

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE – 7 OCTOBER 2014

COUNCIL – 17 DECEMBER 2014

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR STRATEGIC PLANNING
AND TRANSPORT

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL PUBLIC CONSULTATION:
HAVE YOUR SAY ON A MORE EFFICIENT BUS SERVICE FOR
HERTFORDSHIRE, JULY 2014

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- This purpose of this report is to detail the public consultation by Hertfordshire County Council on proposals to implement a reduction in the provision of subsidised bus services in Hertfordshire, which would involve the deletion of some evening and Sunday services, and to agree this Council's response to such proposals.

<u>RECOMMENDATION FOR EXECUTIVE:</u> That:	
(A)	East Herts Council should inform Hertfordshire County Council that it objects to the proposed service reductions proposed in its 'Public Consultation: Have Your Say On A More Efficient Bus Service For Hertfordshire, July 2014' for the reasons contained at paragraphs 2.4 to 2.23 of this report, which should form the Council's formal response.
<u>RECOMMENDATION FOR COUNCIL:</u> That:	
(A)	East Herts Council should inform Hertfordshire County Council that it objects to the proposed service reductions proposed in its 'Public Consultation: Have Your Say On A More Efficient Bus Service For Hertfordshire, July 2014' for the reasons contained at paragraphs 2.4 to 2.23 of this report, which should form the Council's formal response.

1.0 Background

- 1.1 Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) is the local authority with responsibility for the provision of bus services throughout the county. Due to budget restrictions, HCC is faced with making reductions across its services and has identified a need to make savings of around £700k pa in its spending on bus provision. As a way of addressing these overall budget restraints, HCC is currently seeking views on its intention to remove the evening and Sunday timetables for certain subsidised bus services.
- 1.2 A copy of the consultation questionnaire, which includes a schedule of affected routes, is attached to this report at **Essential Reference Paper 'B'**. For further information, a copy of the accompanying Frequently Asked Questions document is appended at **Essential Reference Paper 'C'**.
- 1.3 Following the close of the consultation on 8th October 2014, the results will be presented to HCC's Highways and Waste Management Panel in November 2014 and, following that, to Cabinet for consideration. Any resulting service changes would take effect from April 2015.

2.0 Report

- 2.1 To set the context for the current consultation it should be noted that the vast majority of Hertfordshire's bus services are commercially operated by private bus operators and that these services would be unaffected by the proposals being consulted on. The services that would be affected are known as subsidised services and these involve routes which are not operated on a commercial basis as they would not be considered viable without financial support.
- 2.2 In considering the service reductions proposed in the consultation, it should be noted that not all subsidised services would be subject to reductions. Some subsidised services are supported by funding from sources other than the County Council, such as housing developer contributions or central government grants. These routes would not be affected by the review at this stage. Neither would the review impact on the entitlement of some children to free travel to and from school, or

to the continuation of concessionary (discounted) fares for young and older people.

- 2.3 The consultation itself is constructed in a survey format with set questions which does not allow for any further options to be considered or for free-flow responses. As the questions are more tailored to individual consumer specific responses, it is not considered appropriate for East Herts Council to respond to the individual set questions, but rather that the views expressed at paragraphs 2.4 to 2.23 of this report should be submitted as its formal response. Rather than being limited to the bounds of the consultation, the response should be broadened to consider a multitude of issues which have been omitted. These primarily encompass the lack of a policy and logistics framework taking account of sustainability, environmental, social and economic impacts in the County Council's approach.
- 2.4 The first of East Herts Council's concerns regarding the consultation is the lack of transparency over how the decision to take the proposed approach has been reached. Paragraph 2.5 of Agenda Item 10 of the Highways and Waste Management Panel held 8th July 2014 (attached at **Essential Reference Paper 'D'**), states that a number of options have been considered, but none of these are documented and no reasons have been stated regarding why any alternative options were rejected. There appears to be no documentation readily available to the public so that evidence underpinning the proposed approach can be clearly understood.
- 2.5 Notwithstanding this, it is considered that the currently proposed service reductions constitute a flawed approach in respect of both national and local policy.
- 2.6 Nationally, the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) is quite clear in respect of promoting the importance of facilitating sustainable development in regard to transport policies, particularly in paragraphs 29 and 30 of Section 4, Sustainable Transport.
- 2.7 Locally, East Herts Council, as a predominantly rural District, has made every effort to achieve such development, both within its existing adopted Local Plan and within the emerging Draft District Plan, but the success of this policy approach is predicated on the support of key statutory stakeholders.

- 2.8 The proposals within the consultation go towards a breach of the proposed development plan and undermine the principles of sustainability.
- 2.9 The policy objective of reducing greenhouse gases is equally contained throughout the policy principles and the development strategy of the Draft East Herts District Plan. There is little doubt that the proposed removal of these services would generate further car borne traffic based on the rural nature of the District and the distances between key service facilities. Therefore, the removal of these subsidised services would undoubtedly run contrary to the policy objectives and worsen an already unacceptably high level of gas emissions across the County.
- 2.10 An increase in car usage would also run counter to all the professed sustainability policies and strategies of the County Council. This is especially true of LTP3 for Hertfordshire 2011 – 2031, which states that its vision is “To provide a safe, efficient and resilient transport system that serves the needs of businesses and residents across Hertfordshire and minimises its impact on the environment”. It further states that it will achieve this by ... “Promoting and supporting sustainable travel to reduce growth in car traffic and contribute to improved health and quality of life for residents with a positive impact on the environment and on the wider challenge of reducing transport’s contribution to climate change”.
- 2.11 Furthermore, two of the five transport strategy goals provided to support the vision include:
- Improve transport opportunities for all and achieve behavioural change in mode choice; and
 - Reduce transport’s contribution to greenhouse gas emissions and improve its resilience.
- 2.12 The results of the proposed service reductions are actually likely to be a loss of choice of sustainable options and a reduction in potential modal shift, plus an increase in greenhouse gas emissions.
- 2.13 There is also scope for the proposed changes to result in further negative impacts in relation to the effects on the economic and social well-being of the community. Examples of such impacts could include:

- a) Later arrivals on the rail network (e.g. for those finishing work in London at 6pm) being unable to connect to onward travel on bus services and PlusBus initiatives (particularly those serving rural areas);
- b) Connecting services from place of work to home requiring bus interchanges and/or stopping mid-route due to end of service time;
- c) Reducing options for travel for shift workers;
- d) Reducing the opportunity to visit towns and villages in the evenings and at weekends;
- e) Potential negative impact on the retail trade and the development of significant Sunday trading as well as staff accessibility.

2.14 Isolation is of significant concern to an ageing population particularly from the health and well-being standpoint and, again, especially in a rural District. The hidden costs are presumed not to have been taken into account within the approach to the service changes as no evidence base is available or transparent.

2.15 Furthermore, restricting journey choice to those vulnerable or less affluent members of communities who cannot either access or afford a car (especially in more rural locations) will limit their ability to access employment opportunities if they are unable to make these journeys by bus. This will further restrict opportunities for social interaction where facilities lie in locations beyond their immediate environs.

2.16 While it is noted that the consultation does not affect free travel subsidies for eligible school children, it could well affect the routes that those children use due to curtailed timetables. The proposed changes could involve pupils at schools that offer after-school activities being particularly affected whereby, either pupil opportunities to engage in extra curricula activity would be reduced due to the need to access passenger transport before services stop running, or parental car journeys would be required to facilitate them. The latter would further add to unsustainable journey increases instead of the existing sustainable travel arrangements.

2.17 It is important that a full transparent evidence and information base as to where the proposed changes could affect school children should be made available to inform decision making.

- 2.18 Furthermore, while it is also stated that funding from sources other than the County Council, such as housing developer contributions, would not be affected by the review at this stage, it could be considered disingenuous of the County Council to insist on developer contributions towards sustainable transport while at the same time reducing the contribution to support similar services. Moreover, there is lack of clarity in the consultation as to what will happen with these services when any period of subsidy expires.
- 2.19 Routes which are currently subsidised and are currently proposed for reduction, while not in themselves commercially viable, are viewed as key to serving communities – especially in rural areas. The current approach to the consultation offers no real options for debate to present alternatives to this. It is suggested that such alternative approaches could include:
- a) Higher fare prices across the board;
 - b) Nominal charges for those with travel passes for the suggested removed services, thus reducing the subsidy required but retaining the services;
 - c) Scenarios around social responsibilities of the private bus operators;
 - d) Subsidies and/or fares based on patronage;
 - e) Subsidies and/or fares based on destinations.
- 2.20 It is disappointing to note that no approach to individual District/Borough Councils has taken place regarding the proposed service cuts. A number of these scenarios could have been discussed with an approach to finding alternative solutions through partnership.
- 2.21 Of further particular concern is that the longer term strategic position on bus services is not being opened for debate at this juncture. It is firmly believed that this current consultation is merely a first phase. The evidence for this is clearly articulated in 5.8 of the Highways and Waste Management Panel report of 8th July 2014 and in Appendix 1 Background Paragraph 2.
- 2.22 It is recommended that the District/Borough Councils, as planning authorities, are given an open and transparent evidence base of the strategic direction for the future of bus services across the County, not only to ensure that development is appropriately considered but also that there may be opportunities for locally determined community schemes in partnership with the District/

Borough Councils as well as town and parish councils and the voluntary sector.

2.23 In the event that the current proposals should progress, it is considered that, where there is an element of doubling-up along some of the commercial routes that do offer evening/weekend services, that those providers should be approached to consider rerouting some of these services to cover some of the areas affected by evening/weekend service cuts.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Information on any corporate issues and consultation associated with this report can be found within **Essential Reference Paper 'A'**.

Background Papers

- Have your say on a more efficient bus service for Hertfordshire Consultation, HCC, July 2014.

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