

Report To:	SCRUTINY PANEL A	Date:	12 MARCH 2020
Heading:	SCRUTINY REVIEW: BUS PROVISION IN ASHFIELD		
Portfolio Holder:	NOT APPLICABLE		
Ward/s:	ALL		
Key Decision:	NO		
Subject to Call-In:	NO		

Purpose of Report

The purpose of this report is to present Scrutiny Panel A Members with further information regarding the ongoing review of bus provision in Ashfield. Members have previously held an introductory meeting on the topic at the January meeting of Scrutiny Panel A.

Recommendation(s)

Scrutiny Panel A Members are recommended to:

- a. Note the information contained in this report.
- b. Identify further areas for review.

Reasons for Recommendation(s)

Bus provision in Ashfield was added as a topic for review to the Scrutiny Workplan 2019/20 by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in June 2019.

Alternative Options Considered

No alternative options have been considered at this stage of the scrutiny review process.

Detailed Information

Background

An introductory meeting was held on 23 January 2020 by Scrutiny Panel A on bus provision in Ashfield, where Members considered a report setting out regional context, the impact of buses on social inclusion, community transport schemes, and review objectives.

Regional Context

Nottinghamshire County Council are the responsible authority for setting the direction and objectives of the public transport networks Countywide. Nottinghamshire County Council sets out their strategy for transport through the Nottinghamshire Local Transport Plan (NLTP). The established plan is Countywide and runs until 2026.

The NLTP recognises that within the County there remains significant scope to reduce the number of short car journeys, and encourages healthier active travel for these journeys. The NLTP further identifies there is an opportunity for increased public transport patronage Countywide.

Nottinghamshire County Council have also developed, alongside the NLTP, an Integrated Passenger Transport Strategy (IPTS). The IPTS was developed in recognition of the vital role passenger transport plays in the development of a sustainable transport system for Nottingham. The aim of the IPTS is to ensure the development of an integrated passenger transport system that is:

- Available to all
- High quality
- Easy to use
- Affordable

The IPTS identifies various real and perceived barriers to the use of public transport, including:

- Service coverage, periods of operation, and frequency
- Lack of direct routes
- Length and speed of journeys
- Poor perceptions of public transport
- Fear of crime
- Cost of services
- Vehicle and driver standards
- Service reliability
- Lack of information regarding services

Nottinghamshire County Council works in partnership with commercial bus operators and other stakeholders to ensure bus services serve as many local communities as possible.

It is Ashfield District Councils responsibility, as local leaders for Ashfield, to make representations to Nottinghamshire County Council and bus operators on behalf of residents and community groups in the District.

Social Inclusion, Isolation, and Loneliness

Bus services can contribute significantly to accessibility of jobs, education, and services to people experiencing, or at risk of, social exclusion. Improving social inclusion is a key objective for Nottinghamshire County Council, and for many other partners and agencies. Rural isolation is also common, with commercial transport services often difficult to provide.

Community Transport Schemes

The community and voluntary transport sector offers services for people who have limited access to, difficulty using, or are unable to use public transport services. Ashfield District Council provides grant funding for a community transport service in Ashfield named Our Centre. Our Centre is a local community transport service that provides transport solutions for individuals or groups in Ashfield and wider areas.

Our Centre supports residents and community groups in areas such as:

- Annesley
- Jacksdale
- Hucknall
- Huthwaite
- Kirkby – in – Ashfield
- Selston
- Skegby
- Stanton Hill
- Sutton – in – Ashfield
- Teversal
- Underwood

Our Centre also supports people and community groups outside of Ashfield, in areas such as Mansfield, Rainworth, and Warsop.

Review Objectives

At the outset of the review, Scrutiny Panel A Members agreed a set of objectives and areas of interest as guidelines for the review process. These included:

- Seeking involvement from representatives at Nottinghamshire County Council, Trent Barton, Our Centre, and the Council's Planning Department
- Considering how public transport impacts work accessibility
- How public transport can impact the local economy
- Environmental implications of current and future bus provision in Ashfield
- Funding opportunities for Ashfield through the Future High Streets and Towns Funds, and how they could influence public transport in the District
- Social exclusion, isolation, and loneliness
- Areas of need
- Information sharing regarding bus services

Members also agreed a terms of reference for the review as follows:

“To undertake a review to consider the current gaps in local bus provision within Ashfield and how this impacts on social exclusion and the health and wellbeing of residents. Consideration will also be given to environmental sustainability issues in relation to bus provision.”

Legislation

The Bus Services Act 2017

Buses are England’s most used form of public transport, accounting for more than 60% of all public transport trips. Buses are a fundamental part of every day for millions of people. Buses help commuters get to work, students to school, college, and university, and shoppers to high streets and town centres. Ultimately, buses enable people, wherever they are, increased opportunity to access and enjoy a wide range of services and leisure opportunities. The benefits of reliable and innovative bus services are clear, greater productivity, reduced congestion, and communities that are more greatly connected.¹

The Bus Services Act 2017 introduced advanced quality partnership powers to provide a framework for authorities to work side by side with operators, with the aim of setting a shared vision for bus service in their area. These powers were introduced with new ticketing powers, allowing easier use of buses for passengers, easier movement between different modes of public transport, and increased access to information regarding timetables, fares and routes.² The 2017 Act was introduced with the intention of enabling authorities to consider how bus services can help achieve economic, environmental, and social objectives.

New Options

Main Options

The Bus Services Act 2017 set out listed a set of desired outcomes for bus operators and authorities to improve local bus services and realise untapped growth potential in cities, regions, and rural areas. These outcomes include:

- **Better Journeys**
 - Buses with Wi-Fi and USB sockets
 - Improved bus networks – serving more and different locations
 - Easier payment, including contactless
 - Tickets that work across different operators
 - Increased information
 - Enhanced accessibility for passengers with disabilities

- **Better Places**
 - Better links to opportunities
 - Increased productivity
 - Fewer car journeys
 - Low emission buses
 - Thriving community transport services

- **Better Value**

¹ Department for Transport, *The Bus Services Act 2017: New Powers and Opportunities*, 2017.

² Department for Transport, *Bus Services Act*, 2017.

- Wider range of discounts for apprentices, job seekers, and other groups
- Better competition between operators
- Fares that are easier to compare
- More joined up services – bringing regular bus services, school services, and health transport together

Advanced Quality Partnerships

Within The Bus Services Act 2017, new standards were established that bus operators are required to meet.

- **Better Journeys**
 - Better buses
 - Minimum service frequency
 - Improved passenger information
 - Route or area branding and/or marketing
 - Better payment options
- **Better Places**
 - Better transport connections
 - Improved environmental awareness
- **Better Value**
 - Maximum fares for routes and services

Advanced quality partnerships focus on the relationship between bus operators and authorities. Good working relationships must be established, with a degree of trust on what needs to be done and that all members of the partnership will deliver. Through an advanced quality partnership, an authority will take steps to support bus operators and ensure specific local standards are met through their service.

An authority's side of an advanced quality partnership could include providing bus related facilities such as: bus stops, shelters, stations or depots, and committing to take measures to encourage bus patronage. Measures could include:

- Parking policies that encourage local transport
- Traffic management policies
- Advertising and marketing campaigns

Guidance for Authorities

Providing an Inclusive Service

On average, disabled people take ten times as many trips by bus as they do by rail. With one in twelve people being disabled, the Act states that it is essential that bus services meet the needs of everyone using them.³

Authorities, bus operators, and partners are asked to consider the steps that need to be taken to ensure services are accessible and inclusive, including:

- Designing an inclusive service

³ Department for Transport, *Bus Services Act*, 2017.

- Consult at an early stage with disabled people and groups that represent them
- Ensure that vehicles meet acceptable accessibility standards and roadside infrastructure aligns with equality legal duties and best practice
- Consider requiring or encouraging the provision of enhanced accessibility features such as:
 - A second wheelchair space on vehicles
 - Acceptance of assistance cards
 - Audible and visible information identifying routes and upcoming stops
 - Acceptance of mobility scooters
 - Ensuring ticketing systems are accessible
- Driver disability awareness
 - Bus drivers should be adequately trained to respond to the needs of disabled people and those with reduced mobility
- Information for bus passengers
 - Authorities should require or encourage bus operators to make publically available information on features of their service that assist disabled passengers. This could include information regarding:
 - Locations of accessible stations and stops
 - Accessibility features of vehicles
 - Information on concessionary bus passes and the accessibility of ticketing machines
 - Information on disability awareness training provided to drivers and other customer facing staff
 - Information on what assistance will be provided in the event of travel disruption

Improving Environmental Outcomes

The Bus Services Act 2017 reiterates that buses have a key part to play in addressing some of the country's air quality problems. Diesel buses make up the majority of bus fleets and contribute to the UK's level of carbon and nitrogen dioxide emissions.

Poor air quality is the largest environmental risk to public health in the UK, having more severe effects on vulnerable groups and people already suffering from pre-existing health conditions such as respiratory and cardiovascular conditions.

Through The Bus Services Act 2017, the Department for Transport encourages all authorities to think about ways to improve air quality in local areas.

Maximising Social Value

The Public Services Act 2012 requires authorities who commission public services to think about how they can also secure wider social, economic, and environmental benefits. The 2012 Act is a tool for authorities to get more value for money from the services they provide or procure.

Improving the Safety of Bus Services

The Department for Transport encourages authorities to think about how bus safety measures could be implemented as part of partnerships with bus operators. Local authorities are advised to consider releasing bus safety incident data from operators, such as data involving pedestrians, vehicles, and cyclists.

Tackling Congestion

Congestion has a significant impact on the usage of bus services, both to new and existing passengers. Time taken to make a journey drives transport choice, determines the efficiency of bus services, and is important to customer perceptions and satisfaction levels. Traffic in the UK has risen seven-fold since the 1950s, seeing decreased average speeds, and increased delays and journey times. Authorities, working with bus operators and partners, must consider what measures should be taken to minimise the effects of congestion on the service to passengers, and how the bus service could be used to help reduce congestion more generally.⁴

Meeting the Needs of Rural Communities

The loss of a local bus service, particularly in rural areas, can leave people isolated or dependent on others for travel. Rural areas can also be the most difficult to provide bus services for, as the passengers required for a regular service can be difficult to achieve.

Authorities can step in and subsidise additional services, reflecting local needs and available budget. Between 2014 – 2017, local authorities spent an average of £330 million a year supporting bus services.

Community transport operators can play a major role in the solution to transport issues in rural areas. Community transport operators can provide crucial services that both encourage growth and reduce isolation by linking people to existing transport networks, work, education, shops, and services. In the absence of commercial services, community services can offer bespoke services that address local needs and serve isolated communities.⁵

Authorities are advised by the Department of Transport to encourage and integrate community transport services into the wider network of services within an area.

Nottinghamshire County Council Transport Review

Nottinghamshire County Council is currently undertaking a transport review through its Communities and Place Committee, amidst national transport development and in preparation of National Bus Strategy bids.

Some of the key information set out within the report: ⁶

- Nottinghamshire County Council's local bus support was benchmarked against 26 other County Councils in 2018, and the Council's net expenditure per head of population was £5.14 compared to the national average of £4.19 per head of population.
- The County Council's current budget for local bus support is £3.9 million.
- As set out in the County Council's Transport Update, approximately 85% of bus services Countywide are commercial and 15% supported, with variation across the County.
- 83% of households Countywide are within 800 metres/10 minutes' walk of a bus stop with an hourly and better bus service on weekdays, Mondays to Saturdays, 0600-1800 hours.

⁴ Department for Transport, *Bus Services Act, 2017*.

⁵ Department for Transport, *Bus Services Act, 2017*.

⁶ Nottinghamshire County Council, *Communities and Place Committee – Transport Update, March 2020*.

- In 2018, Nottinghamshire's overall satisfaction with bus journeys is 93% and the second highest in England.

National Bus Strategy and Increased Funding for Bus Services

On the 6 February 2020, the Government announced further details of the National Bus Strategy due to be published later this year and bidding opportunities for local authorities. The developing National Bus Strategy is focussed on passenger priorities and how national and local government and the private sector can work together to address growing connectivity needs of local communities.

The strategy is to be accompanied by long term funding commitments and a review of existing funding for bus operators, including the Bus Service Operating Grant.

On 11 February 2020, the Government pledged £5 billion of investment to improve bus and cycling services in England over the next five years. The investment was announced with aims of providing more frequent services and simpler, more affordable fares. The announcement came as the Government gave the green light to the HS2 project.⁷

As part of these announcements, there are several funding opportunities:

- **All electric bus town:** The Department for Transport will be seeking expressions of interest for an all green bus town or city with air quality issues.
- **Rural mobility fund:** A further £20 million to be allocated for Demand Responsive Transport, looking at alternatives to fixed bus routes.
- **Funding for Supported Bus Services:** Central Government is looking to allocate a further £30 million to local authorities from 2020/21 to improve current services or restore local services. £648,608 has already been confirmed for Nottinghamshire.⁸
- **Superbus fund:** To support the introduction of a package of measures to increase bus patronage with emphasis on bus priority, fare caps, and increased frequencies. The available funding is £70 million for up to three locations with populations over 75,000.

Next Steps

In progressing the review, Members of Scrutiny Panel A should give consideration to the following:

- Consider potential questions to Our Centre representatives
- Explore gaps in bus provision within the district
- Assess the impact of any gaps in provision
- Consider funding opportunities available
- Assess the effectiveness of working relationships with partners

⁷ BBC News, *Government Pledges £5bn for Bus Services and Cycling Routes*, February 2020.

⁸ NCC, *Transport Update*, 2020.

Implications

Corporate Plan:

Consideration of this review topic aligns with Ashfield District Council's commitment to:

- Health and wellbeing of residents
- Economic and town centre regeneration
- Place and communities

Legal:

There are no direct legal implications resulting from this report. Any legal implications identified over the course of this review will be explored and addressed in collaboration with the appropriate Officers.

Finance:

There are no direct financial implications resulting from this report. Any financial implications identified over the course of this review will be explored and addressed in collaboration with the appropriate Officers.

Budget Area	Implication
General Fund – Revenue Budget	None.
General Fund – Capital Programme	None.
Housing Revenue Account – Revenue Budget	None.
Housing Revenue Account – Capital Programme	None.

Risk:

Risk	Mitigation
None at this stage.	None at this stage.

Human Resources:

There are no direct HR implications resulting from this report. Any HR implications identified over the course of this review will be explored and addressed in collaboration with the appropriate Officers.

Environmental/Sustainability:

There are no direct environmental or sustainability implications resulting from this report. Any environmental or sustainability implications identified over the course of this review will be explored and addressed in collaboration with the appropriate Officers.

Equalities:

There are no direct equalities implications resulting from this report. Any equalities implications identified over the course of this review will be explored and addressed in collaboration with the appropriate Officers.

Other Implications:

There are no direct other implications resulting from this report. Any other implications identified over the course of this review will be explored and addressed in collaboration with the appropriate Officers.

Reason(s) for Urgency

None.

Reason(s) for Exemption

None.

Background Papers

The following background papers have been used:

- BBC News, *Government Pledges £5bn for Bus Services and Cycling Routes*, February 2020.
- Department for Transport, *The Bus Services Act 2017: New Powers and Opportunities*, 2017.
- Nottinghamshire County Council, *Communities and Place Committee – Transport Update*, March 2020.

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