

REPORT TO: **SCRUTINY PANEL A** **DATE:** **15 MARCH 2016**

HEADING: **NEW SCRUTINY REVIEW OF EFFECTIVE PUBLIC TRANSPORT IN ASHFIELD**

**PORTFOLIO
HOLDER:**

KEY DECISION: **NO** **SUBJECT TO CALL-IN:** **NO**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

At the last meeting of the Panel, Members discussed and approved a new scrutiny topic on the effectiveness of local transport in the District. During this discussion the remit for the review was debated and approved as the following;

“to consider the current bus service provision within Ashfield and examine whether it continues to effectively meet the needs of local communities”.

During the initial scoping meeting members raised a number of issues relating to bus services in the District including some concerns relating to;

- the current bus services for Skegby, Stanton Hill and the Carsic Estate;
- the levels of current Government subsidies/incentives for providing public transport and how they are utilised by the bus companies;
- whether ‘areas of deprivation’ are taken into account when bus companies assess potential bus routes within the District;
- the types of concessions currently available to older people;

This report provides some further information relating to setting the scene for local transport including consideration of national context, local planning and possible areas for further exploration.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

Members are requested to note the information contained within this report and consider further areas for discussion as part of the review process.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

Reviewing the Impact of effective public transport in Ashfield is a topic that was suggested for review as part of the workplan consultation process. In considering this topic it is anticipated that Members will consult fully with service providers, users and Nottinghamshire County Council.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED (with reasons why not adopted)

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.

5. INTRODUCTION

In considering the impact of public transport in Ashfield, Members of the Panel recognise that the Council's influence upon public transport is limited within the statutory framework, however as transport plays a vital role in the vitality of the Ashfield, it was considered an important area to consider.

6. BACKGROUND

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 Act removed the licensing function from the Traffic Commissioners in relation to bus services and replaced it with one of registration. This left the market open for operators to determine which routes they wished to run and subject to registering the route details with the Commissioners they were free to do so. Individual operators were responsible for timetabling and the introduction of new routes (or the discontinuation of existing ones). This depended on the operator's opinion of demand and its potential commercial viability. The role of Traffic Commissioners is to licence the bus operators, deal with disciplinary issues and check on the quality and safety of the service offered.

Nottinghamshire Local Transport Plan.

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.

The vision is neither urban nor rural specific but the methods of achieving the vision will differ

between urban and rural environments. The County Council uses the appropriate range of infrastructure, operational, technological, resources and information measures that are available to them in delivery of the vision. The measures used to deliver the vision will be dependent upon the issues identified and their ability to deliver value for money outcomes.

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.

Buses are the major provider of the passenger transport network across the county. The most recent national survey of public satisfaction with local bus services in Nottinghamshire identified a satisfaction level of 70% (the highest of the County Council's that responded to the National Highways and Public Transport Survey). More recent local surveys put this figure at 89%. In 2009/10, over 35 million passenger bus journeys originated in the county, which is an increase of almost 8% since 2005/06.

In Nottinghamshire, 96% of households are within 800 metres of an hourly or better bus service (0600-1800 Monday to Saturdays). Within the more rural parts of the county, access to an hourly or better bus service is less good, particularly in the villages, hamlets and isolated dwellings. 80% of bus services in the county are operated on a commercial basis. In 2010/11, the County Council spent approximately £7m to provide additional services to supplement the commercial bus network marketed under the 'Notts Bus' banner.

These services support and complement the commercial network by providing services in the more rural parts of the county that have limited or no services or by providing services in the early mornings, evenings or weekends. Without this support, the more rural parts of the county would have a reduced level of service with some parts having no services at all.

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.

The Local Transport Act 2008

The Local Transport Act 2008 introduced changes to enable local authorities to influence the standard of bus services in their local area in order to better meet local transport needs. It introduced three main options for local authorities (in addition to their existing powers to subsidise socially necessary bus services) through:

1. Voluntary partnership agreements – an agreement entered into voluntarily by one or more local transport authority and one or more bus operator and possibly other relevant parties. The agreement can cover any matter that the relevant parties have control over or power to Deliver
2. Quality (statutory) partnership agreements – a statutory agreement between one or more local transport authority and one or more bus operator. The local transport authority can stipulate frequencies, timings, minimum fares, age of the fleet etc. as long as the bus operators have no 'admissible' objections. Any operator that does not meet the service standards are prevented from using the facilities provided as part of the agreement (for example, bus lanes) and enforcement action can be taken against any bus operator who breaches the terms of the agreement
3. Quality contract schemes – the local transport authority writes contracts concerning the timings, frequencies, fares etc. that bus companies then bid to run. These alternatives provide the County Council with options to improve the network coverage, timings, fares and frequencies of bus services. Where it is deemed necessary and beneficial the County Council will use these powers to improve the standards of bus services across the county.

Quality of buses

The reliability and punctuality, speed of the journey, quality of the vehicle (low floor, age of fleet, fuel efficiency) and the conduct and attitude of the drivers are all important aspects of the quality of the service provided to customers. The Public Service Vehicle Accessibility Regulations (2000) outline the requirement that all new buses up to 7.5 tonnes had to be fully accessible from 1 January 2005; all existing buses weighing up to 7.5 tonnes must be fully accessible from 1 January 2015; and all single and double deck buses over 7.5 tonnes must be fully accessible by 1 January 2016 and 1 January 2017 respectively.

Bus Operators in the District

In reviewing this topic there are a number of bus operators in the District that could assist the Panel. These include;

- Trent Barton
- Stagecoach East Midlands
- NottsBus
- TM Travel
- Our Centre
- G & J Holmes
- AOT Coaches

A number of these providers have been contacted to gain an understanding of bus routes, considerations, usage and performance. Further information on this will be provided at the meeting.

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 recognised that in considering this topic, 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.

6. 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.

Financial:

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.

Health and Well-Being / Environmental Management and Sustainability:

There are no immediate implications contained in this report, however it is recognised that effective public transport links in to Health and Well-Being / Environmental Management and Sustainability.

Human Resources:

There are no immediate human resource implications arising from this report.

Diversity/Equality:

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

Community Safety:

There are no community Safety implications contained in this report. This will be considered should the review be approved

Other Implications:

There are no immediate Unison implications contained within this report.

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