basis in order to access transport for medical appointments, shopping and leisure trips.
21. Community Transport providers such as Wander Bus, Flitta Bus and the Ivel Sprinter also provide transport for all residents with specified time tables and routes. These are generally determined by local demand but the usage would not allow a route to be operated commercially.
22. Qualifying residents can sign up to membership of one of the 3 Dial a Ride operators in Central Bedfordshire. These are door to door services bookable with the operator.
23. Home to day setting transport for qualifying clients is provided by Fleet Services.
24. Consideration was also given to the times of usage and the cost of subsidy per journey for the different public bus routes across CBC. This information was used to inform the new network of core, secondary and least-used routes with subsidies determined by a Subsidised Bus Service Assessment Process.

Reason/s for decision

25. The strategy has been informed by public responses and those from other interested parties whilst ensuring that funding for road based transport in Central Bedfordshire is fair and transparent and meets the needs of residents and represents value for money

Council Priorities

26. Promote health and well being and protect the vulnerable

The PTS refers to users of road based 'public' transport such as commercially operated local bus routes and community transport as well as fleet transport for the provision of home to school transport and home to day setting transport for vulnerable children and adults.

27. Great universal services – bins, leisure and libraries

Central Bedfordshire Council does not have a current Passenger Transport Strategy (PTS) and is therefore in the process of developing one. The aim of the PTS is to deliver transport services that are safe, effective and fit for purpose and provide a framework for decision making processes in relation to all PTS services.

28. The PTS will be developed alongside and sit within the Central Bedfordshire Local Transport Plan (LTP) which is also currently under review. The PTS will set out the Council's objectives for passenger transport in the Central Bedfordshire area and will be supported by relevant policies and best practice.

29. Value for money – freezing council tax

The PTS will put in place transparent process for the allocation of public monies to subsidise bus routes and provide funding for dial a ride schemes.

Corporate Implications

30. By adopting the Passenger Transport Strategy Central Bedfordshire Council will be transparent in how it takes decisions in relation to how we spend public monies on these services.

Legal Implications

29. The allocation of funding for a service provision can be contentious issue when proposals are made for reduction in the service or withdrawal of funding for the service. Decision makers must have regard to the impact such proposals have on their community and the main legal implications that the Council has, when deciding on funding a service such as transport, is it must continue to comply with its duties under equalities legislation, with duties to provide services to children or adults, who may be disabled or vulnerable and who require transport for school or to access other services. The Council should also consult to an extent in respect of changes to a service provision and with those who are likely to be impacted. Consideration should be given to responses to a consultation as part of the decision making process.

30. It is understood that significant consultation has taken place in respect of this Passenger Transport Strategy including advertising, online, in newspapers, on buses, as well as actually within the vehicles that are currently subsidised. Neighbouring authorities have been advised, an Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and representatives from Children's Services, Adult Social Care and Transport have also been consulted so this Strategy links in with other statutory policies the Council has (e.g. the Local Transport Plan).

31. The Draft Passenger Transport Strategy 2016 has been developed in response to and taking account of information obtained as part of this consultation from various sources and as such has been developed to reduce the risk of legal challenge, whilst also exploiting to the fullest extent, the resources available.

An example of this is the fact the Strategy proposes to prioritise routes with a proven demand from elderly/disabled adults over least used or commercially viable routes and what falls into one category or the other is based on information gathered through the consultation process. Members can also see for themselves the responses given and can take account of the information from service users.

32. As people have had their chance to comment, the risk of challenge has been minimised. Please note however that it cannot be completely eliminated where some routes will change and not everyone can be provided with the service they wish. Nonetheless, the amount of consultation that has taken place, having the Strategy itself and Members considering all the information before they make a decision, means that the Council can defend any such challenge.

Financial Implications

33. In the current revenue Medium Term Financial Plan the following budget efficiencies were agreed at Council in February 2016.
34. Concessionary Fares Changes - £10k in 17/18.
35. Reduction in public bus subsidies and move from grant to tender process for dial ride operators: £270k in 17/18, £100k in 18/19 and £100k in 19/20. By adopting the new network of core, secondary and least-used routes with subsidies determined by a Subsidised Bus Service Assessment Process.
36. More efficient use of Fleet Services: £60k in 16/17 and £57k in 17/18, this will be done in two ways firstly by ensuring that the routes run by fleet are agreed and reviewed annually with Adult Social care Health and Housing and by rationalising the fleet owned and operated by Central Bedfordshire Council with the adoption of the fleet policy.
37. Home to school transport: £573k in 16/17 these savings are associated with the work being undertaken in relation to available walking routes to school.

Equalities Implications

38. Central Bedfordshire Council has a statutory duty to promote equality of opportunity, eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and foster good relations in respect of nine protected characteristics; age disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation.

39. The results of research and consultation have demonstrated that respondents to the public consultation, which included a strong representation from frequent bus users, older and disabled people, have expressed concerns that the proposals will have an adverse impact in terms of reducing the number of services.
40. Concern has also been expressed that online application processes can be problematic for older and disabled people and many respondents also highlighted that it would cause problems to limit the times when bus passes can be used.
41. Community Transport provision is highly valued by older and disabled people.
42. The conclusions of the EIA support the retention of the existing time frames for bus passes. It is also recommended that whilst encouraging and supporting people to submit online applications whenever possible, a facility should remain to enable paper applications to be submitted in cases where a resident is unable to use the online application process.
43. As part of the introduction of the Subsidised Bus Service Assessment Process it will also be important that the Council facilitates and supports the development of community transport solutions.

Sustainability Implications

44. By ensuring that the most used routes continue to operate for public bus services and rationalising the number of vehicles and journeys undertaken by Council owned fleet vehicles, the strategy will contribute to a reduction in emissions and congestion.

Risk Management

45. The adoption of the Passenger Transport Strategy, which has been developed through consultation, will help mitigate the risks of:
 - Non delivery of the Council's priorities
 - Failure to meet legal obligations
 - Failure to address equality and diversity implications
 - Failing to achieve the required budget efficiencies and delivering value for money
 - Reputational risks associated with failing to support the needs of our residents, and Risk of legal challenge.

Conclusion and next Steps

46. The responses received from the consultation processes have been used to inform the strategy. The strategy suggests that Central Bedfordshire Council :

- Adopts a new network of core, secondary and least-used routes with subsidies determined by a Subsidised Bus Service Assessment Process
Subsidies limited to times of higher passenger demand:
Monday to Friday 8am to 6.30pm
Saturday 8am to 3pm
No subsidies for Sunday services
Where there are impacts on routes currently subsidised we will work with commercial operators to see if the route can be operated on a commercial basis and with other transport providers to prevent any gaps in the network.
 - Having reviewed the responses received it is suggested that we do not make any changes to the current Central Bedfordshire Concessionary Pass scheme. This means that Central Bedfordshire resident pass holders will continue to be able to use their passes twenty four hours a day seven days a week.
 - Moves to a renewal requirement for concessionary bus passes in an attempt to combat fraudulent use and to prevent distress being caused to residents. In order to ensure that pass holders have access to renew their pass they will be able to be renewed either by post or on line.
 - Funding for dial a ride schemes will move from grant funding to a tendered process.
 - A Fleet Policy will be adopted that will ensure that all vehicles owned leased or hired by Central Bedfordshire Council are managed through Fleet Services.
 - An annual review of all clients using fleet services transport will be undertaken.
 - The walking to school routes assessments will be implemented. This is already covered in the already adopted Home to School Transport Policy but has been included in the strategy to ensure transparency.
47. Once the strategy has been adopted changes set out in the strategy will be put in place from April 2017, apart from the available walking assessment process which is already in operation.
48. The tender process for the dial ride operations will be opened in December 2016.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Passenger Transport Strategy
- Appendix 2 – Response to public consultation
- Appendix 3 – Telephone survey responses
- Appendix 4 – Market research responses
- Appendix 5 – Equalities Impact assessment

Background Papers

The following background papers, not previously available to the public, were taken into account and are available on the Council's website:

None