

<b>Report To:</b>	<b>SCRUTINY PANEL A</b>	<b>Date:</b>	<b>23 JANUARY 2020</b>
<b>Heading:</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION TO LOCAL BUS PROVISION IN ASHFIELD</b>		
<b>Portfolio Holder:</b>			
<b>Ward/s:</b>	<b>ALL</b>		
<b>Key Decision:</b>	<b>NO</b>		
<b>Subject to Call-In:</b>	<b>NO</b>		

### **Purpose of Report**

In June 2019 a new scrutiny topic considering bus provision in Ashfield was approved for the Scrutiny Workplan 2019/20. The remit of the review was agreed as follows;

- Consideration of local Bus provision in Ashfield;
- How elderly isolation and loneliness can be impacted by limited bus routes;
- Effectiveness of bus provision on local businesses;

This report provides an overview of the current services in Ashfield, background information and research.

### **Recommendation(s)**

Members are requested to;

- note the information contained within this report;
- consider further areas for discussion;
- approve the terms of reference

### **Reasons for Recommendation(s)**

A Scrutiny review of local bus service provision in Ashfield was suggested for review as part of the workplan consultation process in 2019. In considering this topic it is anticipated that Members will consult fully with service providers, users and Nottinghamshire County Council

### **Alternative Options Considered**

No alternative options have been considered as part of this review to date. All options considered will be detailed in a final report to Cabinet in due course.

## **Detailed Information**

The Transport Act 1985 radically altered the way in which bus services were operated and funded. The key influence leading to the legislative change was the increased use of the private car and the consequential drop in bus patronage. The cost to the taxpayer of maintaining the network started to approach unsustainable levels and this led to deregulation of the bus industry by way of the 1985 Act.

The Transport Act 1985 places a requirement on local authorities to have regard to the needs of their residents and to provide financial support for local bus services as they see fit to meet those needs. The duty is 'to have regard to the needs', rather than the actual provision of services. In particular, there is a requirement to consider the specific needs of older and disabled people, with powers to provide funding for service 3 provision, such as community transport. There are also duties under the Equalities Act 2010 as both elderly and disabled residents are covered by protected characteristics.

## **Regional Context**

Nottinghamshire County Council are the responsible authority for setting the direction and objectives of the County's public transport networks. The strategy for local transport (including buses as part of public transport) is set out in the Nottinghamshire Local Transport Plan. The current Local Transport Plan covers the whole of the County and runs until 2026.

In relation to buses and public transport as a whole, the plan recognises that there is still significant scope for people to reduce the numbers of short car journeys and undertake more healthy active travel for such journeys. Similarly, there is scope to further increase public transport patronage instead of car journeys where good bus and rail services already exist.

The County Council recognises the essential role that passenger transport provides in the development of a sustainable transport system and has therefore developed an Integrated Passenger Transport Strategy alongside LTP3, which amongst other modes of public transport, encompasses buses. The vision for the Integrated Passenger Transport Strategy is to develop an integrated passenger transport system that is;

- available to all
- high quality
- understood by all and easy to use, and
- affordable.

Within the Strategy it is recognised that there are a number of real and perceived barriers to people using passenger transport that will need to be wholly or partially overcome to deliver the strategy, including;

- availability of passenger transport services in terms of coverage, periods of operation and frequency
- lack of direct routes to destinations, length and speed of journey
- poor image of passenger transport
- personal safety and fear of crime either on route to waiting facilities, at waiting facilities or on board

- relative cost of passenger transport services
- vehicle and driver standards/quality
- unreliable services, and
- lack of information on available services.

The County Council works in partnership with commercial bus operators and other stakeholders to ensure that the bus network adequately serves as many local communities as possible. This entails the provision of a high quality, frequent bus service for as many hours as possible that enables them to access key services and facilities within the budgetary limitations.

The performance management framework, developed by the County Council, independently assesses the socially necessary bus services that the County Council subsidises so that transparent decisions are made when budget pressures occur, whilst allowing the objectives of the plan in relation to buses. The framework and the variables used are reviewed periodically to ensure that it continues to meet the requirements of the LTP and to consider changes in priorities when necessary. Similarly, the area transport reviews to determine the most effective delivery of all of the different forms of public transport services in an area are undertaken periodically to ensure the most efficient use of the resources available.

### **Impact of Buses on Social Inclusion, Isolation and Loneliness**

Improved bus services can contribute greatly to improving the accessibility of jobs and services to people experiencing, or at risk of, social exclusion, and consequently lie at the heart of the North Nottinghamshire LTP. Achieving social inclusion is an important objective for the County Council, and for many other local partners.

Rural isolation in the north-east has its own problems of access to jobs, education and services. Social need exists not just geographically, but also with specific groups. These include the elderly, young people, and those with physical and learning disabilities, many of whom fall within the scope of social services provision, and others such as ethnic minorities.

In considering this topic for the Scrutiny Workplan, Members acknowledged that bus services can often provide a lifeline for many older people. For those without easy access to a car, having accessible and affordable public transport is vital to leading an active and independent life.

The national bus concession means people in later life are able to reach key services and friends and family, without making difficult financial choices. The concession allows older people to travel off-peak on buses anywhere in England for free. Eligibility is currently tied to State Pension age for both men and women. It is considered a crucial universal benefit that is greatly valued by older people.

### **Community and Voluntary Transport Schemes**

Community and voluntary transport schemes offer services for people who have difficulty using, or are unable to use public transport services. One such scheme that receives grant funding from Ashfield District Council is Our Centre. Our Centre is a local transport company that provides transport solutions for individuals or groups.

### **Review Objectives**

Public transport has the potential to make an impact on a number of areas affecting quality of life in the district, including social inclusion (as a means of access to services and amenities), promoting a flourishing local economy (improving accessibility for both employees and customers) and the

environmental implications of choices about transport and travel. In planning this review, Members of the Panel should consider the main issues, stakeholders, objectives and potential outcomes. The reasons provided for putting the topic on the workplan are that public transport plays a key role in the following;

- Social inclusion
- Economic growth
- Reduction in environmental pollution
- Meeting the needs of the community

It is considered that in reviewing this area, Members will gain a greater understanding of the need for effective public transport, how this impacts the district and whether there are currently any gaps in provision that are adversely affecting the area. It is also recognised that Members of the Panel will need to engage the following stakeholders;

- Nottinghamshire County Council
- External service providers
- Planning
- Regeneration
- Community

Members should also be aware that effective transport links in to many other major pieces of work currently being undertaken by Ashfield District Council and Nottinghamshire County Council. Therefore, Members will need to gain an understanding of these areas to ensure that any work undertaken adds value.

Moreover, consideration on the focus of this review and potential outcomes should also reflect whether the Panel could narrow the focus to one or more of the following;

- local bus services covering Ashfield as a whole;
- the effectiveness of current services;
- the gaps in provision that are impacting those areas of the community that do not have sufficient coverage. This includes issues of social and economic exclusion.

Further details on this topic will be presented at the meeting.

## **Implications**

### **Corporate Plan:**

Consideration of this topic contributes towards our commitment to;

- Health and wellbeing of our residents.
- Economic Regeneration
- Place and Communities

### **Legal:**

There are no immediate legal implications arising from this report.

**Finance:**

There are no immediate financial implications arising from this report. Any financial implications discussed as part of the review process will be informed by Finance advice and involvement.

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	N/A
General Fund – Capital Programme	N/A
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	N/A
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	N/A

**Risk:**

Risk	Mitigation
None at this stage, all risks will be considered as part of the review scoping meeting.	None at this stage, all risks will be considered as part of the review scoping meeting.

**Human Resources:**

There are no immediate human resource implications arising from this report

**Equalities:**

Equality issues relating to this review will be considered as part of any work undertaken.

**Other Implications:**

*None*

**Reason(s) for Urgency**

*None*

**Reason(s) for Exemption**

*None*

**Report Author and Contact Officer**

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