

REPORT TO INFRASTRUCTURE SERVICES COMMITTEE – 15 MARCH 2018

REVIEW OF PASSENGER TRANSPORT NETWORK

1 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to:

- 1.1 **Note the proposed review of the supported bus service network and associated re-appraisal of the relevant aspects of the Council's Passenger Transport Strategy; and**
- 1.2 **Approve the establishment of a Member Officer Working Group to oversee the proposed review.**

2 Background/Discussion

- 2.1 The last Aberdeenshire wide review of the supported bus network (fixed route and demand responsive) was undertaken in 2013, at which time THIS Committee at its meeting on 5 December 2013 also approved a Passenger Transport Strategy and the Council's Public Transport Policy Statement (Item 8).
- 2.2 Since then the network of passenger transport services has been subject to monitoring and amendment in response to changes in the commercial bus network, evolving travel needs and the requirement to achieve efficiency savings, the last mentioned reflected, for example, in service changes to supported local bus services scheduled to be implemented in May 2018.
- 2.3 In view of the requirement to replace existing contracted public transport and mainstream school transport contracted services in south Aberdeenshire with effect from August 2019, followed by those in north Aberdeenshire in August 2020, it is proposed to review the Council's passenger transport network comprising supported local bus services and associated A2B dial-a-bus demand responsive transport services whilst taking into account available vehicle resource deployed on other passenger transport services, in particular mainstream school transport.
- 2.4 In terms of public transport provision, under the Transport Act 1985, transport authorities have a duty to subsidise bus services that they deem to be socially necessary in order to accommodate travel needs that would not otherwise be met by the commercial bus network.
- 2.5 A 'Total Transport Review', whereby all available vehicle resource within a defined geographic area is reviewed to determine if efficiency savings can be identified, is currently being undertaken on a Community School Network (CSN) by CSN basis. However, given the imperative to address significant budget pressures associated with school transport service delivery this project

has to date focussed almost exclusively on mainstream school transport provision.

- 2.6 The Council's current Passenger Transport Strategy sets out a high level hierarchy of local bus service provision covering: mainline services; rural feeder services; cross-country services; local rural services and town services. It is proposed to re-appraise the approved network typology to determine its current suitability, prior to determining the most effective network of services necessary to cater for identified travel needs, within the financial resources available to the Council. It will also be important to consider the most appropriate means of service delivery, for example, 'in-house' or 'contracted-in', 'fixed route' or 'demand responsive', 'conventional bus' or 'taxibus' and also to engage with current and potential operators to ensure that a coherent, effective and affordable network emerges. Such engagement with operators is in the spirit of the emerging revised legislation on bus policy, which will place greater emphasis on partnership working between transport authorities and the commercial sector.
- 2.7 In line with the 'Total Transport Review' approach, it is important that in analysing 'public transport' provision appropriate cognisance is given to all other areas of Council passenger transport service delivery, including grant funding of community transport services. For instance the role of the Councils Taxicard concessionary travel scheme for the severely mobility impaired should be considered in the review alongside other financial subsidies.
- 2.8 In order to oversee the review it is proposed that a Member Officer Working Group be convened, consisting of the Chair, Vice-Chair, Opposition Party Transport spokespersons and Officers from Infrastructure Services, Education and Children Services, the Health & Social Care Partnership and Business Services (Finance, Procurement, Legal and Improvement Teams as appropriate). The approach will also see an officer level group that will involve key stakeholder representation from bodies such as Nestrans and other Community Planning Partners NHS. It is further proposed that this Working Group would report any recommended changes to the Passenger Transport Strategy and/or network of services to Committee in late 2018 in order that these can be incorporated into the forthcoming major procurement exercise of all supported local bus and mainstream primary and secondary school transport services in south Aberdeenshire, as well as the budget discussions for 2019/20 and beyond.
- 2.9 A draft remit for the review is being scoped. Subject to the Committee approving the establishment of the MOWG to oversee the proposed network review, in line with recommendation 1.2, the draft remit will be considered and agreed by the MOWG.
- 2.10 The Head of Finance and Monitoring Officer within Business Services have been consulted in the preparation of this and their comments are incorporated within the report and are satisfied that the report complies with the Scheme of Governance and relevant legislation.

3 Scheme of Governance

- 3.1 The Committee is able to consider and take a decision on this item in terms of Section F.3.1.1 of the List of Committee Powers in Part 2A of the Scheme of Governance as it relates to the establishment of a working group.

4 Implications and Risk

- 4.1 An equality impact assessment (EqIA) is not required because as this report only seeks the establishment of a Member Officer Working Group and does not have a differential impact on any of the protected characteristics. An EqIA will be undertaken as part of the proposed review process and will form part of the future report to Committee outlining the outcomes of the review.
- 4.2 There are no direct long term staffing and financial implications associated with the report. The proposed review will however require staff resource and consideration will be given to how the review work will be taken forward in a corporate approach. Officers are considering what resource will be required from within existing teams to support the review process.
- 4.3 No Risks have been identified as relevant to this matter on a Corporate or Strategic Level however in undertaking the review the Member Officer Working Group will be asked to consider any emerging Risks and appropriate mitigation measures.
- 4.4 The Town Centre First Principle will be taken into account when determining appropriate supported bus service delivery.

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Report prepared by Richard McKenzie, Passenger Transport Manager
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