

15 March 2023		ITEM: 11
		Decision: 110643
Cabinet		
Thurrock Supported Bus Services		
Wards and communities affected: All	Key Decision: Key Decision	
Report of: Cllr Ben Maney, Cabinet Member for Transport and Public Safety		
Accountable Assistant Director: Leigh Nicholson, Assistant Director, Planning, Transportation and Public Protection		
Accountable Director: Mark Bradbury, Interim Director of Place		
This report is Public		

Executive Summary

Thurrock Council supports through financial contribution three local bus services within the borough. These services, tendered by the council in 2019 are funded through a corporate budget. The services are operated by the bus operator NIBS and Stephenson's of Essex on a three-year contract, which concluded in March 2022, with an option to extend by up to a further two years.

Due to uncertainty in the market, and the impacts of the pandemic, a twelve-month extension was implemented for the year to March 2023. The tendered cost of these services was approximately £452,000 per annum, but due to cost pressures, has risen significantly this year. With the receipt of a grants from the Department for Transport, and increased fare revenues, the projected additional liability for this year is £14,611.25 which will form a corporate budgetary pressure on the council.

If these services were to be extended by a further year, there is expected to be a further cost increase of 8%-16%, and a budgetary pressure of between £150,000 - £200,000 for the year 2023/24.

This report presents an analysis of bus patronage data and a twelve-week consultation regarding these supported services to help enable decision makers to determine if these services present value for money. Cabinet is asked to review these findings to help support in their decision making.

This paper was presented to Planning, Transportation and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 23 November 2022. Recommendations from the committee have been included within this report.

Additional service options have been explored in detail following input from Ward Members and Portfolio Holder. These options explore how a level of bus service could be retained in the affected communities. The options are set out in Section 10 and are intended to help Members with the recommendations set out in this report.

1. Recommendation

1.1 Cabinet approves the withdrawal of the funding provision of the three supported services the 11, 265 and 374.

1.2 Cabinet approves the procurement of off-peak day-time provision three days a week to the community of Fobbing. This would involve re-routing some existing commercial bus routes through Fobbing, providing a link between Stanford-le-Hope and Basildon. This would be for an initial 12-month period with a review of usage to be undertaken before any extension.

1.3 Cabinet notes the net saving of £427,000 delivered by these decisions.

1.4 Cabinet notes that the following communities will have no or limited public transport provision linking them to the rest of the borough – Bulphan, East Tilbury Village, Horndon-on-the-Hill, North Stifford, West Tilbury, and western parts of Aveley. East Tilbury and Linford would also lose all bus provision. While members will be mindful of the ongoing review being undertaken by the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee, cabinet directs Transportation Services to keep the public transport needs of these communities under review and consider future options which could address any unmet need, within the context of the council's financial situation.

2. Introduction and Background

2.1 Thurrock Council currently subsidises the operation of three local bus services within the borough. These services provide access to and from a number of locations and for communities which would not be otherwise supported by commercially sustainable bus services. These three services, the 11, 265 and 374, are further detailed below, with a route map appended to this report (Appendix A).

2.2 Service 11 serves Purfleet-on-Thames, Aveley, South Ockendon, North Stifford, Thurrock Hospital/proposed IMC, Grays, Chadwell St Mary, Orsett, Horndon-on-the-Hill, Stanford-le-Hope, Corringham, Fobbing, Basildon Hospital and terminating at Basildon bus station. This bus departs every two hours from approximately 7am until 7pm Monday to Friday only, with one bus in each direction.

- 2.3 The 265 operates twice a day with a solitary bus on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays only, connecting Grays, Socketts Heath, Orsett, Bulphan and West Horndon, with departures in each direction between 10am and 2pm.
- 2.4 The 374 serves Grays, Socketts Heath via Hathaway Road, Chadwell St Mary, West Tilbury, Coalhouse Fort, East Tilbury, Linford, Stanford-le-Hope, Corringham, Fobbing, Basildon Hospital and terminates at Basildon bus station. These buses run Monday to Friday, departing approximately every 90 minutes between 7am and 6pm, with one bus in each direction, and every three hours on Saturdays.
- 2.5 Prior to a formal tender in 2019, papers were submitted to Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet to agree the continuation of the services. A three-year contract with a two-year extension option was awarded to operators NIBS and Stephenson's of Essex.
- 2.6 The contract was tendered on a "revenue risk" basis, where the council does not pay for the full cost of delivering these services but provides a guaranteed sum to the operator. All fares and revenues collected remain with the operator, providing an incentive to the operator to increase patronage, helping to reduce cost to the council, and placing a risk with the operator if revenues do not meet their projections.
- 2.7 In 2019, the three services carried 89,040 passenger journeys. The subsidy provided by Thurrock Council for these three services for that year totalled £454,318.20. This equated to a subsidy of £5.10 per passenger trip. Of those 89,040 passenger journeys, approximately a third were fare paying passengers, with the overwhelming majority of the remaining riders being older person or disabled concessionary pass holders. Respective figures for 2020 and 2021 are significantly skewed due to the impacts of the pandemic, coupled with government guidance and changes in travel behaviours. In 2020/21 patronage was 30,758, and in 2021/22 patronage was 65,008. This trend in patronage can be seen on all bus services across the country. In 2019/20 only a third of journeys were by fare paying passengers (40% in 2021/22).
- 2.8 These services provide a key community, social, and health and wellbeing benefit to many residents. For example, in 2019, 54% of all passengers on the 11 service were concessionary pass holders, and these were most likely to be older persons. For the 374, this was 64%, and 89% for the 265. This totalled 53,789 passengers in 2019, or 60% of all passengers on these three services. Concessionary pass holders do not pay to use the bus anywhere in England from 9.30am onwards, and this is a statutory provision. In Thurrock, this provision is allowed from 9am. Thurrock Council has a duty to fairly compensate bus operators for concessionary travel, and this is provided from a separate grant and budget.
- 2.9 All other bus routes in Thurrock, except those franchised by Transport for London, and an Essex County Council service which serves Bulphan from

Brentwood, are commercially operated services delivered by Ensign Bus and First Buses Essex.

3. Contract Extension in Financial Year 2022/23

- 3.1 The initial three-year term of the contract came to an end in March 2022. As such, the council has extended the provision of the service through the available contract extension by a further twelve months. Unfortunately, due to inflationary and commercial pressures, this has seen the price increase by approximately £100,000. This increase has been caused by rises in cost to fuel, drivers wages, cost of parts, as well as other increased costs. Over the contracted three-year period, the price had remained the same to the council.
- 3.2 One of the main reasons as to why the contract was extended rather than retendered was due to market uncertainties in the aftermath of the Coronavirus pandemic, with dropped patronage levels. This would likely have increased costs for the council in providing these services. Furthermore, officers were of the mind that competition from alternative providers did not exist within this market, and therefore it could have led to a significant increase in the tendered price beyond that which has been seen through the extension period.
- 3.3 The way the contract pricing was structured also differed from the initial three year period, and became a "Gross Cost" price, rather than revenue risk. In all, the Gross Cost price of the contract was set at £676,281.91. From here, a number of subsidies and generated revenues are to be subtracted from this sum to identify this cost. An initial payment of £55,190.88 was paid to cover the English National Concessionary Travel scheme, which funds free bus travel for older persons and those with qualifying disabilities, which is funded directly by the Department for Transport as a grant allocation to local authorities. In addition, it was projected that the service would generate £71,436 in fare revenues over the course of the year. By subtracting these sums from the Gross Cost, the cost to the council was projected to be £549,655.03. The annual budget to support these three supported services remained at £452,000. Therefore an additional sum of £97,655.03 was required to cover the cost of the delivery of these services for the year 2022/23. This additional sum had not been budgeted.
- 3.4 Given these circumstances, it was requested that the council review these services, based on the increased cost, to ensure they present value for money. Whilst this review is timed in line with procurement, we do need to consider the findings of the review, against the council's current financial position, which is under significant pressure, with all budgets under review. Any increase in cost presents additional revenue pressures to the corporate budget and in identifying any increases, decreases will need to be found from elsewhere. When considering this paper and findings, there is a need to be mindful of the potential of creating an unsustainable position for the council.

- 3.5 With an increase in costs, work was undertaken to identify if these services should be maintained in their present form, or if there are opportunities to revise the provision. In consultation with the Communities Team and Legal Services, there is legitimate expectation by our communities to be consulted where services are considered for significant alteration or potential for withdrawal, in particular where budgetary pressures are a key underlying factor. In July 2022, Cabinet approved a twelve-week consultation with all communities which are supported by these services. Alongside the consultation, a Community Equalities Impact Assessment was also undertaken to consider due regard requirements set out in the Public Sector Equality Duty. This assessment is appended to this report.

4 Communities Equalities Impact Assessment

- 4.1 A Communities Equalities Impact Assessment has been undertaken as part of this services review. As part of the council's requirements under the Public Sector Equality Duty, which forms part of Section 149 of the Equalities Act, it is required to be fully aware of the impact any changes may have on stakeholders. Public bodies must assess this impact relative to the decision to be taken.
- 4.2 The CEqIA has identified that changes to the services would have a negative impact on the following protected characteristics groups – Age, Disability, and Sex, as well as non-protected groups such as rural communities, workforces, health and wellbeing, and socio-economically disadvantaged.
- 4.3 In each of these cases, there may not be much opportunity to mitigate against the negative outcomes without alternative provision of some sort being provided. This may be providing a different service, or the private sector stepping in to provide provision, as the commercial bus network does across other parts of Thurrock.
- 4.4 Full details of the CEqIA are given in the accompanying Community Equalities Impact Assessment (Appendix B) and Communities Impact report (Appendix C). This identifies in detail each of the protected groups and other categories identified within the CEqIA and what measures can be implemented to mitigate any negative impacts.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 The public consultation started on Friday 15 July 2022 and was scheduled to run for twelve weeks, closing on Sunday 9 October 2022. The consultation format was primarily digital, using the council's consultation web-portal, with the direct link being <https://consult.thurrock.gov.uk/bus-consultation-2022>.
- 5.2 The consultation was structured as a standard form-based survey, where participants could provide details about the frequency with which they use these supported services and other bus services in Thurrock, origin and destination for journeys, and whether services remain fit for purpose or could

be enhanced. Alongside the survey, the consultation portal also included an interactive map to help participants better understand the routes of the three supported services being consulted upon.

- 5.3 Given the awareness of types of bus user who ride or rely on these services, and their rural locations, it was determined that alternative provision should be required beyond the digital platform. As a result, the survey was converted into a paper-based form, asking each of the same questions as that on the digital platform, while simultaneously providing the same background information and visualisation of routes. This was published as a four-page colour booklet which was distributed across the borough. Residents in each of the locations which were served by the bus could pick up the survey from key locations, such as libraries and key community facilities. Completed forms could be returned in consultation boxes within each of these communities.
- 5.4 The consultation was also made available for collection on each of the three bus services with posters in the bus to help inform passengers. Particularly for those participants who collected their survey on the bus, but not exclusively, a freepost envelope was also provided to allow the survey to be returned via Royal Mail, without having to identify the location of the nearest collection point.
- 5.5 Many of the bus stops served by the three supported services promoted the consultation through posters and all promotional materials, including the paper surveys included a link and QR code to enable participants to log their responses via the web-portal. These would have been posted either in the bus shelter or timetable casing. Posters were also placed to advise where paper forms could be obtained and submitted for collection.
- 5.6 The full list of locations where forms could be obtained and submitted were as follows:

Locations where forms could be obtained and submitted

Grays Library
Blackshots Library
Chadwell Hub
East Tilbury Library
Stanford Library
Corringham Library
Aveley Hub
Belhus Hub
Tilbury Hub

Locations where forms could be obtained only

Post Office and shop in Horndon on the Hill
Post Office and Village Hall in East Tilbury
The Village shop in North Stifford
Headon Hall in Stifford Clays
Village Hall and shop in Bulphan

Orsett Hospital reception
Village shop in Orsett
Local forum members in Horndon on the Hill
Local Forum Members in Fobbing
Bus Services 11, 265 and 374

- 5.7 All paper forms which were received via the mail and those collected from across the community, were entered into the main consultation portal, to act as a single repository for all collated data. In total 356 individual responses were received to the consultation across the twelve weeks.
- 5.8 A full consultation report has been developed alongside this main report, which analyses the responses, but high-level feedback identified the following:
- 99 respondents identified they were aged over 60, which accounted for 47% of respondents to this question. Those aged 45-59 accounted for 18% (37 responses) and only 7% were under 45 years old (14 responses). The second highest level of response were those who declined to state their age (58 responses, 28%). Approximately 40% of respondents did not answer this question.
 - Three quarters of all respondents were female and only 22% identified themselves as male, with 3% preferring not to state their gender or chose other.
 - Of the 356 respondents, only 22 had not used a bus within the last six months (6%). Nearly 55% of respondents had used the 11 service within the past six months, and nearly 60% had used the 374. Just over 16% identified they had used a different bus service that wasn't one of the three supported services.
 - Exactly 68% of respondents used the bus at least once a week with a further 25% of respondents using the bus at least once a month. Only 5% stated they had never used the bus.
 - The primary reason respondents stated they used the bus was for three core purposes – accessing shops, retail and leisure (67%); accessing health appointments (64%); and visiting friends and family (43%). Smaller numbers used these services for accessing employment (16%) and education (10%).
 - The most prevalent reasons why the bus was used was due to having no other alternative (52%) and due to having a bus pass (51%). The bus was also identified as the most convenient way to travel, as identified by 36% of respondents, as well as for the buses environmental credentials (32%)
 - Approximately 50% of all respondents stated they were regular users of the number 11 service, and 80% of respondents stated that the service met their needs. The most popular destinations on this service in order were Basildon town centre, Basildon Hospital, Orsett (assumed the hospital), followed by Corringham and Stanford. The most popular origin point was Horndon-on-the-Hill.
 - Only 10% of respondents identified as regular users of the 265 bus service, and only 55% of users felt the service met their needs. The

most popular destinations in order of preference were Grays town centre, followed by Orsett (again assumed hospital), followed by North Stifford and West Horndon. Bulphan and Grays were the most popular origin points.

- Lastly, 57% of respondents stated they were regular users of the 374 bus service. Over 80% of users felt this service met their needs (82%). The most popular destinations on this service were Basildon Hospital and Basildon town centre, followed by Grays town centre, and to a lesser extent Corringham, Stanford, East Tilbury and Chadwell St Mary. East Tilbury was the most popular origin point identified.

5.9 Upon review of the free text options offered by the consultation, the responses further strengthened the key themes identified through the CEqIA and in the responses above. In particular, respondents reiterated how these services act as a lifeline in particular for those who are elderly or disabled, provide access to healthcare, access to shopping, provide a social function, and would create social isolation for many, which may lead to other negative outcomes for communities, the council and other services. Respondents also made note of the concerns of costs associated with alternative options to continue making the journeys by these services, and that in many cases taxis are available but unaffordable.

5.10 A full report specific to the public consultation, and its outcomes is given in Appendix D.

5.11 A petition from 255 Fobbing residents was presented to officers on 22nd February 2023. The petition states ‘We the undersigned appeal to Thurrock Council to protect the vital bus service through Fobbing. The loss of which will have a catastrophic impact on the isolated village particularly to our senior citizens who rely on public transport’.

5.12 Of the signatories 189 declared that they were bus users and amongst those the main reasons for bus use were, visiting hospital & doctors and food shopping. Whilst the petition is specific to residents of Fobbing it is not considered that it raises new issues from those raised in the consultation and addressed elsewhere in the report and appendices.

6 Use Analysis

6.1 To attain a better understanding of these three services, all passenger journeys were assessed over a twelve-month period. Between 01 July 2021 and 30 June 2022, all journey data collected by the ticketing machine on the three supported bus services were analysed to better improve the understanding of how these services are used. This is split into four parts, covering all three services, and then each service individually.

6.2 Across all three services, in the twelve-month period that was analysed, there were a total of 68,088 passenger journeys recorded. In total, £73,224.90 was generated in fare revenue. The 374 service accounts for the highest

proportion of passenger journeys (38,272 (56%)) and revenues (£44,586.70 (61%)). It is followed by the 11 with 41% of passenger journeys (28,345) and 38% of revenues (£28,121.50). The 265, which has the lowest frequency and milage accounts for just 2% of passenger journeys (1471) and less than 1% of revenues (£516.70). In terms of the cost of providing these services, the 11 accounts for 51.5% (£259,78.44), the 374 accounts for 43.5% (£219,822.17), and the 265 for just 5% (£24,835.10).

- 6.3 In terms of ridership, over half of all passenger journeys across the three services are made by concessionary pass holders, which may be issued for either age or disability. 38% of passenger journeys are through adult tickets, and nearly 7% are child tickets. Where tickets are purchased – adult or child, approximately a third are purchased using cash, with 67% being made by some form of card or electronic payment.
- 6.4 Further details regarding how these services are used are given in the accompanying Community Equality Impact Assessment and Communities Impact report, which can be found in Appendix C.

7 Impact of Service Withdrawal

- 7.1 Additional analysis has been undertaken to identify what proportion of the population would be impacted if a decision was made to withdraw the three services. This analysis was undertaken against a number of different timeframes across the week.
- 7.2 Using 2020 Mid-year population estimates, it was identified that 113,448 residents were able to access one of these three supported services, by travelling 400 metres or less from their homes. A further 62,083 residents within the borough of Thurrock are not classed as being able to access these services, based on this 400m parameter. Over 6000 residents currently do not have access to any form of public transport within 500 metres of their home.
- 7.3 On a typical weekday, if these three supported services were to be removed, as many as 8,000 residents would lose access to public transport, whereas on a Saturday this would be limited to closer to 4,000. The following table sets out public transport accessibility, measuring service availability within 500m of an access point, including rail services. Therefore, if one public transport service was available within the hour timeframe identified, and the residential dwelling within an actual 500 metre walking journey from the bus stop (or railway station), then that resident was identified as having public transport access.

Day	Time Period	Population currently served	Population served if services are removed	Population losing access to public transport
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Weekday (Monday)	07:00 - 08:00	171,734	164,420	7,314
Weekday (Monday)	12:00 - 13:00	171,637	163,464	8,173
Weekday (Monday)	15:00 - 16:00	171,670	164,098	7,572
Weekday (Monday)	20:00 - 21:00	142,314	139,170	3,144
Saturday	08:00 - 09:00	167,146	164,131	3,015
Saturday	15:00 - 16:00	167,146	163,429	3,717
Sunday	12:00 - 13:00	139,254	139,254	-

- 7.4 The table identifies that during the working week, the biggest impact would be felt by communities during the middle of the working day. On Saturdays, where only the 374 operates on a three-hour frequency, nearly four thousand residents would be without access to public transport.
- 7.5 As a result of this impact work, Members asked for alternative service options to be explored to ascertain if some level of bus service could be retained and funded.
- 7.6 Further details and supportive mapping of this analysis can be found in the accompanying Community Equality Impact Assessment and Communities Impact report in Appendix C.

8. Financial Considerations

- 8.1 As identified in section three, as the contract was extended beyond its initial three-year period, there was an increase in cost, due to inflationary pressures on the operator, which had not been implemented in the initial contracted three-year period. This price was projected to be approximately a £100,000 budgetary pressure on the council, as increases in contract prices had not been factored into the budget. The Gross Cost price for the year 2022/23 has been identified as £676,281.91, with a projected income of £71,436 from fares and a £55,190.88 contribution via the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme, this reduced the price to £549,655.03. The council's allocated budget to support these three services is £452,000. This created a budgetary pressure of £97,655.03.
- 8.2 In the year to date, the revenue generation has exceeded the projection by a small sum. The service was projected to generate £47,624 over the eight-month period April to November. Revenues from the service are in fact £56,467.80, resulting in an additional income of £8,843.80. This has currently reduced the council's liability to £88,721.25. Furthermore, the council has managed to secure a further £74,200 in grants from the Department for Transport for this year only, which will be allocated to this expenditure, further

reducing the budgetary liability to £14,611.25. This also assumes revenues will meet projected incomes for the remaining four months of the year.

- 8.3 Therefore, for the financial year 2022/23 it is predicted that the cost for delivering these three services will be £466,611.25. This is therefore an overspend of £14,611.25 against the budgeted amount of £452,000.
- 8.4 Going forward, the council has sought to engage with the existing operator to identify a projected cost for financial year 2023/24, on the assumption no alterations are made to the services by the council. Due to the fluctuating circumstances in the economy, the operator has reasonably been reluctant to specify an exact price for next year. However, for sake of guidance, they have identified key financial bands which may help the council to plan. A best-case scenario is an 8% increase in costs, which would give a gross cost of c£730,000. A worst case was identified as being 16% increase in price, bringing the gross cost value to c£784,500. Without significant fare rises, these price increases are likely to further extend the budgetary pressure on the council, with little likelihood of additional grants being received from the Government, as were those received this year.

9. Overview and Scrutiny

- 9.1 A paper was presented to Planning, Transportation & Regeneration (PTR) Overview and Scrutiny Committee (O&S) on Wednesday 23 November 2022 on the topic of the Thurrock Support Services. The Members of PTR were presented a number of options on how to proceed with these services, to help inform the decision making by Cabinet.

These options were:

- a) To withdraw these three services;
 - b) Maintain these services without amendment
 - c) To maintain one of the three services (as is or amended)
 - d) Option c but with enhanced frequencies; and
 - e) To use the funding to develop a Thurrock-wide fare scheme.
- 9.2 Members of PTR showed concern of the impact of the withdrawal of these services to residents and communities which would become isolated as a result. There was however acknowledgement that these services have limited patronage levels with high levels of subsidy per passenger journey and were minded to see how services could be provided more efficiently.
- 9.3 Members of PTR did not advocate for the full withdrawal of services but did not advocate maintaining the existing provision either. They did propose that officers return to the committee with further details on how a service (or a number of services) could be provided to ensure communities which would be cut off from public transport provision could be connected to public transport routes, either through a dedicated service or some form of “hub and spoke” system, where community services shuttle residents into key connection

points. In addition, Members of PTR also advocated for the development of a Thurrock-wide fare scheme, but one which was developed in collaboration with the bus industry and local operators, and if implemented, not at cost to the council. Members of PTR asked for this proposal to be returned to the committee, however the time critical nature of this issue means that this report needs to be considered now.

10. Alternative Options

- 10.1 A decision to withdraw these services would deliver will be an annual budgetary saving of £452,000 effective three-months after formal notice is given to the operator as per the contractual agreement between the council and the service operator, provided no alternative service is offered.
- 10.2 Alternatively, Cabinet may wish to consider a reduced provision, ensuring some of the most impacted communities retain a level of bus service access for residents who have no alternative. Three options have been assembled, with a cost estimate. Further details and indicative operating timetables are given in appendix E.

Option 1

- 10.2.1 To offer service levels similar to the existing Saturday service on route 374 on weekdays for two or three days of the week. This would see the implementation of one single bus connecting the existing communities served by the 374 between Grays and Basildon Bus Stations and amended to incorporate Horndon-on-the-Hill. The bus would provide three runs in each direction, with a headway of three hours and thirty minutes. The approximate cost for this provision is projected to be c.£198,000. This option could be implemented without needing to seek any external procurement by utilising the existing contract, through until March 2024.

Option 2

- 10.2.2 To propose a route between Chadwell St Mary and Basildon, covering West Tilbury, East Tilbury, Horndon-on-the-Hill, Stanford-le-Hope, Corringham and Fobbing to operate with a single bus three days a week. Industry figures have suggested the cost of this service would be as much as c.£198,000, however the council would have to go out to tender to implement this option if an interest existed in the market to provide such a service. Such a route could offer four runs a day in each direction on a three hour headway. There are operational considerations regarding turn-around and appropriate layover facilities, which may necessitate the route operating slightly further west than Chadwell St Mary.

Option 3

- 10.2.3 To provide off-peak day-time provision to the community of Fobbing only, three days a week. This would involve re-routing some existing commercial bus routes through Fobbing, providing a link between Stanford-le-Hope and

Basildon. This would offer a minimum of three runs in each direction between 9am and 2pm and is projected to cost £25,000 per annum, with all fares retained by the operator. Due to the cost, this option could be procured without formal tender.

- 10.3 The following table sets out other options which were considered, and presented to PTRO&S, but have been rejected in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Transport.

Option	Reason
Maintain the services without amendment	Financially unsustainable – need to identify additional revenue budget to support
As above but with enhanced frequencies	Financially unsustainable – needs ongoing revenue support at levels additional to above
Develop a Thurrock-wide Fare Scheme	Financially unsustainable – needs ongoing revenue support. This option was supported by Members of PTR O&S Committee, but did not want to see this funded by the council

11. Reasons for Recommendation

- 11.1 The report has been developed to provide the necessary information to help inform a decision by Cabinet in March 2023 on the future of the three financially supported bus services delivered by Thurrock Council. The identified recommendation to withdraw these services is not supported by data and the public consultation, and not formally endorsed by the Planning, Transportation and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee, however the recommendations present an opportunity to make a significant annual financial saving, in turn supporting the council's wider budgetary concerns.
- 11.2 Upon review of this report and supporting appendices, and the recommendation made by members of PTR O&S on 23 November 2022 given in section 9, Cabinet are asked to withdraw these services based on the information provided and the recommendation given in section 10 of this report.

12. Impact on corporate policies, priorities, performance and community impact

- 12.1 Any future reduction, or withdrawal of these services will have a significant impact on those communities in Thurrock which have no or limited alternative public transport provision in the borough. Most impacted will be those from socio-economically disadvantaged communities and groups who may not have alternative to other forms of transport, and the Communities Equalities Impact Assessment has identified older persons, those who are women, and those with disabilities who will be most negatively impacted.

13. Implications

13.1 Financial

Implications verified by **Laura Last**

Senior Management Accountant

The Council continues to experience significant revenue budget pressures and exceptional wider financial risks and, as a result, a section 114 notice was issued on 19th December 2022. This means that all expenditure must meet strict criteria in order to be authorised. The Thurrock Supported Bus Services contract was extended by a further 12 months in March 2022. The initial three year contract had a budget of £452,000 per annum, funded through a dedicated corporate budget. The budget for 2022/23 remains £452,000 and therefore any price increase in the extension is currently unfunded and will cause a budgetary constraint. This is currently projected to be £14,611.25 for the year 2022/23. If the services were to be withdrawn, this would create an annual budgetary saving of £452,000 per annum, effective three-months after formal notice is given to the operator (as per the contractual agreement between the council and the service operator), provided no alternative service is offered. Any reduction in services may result in a saving, but this would have to be determined.

13.2 Legal

Implications verified by **Gina Clarke**

**Corporate Governance Lawyer & Deputy
Monitoring Officer**

It is not a statutory requirement for the Council to fund any public local bus services. However, the Council does have powers under the Transport Acts 1985 and 2000 and Local Transport Act 2008 to enter into agreements with public transport operators to provide subsidies for services which are not available commercially.

Any withdrawal of subsidies for bus services will need to be justified and such a decision would need to be based on robust evidence and analysis. The decision-making process would need to be supported with consideration by Cabinet of the outcome of the consultation, the consultation responses, and the Equality Impact Assessment, the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) requirements under Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 as detailed in Appendix C of the of report, together with any other relevant factors such as budget constraints.

13.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Roxanne Scanlon**

Community Engagement and Project Management Officer

A Community Equality Impact Assessment has been undertaken to support any decision made on these services, as referenced in section 4 of this report to ensure compliance with Public Sector Equality Duty. A formal consultation with residents and affected communities has also been undertaken, taking into consideration existing users and their locations of residence, and the consultation process was fair and accessible. The outcomes of the consultation were used to inform and support completion of the Community Equality Impact Assessment. This determined the following groups - age, sex and disability - would be negatively impacted if these services are reduced or withdrawn.

13.4 Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Staff, Health Inequalities, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder, and Impact on Looked After Children

Changes to these services will likely have an impact on residents who are reliant on these supported bus routes and do not have access to alternative modes of travel. This may then result in costs transferred to other parts of the council or health services, providing access to services and facilities, including hospitals and education, as well as access to food and other retail services.

14. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

Cabinet Report – July 2022 – Thurrock Supported Bus Services; - <https://thurrockintranet.moderngov.co.uk/documents/s35273/Thurrock%20Supported%20Bus%20Services.pdf>

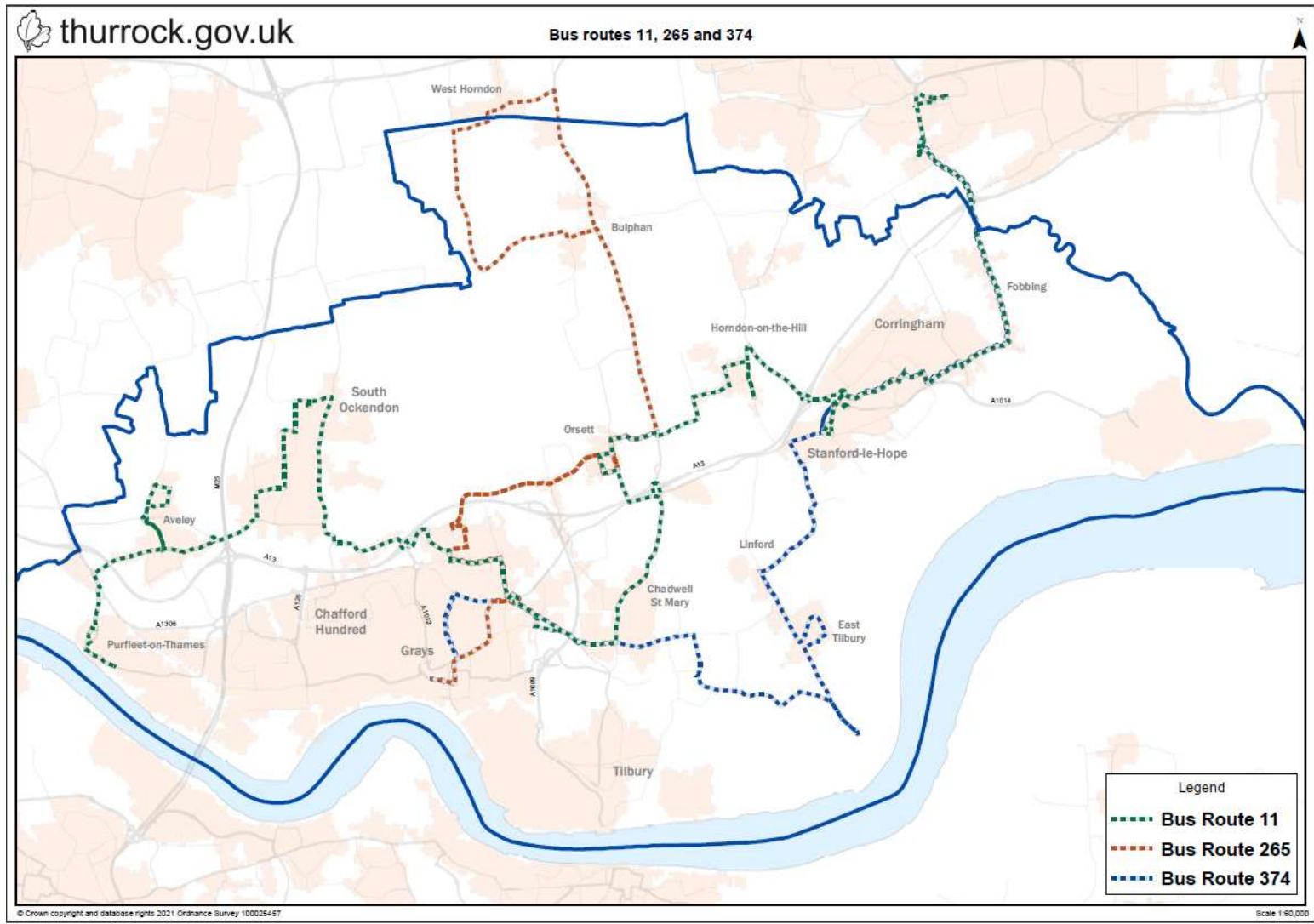
15. Appendices to the report:

- Appendix A - Map of Supported Services – 11, 265, and 374
- Appendix B - Communities and Equalities Impact Assessment template
- Appendix C - Supported Services Communities Equalities Impact Assessment and Community Impacts Report
- Appendix D - Supported Services Consultation Report
- Appendix E – Minimum Service Level Options

Report Author

Navtej Tung
Strategic Transport Manager

Appendix A – Supported Services Route Map – 11, 265, 374



Community Equality Impact Assessment

The Equality Act 2010 states that public bodies must have “due regard” to a variety of Equalities objectives (Equality Act 2010, Section 149) and consequently, Equality Analysis must be carried out to demonstrate that decision-makers are fully aware of the impact that changes may have on stakeholders.

The concept of ‘due regard’ was reinforced in 2012 during the review of the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which “requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between different people when carrying out their activities”

‘Due regard’ is dependent on the relevance and potential impact of the decision being considered. The greater the relevance and impact, the higher the regard due.

As an authority, we have made a commitment to apply a systematic screening process to new policy, strategy, functions or service development including reviews or changes to existing policy, strategy, functions or services.

This is to determine whether the proposals are likely to have a significant impact on different groups within our community.

This process has been developed, together with [full guidance](#), to support officers in meeting our duties under the:

- Equality Act 2010
- Public Sector Equality Duty
- The Best Value Guidance
- The Public Service (Social Value) 2012 Act

In addition, the guidance supports officers to consider our commitments set out in the [Thurrock Joint Compact](#) with the voluntary sector.

As well as supporting you to look at whether there is, or will be, a significant impact, the guidance will also consider ways in which you might mitigate this in the future.

About the service and reason for the development or review process

Name of service	Transportation Services; Planning, Transportation and Public Protection
Lead Officer	Navtej Tung, Strategic Transport Manager
Contact Details	ntung@thurrock.gov.uk ; 01375 652006

Why is this policy, strategy, function or service development/review needed?
<p>Thurrock Council financially supports three local bus services which operate across the borough, supporting predominantly rural communities where commercially operated bus provision does not exist and is unlikely to be deemed financially viable. The existing tendered contract has come to the end of its initial three-year period, with a significant price increase as part of the allowable contract extensions, the council are seeking to understand if the routes are fit for purpose and retain value for money. The council are therefore undertaking a review of these services, to determine if these services should continue, plus understanding what impact there would be if these were removed.</p>

1. Community impact (this can also be used to assess impact on staff although a cumulative impact should be considered)

<p>1.1 What impacts will this policy, strategy, function or service development/review have on communities, workforce and the health and wellbeing of local residents? Look at what you know? What does your research tell you?</p> <p><i>Consider:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> National and local data sets – please see guidance Complaints Consultation and service monitoring information Voluntary and community organisations The Equality Act places a specific duty on people with ‘protected characteristics’. The table below details these groups and helps you to consider the impact on these groups. 					
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	What are the positive and negative impacts?	How will benefits be enhanced and negative impacts minimised or eliminated?
Local communities in general			x	A potential reduction or withdrawal of services would have a negative impact on communities, most particularly those communities which	Unlikely to be mitigated unless an alternative provision is provided.

				are smaller, rural or not within the main conurbations within Thurrock.	
Age			x	Any reduction or withdrawal of service would have a negative impact on members of the community who are older, in particular those who have qualified for concessionary bus passes (c.90% of all concessionary bus passes issued in Thurrock are for age). The largest group of respondents to the consultation are those aged over 60.	Unlikely to be mitigated unless an alternative provision is provided.
Disability			x	Those with disabilities in communities without alternative provision are likely to be negatively impacted without owning their own transport. Persons with disabilities are eligible for concessionary travel (as may necessary companion who is required for travel). C10% of concessionary pass holders qualify through disability.	Unlikely to be mitigated unless an alternative provision is provided.
Gender reassignment		X			
Marriage and civil partnership		X			

Pregnancy and maternity		X			
Race (including Gypsies, Roma and Travellers)		X			
Religion or belief		X			
Sex			X	Women are disproportionately likely to be impacted with reductions or withdrawal of services, particularly older women who may not have access to a car or are able to drive. c75% of respondents to the consultation identified as female.	Unlikely to be mitigated unless an alternative provision is provided.
Sexual orientation		X			
Any community issues identified for this location? <i>See above link to ward profiles.</i> If the project is based in a specific location please state where, or whether Borough wide. Please include any detail of relevance – for example, is it an area with high unemployment, or public transport limited?			x	A number of rural communities are likely to be impacted by any reduction or withdrawal of services. These communities are likely to be Bulphan, Orsett, East Tilbury, West Tilbury, Aveley. Groups identified above living in these communities are most likely to be disproportionately impacted, if they have no private transport alternative.	Unlikely to be mitigated unless an alternative provision is provided.

Workforce			X	People in employment who are reliant on these services are likely to be impacted through any reduction or withdrawal of services, especially if there are no alternate route, if alternatives are longer, more costly or require interchanges, or do not have own private transport.	Unlikely to be mitigated unless an alternative provision is provided.
Health and wellbeing			X	Based on the identification of the groups above, those most affected by the withdrawal or reduction of these services will be negatively impacted. The consultation has identified that the main use of these services by respondents is to access food/shopping, access health appointments and for visiting friends and family. Each of these journey purposes is strongly linked to health and wellbeing of residents.	Unlikely to be mitigated unless an alternative provision is provided.

2. Consultation, data and intelligence

2.1 Please highlight the steps you have taken, or plan to take, to consult the whole community or specific groups affected by the policy, strategy, function or service development/review e.g. on-line consultation, focus groups, consultation with representative groups? For further guidance please contact: consultations@thurrock.gov.uk

This is a vital step

The Passenger Transport Unit has taken multiple steps to increase the reach of this consultation, targeting specifically users of the bus services. To do this, key factors have been taken into considering, in collaboration with the Communities team. The primary method of consulting is the council's web-portal. This is accessible via different devices and supports different needs to be accessible. However, taking into consideration the rural nature of some of the communities served by these bus services, and reflecting on the age profile of users, alternative options were put forward. A paper-based survey was made available to all users, which was available from the following locations – onboard the three bus services under consideration, each of the boroughs libraries and community hubs, key community locations such as post offices and community shops, as well as available for collection from certain community forum members. Responses could be submitted at many of these locations, or via Royal Mail, as a freepost address was set up. The consultation was promoted through posters at bus stops and key locations, and also advising the nearest location from where forms could be collected. All Local Forums and all elected members were advised of this consultation. Posters were also advertising the consultation on the buses.

2.2 Please also provide details on the sources of data or intelligence you have used to inform your assessment of impact and how they have helped you to understand those that will be affected by the policy, strategy, function or service development/review outlined?

Prior to the undertaking of the consultation, the council used patronage data for a full month (May 2022) to help inform and better understand service user profiles. This helped to better understand the profile of user groups and how to target. It was already know that over 50% of all trips were undertaken by persons who qualified for concessionary travel under the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme. This was combined with local knowledge within the council and the team to target and make available consultation materials.

3. Monitoring and Review

3.1 How will you review community and equality impact once the policy, strategy, function or service has been implemented?

*These actions should be developed using the information gathered in **Section 1 and 2** and should be picked up in your departmental/service business plans.*

Action	By when?	By who?
If there are changes in service provision, to undertake a shorter follow-up survey with those participants of the consultation who have opted in to being contacted into	6-12 months after any	Passenger Transport Team

<p>3.1 How will you review community and equality impact once the policy, strategy, function or service has been implemented? <i>These actions should be developed using the information gathered in Section 1 and 2 and should be picked up in your departmental/service business plans.</i></p>		
the future, to see how journeys are being made or what the impact has been on residents. Approximately 100 people have opted into being contacted further.	change to the service	
To propose options to help minimise any impact of service reductions or withdrawals within final report	Dec 2022	Strategic Transport Manager
Where possible to seek funds to implement measures to minimise impact. This may include developing alternate service options, or ticketing measures	2023	Passenger Transport Unit

4. Next steps

It is important to ensure that the information gathered is used to inform any council reports that are presented to Cabinet or Overview and Scrutiny committees. This will allow members to be furnished with all the facts in relation to the impact their decisions will have on different equality groups and the community as a whole.

Take some time to précis your findings below. This can then be added to your report template and the Equality and Diversity Implications section for sign off by the Community Development and Equalities team at the consultation stage of the report cycle.

Implications/ Customer Impact

It is recognised that any reduction or withdrawal of services will have a significant impact on key communities and persons. These services are provided on routes which are not commercially viable, and therefore it is not expected they could be replaced by commercial providers. They also link key communities which do not have alternative public transport provision. Data collected identified persons who were older, in particular those qualifying for concessionary travel on the basis of age, and those who are disabled within these communities are most likely to be impacted. Following the consultation, gender has also been identified as a key indicator of impact, with over 75% of consultation respondents being women. People who rely on these services are likely to do so for a number of reasons, as they may not have alternative options, own their own transport, or for affordability reasons. The health and wellbeing of users within these communities are also of importance and could have other impacts on the council or other stakeholders if services are reduced or withdrawn, as a high number of users use these buses to access health care appointments, particularly at hospitals and in future at the Integrated Medical Centres programme which the council are delivering in hand with the NHS, to access food, retail and leisure, and also to visit friends and family.

The consultation did not identify a large number of respondents who use the bus for employment or education, but it is known that a significant volume of fare paying passengers are in this bracket. Those who rely on these services may be impacted in the future if they are reduced or withdrawn as they may not be able to access centres of employment, impacting on their employability and therefore quality of life.

5. Sign off

The information contained in this template should be authorised by the relevant project sponsor or Head of Service who will be responsible for the accuracy of the information now provided and delivery of actions detailed.

Name	Role – for example, project sponsor, head of service)	Date
Navtej Tung	Strategic Transport Manager	19/10/22