

Local Members' Interest
N/A

Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee – 31st July 2017

Supported Bus Network

Recommendations

1. That the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee note the content of the report and consider whether they wish to formally respond to the consultation as a committee as well as responding as individual members.
2. That the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee consider the range of consultees and consider whether any additional groups should be considered during the consultation period.
3. That the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee note that they will be asked to consider the outcome of the public consultation on the supported bus network and make any appropriate recommendations, including endorsing a preferred option to Cabinet.

Report of Cllr Mark Deaville, Cabinet Member for Commercial

Summary

What is the Select Committee being asked to do and why?

4. The authority is currently holding a public consultation on how the available budget for supporting bus services in Staffordshire from 2018/19 onwards is best spent.
5. The Select Committee is asked to take note of the consultation and consider how all target groups can be encouraged to complete the questionnaire so that all views are represented in the consultation feedback.

Report

Background

6. Over 90 per cent of bus passenger journeys in Staffordshire are undertaken on the commercial bus network. The authority currently provides funding for less than 10% of the bus journeys which are not commercially viable, and which provides connectivity across the county in support of the Authority's strategic objectives:
 - a. To provide access to good jobs and feel the benefit of economic growth;
 - b. Enable improved health and greater independence;
 - c. Enable people to feel safer, happier and more supported in their community.

7. The authority has a statutory duty to secure public transport that it considers to be socially necessary. This is set out in the Transport Act 1985, Section 63(1)(a) which explains that local transport authorities must:

“... secure the provision of such public passenger transport services as the council consider it appropriate to secure to meet any public transport requirements within the county which would not in their view be met apart from any action taken by them for that purpose.”

8. Having considered its duty under section 63 of the Transport Act 1985 and having regards to the needs of the area it must make decisions which are appropriate within the authorities available resources.

Supported Bus Network Options

9. In February 2016 the Council agreed to provide a budget of £600,000 pa from 2018/19 onwards which when combined with the Bus Services Operator Grant (BSOG) will provide a total budget of £1.3m to enable bus journeys which would not be possible on the commercial bus network.

10. Significant work has been carried out over the last 3 years to reshape the Staffordshire supported bus network in order that connectivity is maintained and where possible improved to facilitate bus journeys to education, employment, essential public services, shopping and leisure purposes.

11. Following analysis of passenger data on a contract by contract basis and taking into account the authority's statutory duty under the Transport Act 1985, four options have been developed which provide a supported bus network within the approved financial envelope.

12. These options are described fully in the consultation questionnaires which are attached this report - Appendix B (individual) and Appendix C (organisation) and in summary are:

a. Option 1 - Revised Local Supported Bus Services, (no Connect or Demand Responsive Services)

b. Option 2 - Revised Local Supported Bus Services with Two Connect Services (South Staffordshire Connects and Moorlands Connect)

c. Option 3 - Revised Local Supported Bus Services with Existing Connect Services Retained (Border Car excepted)

d. Option 4 - County-wide Connect and Demand Responsive Services, (no local supported bus services)

13. At this time no decisions have been taken although Option 1 is the preferred option as it retains the greatest number of existing bus journeys whilst minimising the public subsidy for each passenger trip.

Voluntary and Community Transport and Potential Alternative Travel Opportunities

14. Despite careful planning it is recognised that some previous travel opportunities via the Staffordshire Bus Network will be lost. The Council already encourages and provides support for voluntary and community transport schemes across the authority area and is keen to see additional schemes come into operation. The existing schemes provide some 80,000 return trips annually mostly for health appointments.
15. In addition the authority provides support for Wheels to Work to kick start access to employment and encourages Staffordshire employers to sign up to the Share a Lift car share scheme to provide more sustainable travel to work journeys.

Public Consultation

16. An extensive eight week public consultation was launched on the 24 July and views will be sought from both individuals and organisations. An initial list of consultees is attached in Appendix D. Bus users will be targeted using posters on buses and in libraries together with normal media campaigns.
17. The consultation will explore the appetite from communities for the provision of additional voluntary transport schemes.
18. Following the closure of the consultation on the 17 September and a full analysis of the results it is intended that the results of the public consultation exercise will be presented to the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee on the 14 November prior to the Cabinet making the final decision on the shape of the Supported bus Network on the 15 November 2017.
19. This will allow time for the new network to be introduced from April 2018 onwards.
20. It is intended that the authority will engage in the Transport Focus Bus Passenger Survey in both 2017 and 2018 so that the impact on the overall bus network in Staffordshire can be assessed.

Link to Strategic Plan

21. The provision of a supported bus network supports the County Councils vision for a **connected Staffordshire** by ensuring that appropriate public transport links are maintained which would not otherwise be provided by the commercial bus network.
22. In terms of **prosperity**, the provision of a supported bus network, endeavours to provide links to education and work opportunities which would not otherwise be available by the commercial bus network.
23. In terms of being **healthier and more independent**, the provision of a supported bus network enables residents to access education, employment, health, retail and leisure opportunities which would not otherwise be available by the commercial bus network.

Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity – None

Community Impact – The initial community impact assessment is included in Appendix A

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Appendices/Background papers

Appendix A – Initial CIA

Appendix B – Individual Questionnaire

Appendix C – Organisational Questionnaire

Appendix D – Supported Bus Network Review Initial Consultees