

29 July 2015

ITEM: 8

Planning, Transport, Regeneration Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Local Bus Services

Report of: Cllr Oliver Gerrish, Portfolio Holder, Planning Transportation and Regeneration

Wards and communities affected:

All

Key Decision:

Key

Accountable Head of Service: Ann Osola, Head of Service, Planning and Transportation.

Accountable Director: David Bull, Director of Planning & Transportation

Executive Summary

This report explains the role of local bus services, the legislation under which they are provided and how local authorities deliver bus services where they feel the need is required. This report also explains the benefit of transport links to members of the community. The recommendations of the committee will form part of the ongoing consultation process.

1. Recommendations

1.1 To consider appropriate local bus budget to ensure access to employment, healthcare, education, shopping and leisure facilities, enabling residents to live independently, minimising the cost of services provided by the local authority.

1.2 To consider alternative ways of providing communities with the transport services required.

2. Introduction and background

2.1 The provision of public transport is considered important to local communities. Local bus, ferry and train services transport residents across the borough and beyond for employment, shopping, hospital and medical appointments, education establishments including colleges and recreational facilities such as leisure centres and swimming pools. Public transport is essential for those who have no other means of transport and allows the option of sustainable travel for those who choose it, which provides environmental benefits.

2.2 The Transport Act 1985 sets out the legislation under which bus services are provided. Any bus company can operate a route and timetable they choose

and set fare levels. Services have to be registered with the Traffic Commissioner, but this is an automatic process. A 56 day notice period has to be given to introduce, withdraw or amend a service. Operators will therefore adopt a commercial approach to bus service provision over which the local authority has no jurisdiction, control or responsibility. These routes are often referred to as the commercial network.

- 2.3 The role of the local authority is to consider the needs the commercial network does not meet, and, if it so wishes, supplement the network with additional journeys or routes. These routes are known as financially supported services and are procured through a process of competitive tendering, although small payments can be made directly to operators for minor modifications or additions to the commercial network (known as de minimis payments).
- 2.4 Without financial support it is unlikely that areas such as Fobbing, East & West Tilbury, Bulphan and Horndon on the Hill would have any bus services. Other areas may not have services at times of low demand.
- 2.5 Over recent years discussions have taken place with operators to provide a cost effective bus network, minimising the need for supported services. The budget had reduced from £835k in 2008/09 to £245k in the current financial year, but this level of funding does not provide a service for all communities or at a frequency that users consider acceptable. Many local authorities have reduced funding for supported bus services in recent years.
- 2.6 The Council currently has 23,000 pass holders of which 1,578 have a disability pass and 521 of those residents require a companion to accompany them on their travel. This is a statutory Government scheme; the financial burden of which continues to increase in line with growth in the borough. Free concessionary fares currently cost the Council £1.2 million per annum. Many of these pass holders are totally dependent upon local bus services to continue their quality of life.
- 2.7 Thurrock has around 40,000 young people under the age of 18 - representing a quarter of the population, many of whom are dependent upon bus services, particularly to access education
- 2.8 Bus services are crucial for many residents to access work, so that they can be economically active and reduce dependency on funding met by the public sector. For some out of work, a bus service is the only prospect of accessing employment and changing their lifestyle
- 2.9 A consultation is currently being undertaken with users of the three supported services which will run until 10th September 2015.

3. Issues, options and analysis of options

- 3.1 Many local bus services are essential for combating social isolation. Operators will not invest in areas of low patronage since by definition these

services are unlikely to be commercially sustainable. Some communities will only receive a local bus service if Thurrock Council provides funding. A consultation is currently underway to identify the value of supported bus services to the community.

- 3.2 Other options for providing transport in rural areas include community transport schemes, car sharing and taxi schemes. Many examples of these schemes exist around the country, and although they often meet the transport needs of certain communities, they tend to rely quite heavily on the use of volunteers and can be quite expensive to run. Demand responsive type services do not provide the convenience of a local bus service due to the need to pre-book.
- 3.3 Transport Act 1985 section 63. (See appendix 2) sets out the legal responsibility of Thurrock Council in relation to bus service provision.
- 3.4 Ways of maintaining services at reduced cost have characterised the work of the passenger transport unit in recent years. This has been achieved by discussions with commercial operators, community transport providers and other authorities and ensuring directorates understand the role that bus services provide in assisting them to meet the needs of service users.

4. Reasons for recommendation

- 4.1 Buses are vital to those living in communities without any other means of transport and enable independent living and crucially reduce calls on other public expenditure.
- 4.2 Commercial operators will not meet all the needs of residents, some of which will only have bus services provided with Thurrock Council financial support.

5. Consultation (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 Bus routes 11, 265, 374 are currently provided by operators with financial support from Thurrock Council. A consultation is being undertaken to assess the value the community places on these routes. In addition, Section 106 funding is used to pump prime services to new developments. For route details please refer to Appendix 1.

6. Impact on corporate policies, Priorities, Performance and community impact

- 6.1 Passenger Transport contributes towards each of the five strategic priorities of the Council, especially to improve the health and well-being of our residents. Inadequate funding will lead to various members of our community, especially the elderly, being socially excluded.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**
Management Accountant

An allocation has been made within the base budget for the provision of local bus services. As the cost of the service following the tendering excises is identified, further consideration will be given to the financial implications.

7.2 **Legal**

Implications verified by: **Daniel Toohey**
Principal Solicitor - Contracts & Procurement

The law applicable to this matter, including a discussion on the Highways Act 1985, is referred to in the body of this report, and schedules.

The content of this report is consistent with the provisions of the Council's Constitution and Local Government Act 2000. The local authority overview and scrutiny function was introduced under the Local Government Act 2000, giving a clearly defined scrutiny role to non-elected members in holding executives of councils to account, and in scrutinising the work of other agencies providing local services. A robust and effective scrutiny process is a vital component in the ethical health and governance of a local authority

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren, Community Development and Equalities Manager**

A sustainable public transport network ensures that the most vulnerable members of the community have fair access to the public realm. Disabled people, in particular, place a high priority on the provision of such services, without which can leave them socially isolated.

7.4 **Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental**

Not Applicable

Background papers used in preparing this report (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

- None

Appendices to this report:

- Appendix 1 - List of Thurrock Council financially supported routes
- Appendix 2 - Extracts from the Transport Act 1985

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