

Local Members' Interest
N/A

Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee – 14th November 2017

Supported Bus Network Consultation Outcome

Recommendations

1. That the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee scrutinises the content of the consultation analysis and comments on the outcome.
2. That the Prosperous Staffordshire Select Committee scrutinises the content of the report and considers whether they wish to make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Commercial prior to a final decision being made by Cabinet on the 15 November 2017.

Report of Cllr Mark Deaville, Cabinet Member for Commercial

Summary

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

3. The authority has undertaken a public consultation on how the available budget for supporting bus services in Staffordshire from 2018/19 onwards is best spent.
4. The Select Committee is asked to take note of the consultation insight and detailed analysis and consider whether any appropriate recommendations should be made to the Cabinet Member for Commercial prior to the Cabinet making a final decision on network options on the 15 November 2017.

Report

Background

5. A report was considered by the Staffordshire Prosperous Select Committee on the 31 July 2017 (Background Paper) which provided details of the public consultation on bus journeys subsidised by Staffordshire County Council. The eight week consultation was undertaken between Monday 24 July 2017 and the 17th September 2017.
6. The report highlighted that over 90 per cent of bus passenger journeys in Staffordshire are undertaken on the commercial bus network with the authority currently providing funding for less than 10% of the bus journeys which are not commercially viable.

7. The report also confirmed that 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. In February 2016, having considered its duty under section 63 of the Transport Act 1985, 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.
9. Members will recall that the public consultation on bus journeys subsidised by Staffordshire County Council suggested four options on how the agreed allocated funding could be best spent. These options were described fully in the consultation questionnaires and in summary were:
 - 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)
10. The consultation document explained that Option 1 was the preferred option as it retained the greatest number of existing bus journeys whilst minimising the public subsidy for each passenger trip.

Public Consultation Insight

11. The extensive eight week public consultation which was launched on the 24 July sought views from both individuals and organisations.
12. As well as seeking opinions on the four service options the consultation explored the appetite from communities for the provision of additional voluntary transport schemes.
13. Over 7000 paper consultation documents were distributed during the 8 week period and 979 completed paper surveys were returned to the authority. Residents were also able to complete the consultation on line via a dedicated website and in total of 1,923 individual survey responses were received. A further

37 organisations also completed a bespoke survey that reflects the views of their organisation/people they represent.

14. In addition to survey responses, a total of 65 written responses were received from organisations and individuals.
15. In total, 2025 responses have been received to the consultation and three petitions were also received during the consultation period.
16. Three petitions and a small number of responses were received outside the consultation period and in line with established practice these have not been included in the detailed analysis but the Cabinet Member has been made aware of the correspondence.
17. The detailed insight report to the consultation report is attached as Appendix A.
18. In terms of general concerns raised by respondents, these included social isolation, access to services including health and retail, potential social and health care impacts and more limited education and employment access due to a lack of suitable alternatives for them.
19. Specific concerns included needing to be able to make vital healthcare appointments – this was evident across all options but was raised most frequently in option 1, under which Dial-a-Ride services would be removed.
20. Social isolation and becoming housebound were also common concerns across all options and especially so for those older people who indicated they were unable to walk very far alone.
21. There is most agreement for option one with 47% of respondents indicating their agreement with this option. Agreement with all other options ranged between 22-27%. 27% agreed with option 4, 24% agreed with option 2 and 22% agreed with option 3.
22. Within the consultation document, consideration was given to elicit travel pattern information, e.g., journey purpose, frequency of travel, to enable objective assessment of service options and travel need, set against the available funding. From the consultation responses there appears to be a partial willingness to retain service(s) by some service users, through the payment of a fare in conjunction with use of the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) passes. This unfortunately is illegal, albeit it could have made the difference to the ability to retain some services, where ENCTS pass holders constitute the greater percentage of users.
23. Understandably many respondents wished to preserve their existing bus services. This option is not possible given the MTFs budget decision made in February 2016 and the agreed need to protect statutory services.

Implementation and Monitoring

24. A paper is being submitted to the Cabinet Meeting on the 15 November 2017 to make a final decision on a supported bus network option which will be implemented in April 2018.
25. It is likely that further work will be undertaken with bus operators prior to April 2018 to see if the remaining agreed supported bus network (or the commercial bus network) can be adjusted to provide some additional connectivity to communities impacted by bus service reductions.
26. Further work is also planned with parish councils and voluntary agencies, including Support Staffordshire, to attempt to enhance and develop community transport and voluntary transport options, expanding on our current 22 schemes. It should however be noted that the Department for Transport's recent revised legal interpretation of section 19 permits and community driver qualifications is likely to have a significant impact in this sector. This is because the comparative cost advantage of community transport service provision has been eroded, as staff availability and legislative requirements have converged with the traditional local bus sector.
27. Bus passenger numbers on the Staffordshire bus network will continue to be monitored quarterly post April 2018 and the authority will be engaging in the English 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

28. 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.
29. 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.
30. 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 final community impact assessment using data from the consultation exercise is attached as Appendix B

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Appendices/Background papers

Background Paper - Staffordshire Prosperous Select Committee 31 July 2017

Appendix A - Staffordshire Insight Consultation Analysis

Appendix B - Final CIA