

Excerpt from the minutes of the Cabinet meeting 15 March 2023

Thurrock Supported Bus Services (Decision: 110643)

Councillor Maney introduced the report and felt that it was a difficult decision to make, as the Council had been funding the 11, 265, and 374 bus services for approximately four years, which had served many communities. He explained that previously these services had been funded by one-off government grants, but would cost the Council approximately £785,000 moving forwards, and this could increase to almost £1mn after inflationary costs were considered. He felt that this was unsustainable for the Council in the current financial context, as providing buses was not a statutory service. He added that the services were currently under-used and therefore, the recommendation was to withdraw these buses. Councillor Maney described how a detailed consultation over twelve months had been undertaken, and a twelve-month extension to the services had been granted. He summarised and stated that the team had considered alternative options for the services, but none had been deliverable.

Councillor Arnold thanked Councillor Maney and officers for their hard work on the report, but felt that Fobbing had not been fully represented in the consultation as consultation documents had not been provided in the shops or Village Hall. She felt that Ward Members should have been more included in the consultation, but thanked officers for taking on-board comments from the submitted petition and working to offer an alternative bus service. She stated that she would continue working with officers and bus providers on the future of bus provision to ensure all communities were included. Councillor Johnson stated that he had spoken to residents in his ward who would be impacted by the withdrawal of the bus service, and he understood the upheaval this may cause some residents. He felt that it was a large spend for the Council so agreed with the recommendations, but he would continue to search for a solution to bus provision in Orsett.

Councillor Maney confirmed that lots of work on the consultation had been undertaken, and officers had tried to reach all audiences. He added that consultation documents had been available on the buses themselves and drivers had been instructed to hand these out to service users. He stated that the consultation process would continue to be reviewed to ensure all audiences are reached. Councillor Maney added that Fobbing would have a new bus arrangement as an option to loop other services had been available, but this option was not workable for other communities. He highlighted recommendation 4 which would ensure that Members and officers would continue to review the borough's transport needs, and seek alternative options for bus services in more rural communities. Councillor Arnold questioned if future planning applications in these areas could contain provision for bus services, and if these could be funded through S106 monies. She felt that bus provision for rural communities linked into adult social care, and other Council directorates. The Leader explained that First Bus had recently taken over from Ensign in the borough, and he would be meeting with the new owner to discuss bus

routes and services connecting the east and west of the borough. He thanked the Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their views contained within the report and for their continued challenge of Cabinet Members.

RESOLVED: That Cabinet:

1. Approved the withdrawal of funding provision of the three supported services the 11, 265 and 374.

2. Approved 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.

3. Noted the net saving of £427,000 delivered by these decisions.

4. Noted 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.

Reason for decision: as outlined in the report

This decision is subject to call-in