

To: Environment, Highways & Waste Policy Overview & Scrutiny Committee - 22 November 2011

By: Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member - Environment, Highways and waste
John Burr, Director of Highways and Transportation

Subject: A Sensible Approach to Supported Bus Services

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: This report makes recommendations to update the existing criteria for prioritising support for Socially Necessary Bus Services. It has been considered by and has the support of the Finance Working Group to this Committee. There is also a proposal to form an Informal Member Group to consider policies, integration and delivery across public transport.

1. Introduction

Kent County Council (KCC) currently commits around £6.4m annually to supporting local bus services. The budget is fully committed in the current financial year and is likely to come under increasing pressure over the coming years for the following reasons:

- Commercial service withdrawals - when a commercial bus service is withdrawn KCC has a duty to assess whether it should intervene and support the service;
- Operator gives Contractual Notice to cease operation of a subsidised bus service – KCC could procure a replacement service but the cost may increase;

In addition, KCC could decide to vary the supported bus budget. If and when any of these circumstances arise, it is essential that there is a method through which bus services are prioritised for support. This paper sets out the proposed prioritisation approach that would be used for adding/de-prioritising services.

Given the inter-relationship with other public transport budgets including the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme and the Kent Freedom Pass there is also a proposal to form an Informal Member Group to consider policy development, integration and delivery.

2. Proposed new criteria for support of bus services

(1) Support will be considered for a bus service that is not commercially viable if its main purpose meets one or more of the following journey activities:

- Access to work
- Access to learning
- Access to healthcare
- Access to food shopping

(2) In order to consider these criteria, services are ranked in the following order of priority (1 being the highest):

Priority	DAYS OF OPERATION	£ Per Passenger Journey
1	Any Day of the week	Less than £3
2	Monday to Friday	Over £3
3	Monday to Friday	Over £5
4	Saturday	Over £3
5	Sunday and evening	Over £3
6	Saturday, Sunday & evening	Over £5
7	Any day	Over £7
8	Poorly performing contracts with very limited implications	Regardless of cost

3. Procedure to be followed in the event of commercial bus service being deregistered or Contractual Notice being given on a subsidised bus service;

(1) In either circumstance, KCC will undertake a costing exercise to assess the service according to the criteria set out above. If the service is likely to perform better than an existing supported service then KCC will intervene and fund the continued operation of the service following a procurement process. In such a circumstance, it is likely to be necessary to withdraw subsidy from other supported services to stay within budget.

(2) This will be achieved by giving contractual notice on a sufficient number of the lowest priority supported bus services to remain within budget (prioritised as detailed above).

(3) Operators and local members affected by the subsequent service withdrawals would then be given at least 90 days' notice of the intended withdrawals, and wherever possible arrangements will be made to amend either Kent Karrier or other community transport provision to meet the basic access needs of those passengers affected by the proposed withdrawal. Such withdrawals will be programmed

to take effect on a quarterly basis, on 1st April, July, October and January.

- (4) In order to structure withdrawals in this way, it will be necessary to include a contingency of £100k per annum. This will cover the periods when KCC is supporting both the newly acquired services which have been deregistered and the subsidised services on which contractual notice would be given but which would still continue to operate until the next programmed date for withdrawals.

4. Procedure to be followed in the event of bus service withdrawals due to future budget reductions;

- (1) If KCC withdraws funding from supported services due to a future budget reduction, a full consultation would be undertaken. This would consist of a media plan using the KCC website, District Council websites, on bus notices and direct contact with local Members, District and Parish Councils. An Equality Impact assessment (EIA) would also be undertaken to ensure that any adversely affected groups (e.g. bus passengers with disabilities) were provided wherever reasonably practicable with a reasonable alternative. Once consultations are completed, a report will be compiled and brought to the Cabinet Member for a final decision.
 - (2) Any decision to cease support for bus services, even those which were considered relatively straightforward, should not be taken lightly, but once made the decision should be maintained. Whilst passenger numbers are not substantial, services supported by KCC carry a large proportion of elderly and disabled people as well as those who do not have alternative access to key services.
 - (3) Wherever possible arrangements should be made to amend either Kent Karrier or other community transport provision to meet the basic access needs of those passengers affected by the proposed withdrawal.
 - (4) Withdrawal of subsidised services should, wherever possible, be phased in accordance with the dates detailed above. However, such phasing of withdrawals of subsidised services might incur additional costs due to the extended time of operation of such contracts beyond the current expiry date of 31 March in any given year, and the contingency fund referred to above would accommodate these costs.
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5. Recommendations

Members of the Committee are asked to comment on:

- (1) The processes outlined above in paragraphs 2, 3 & 4 to prioritise the support of bus services in the event of a commercial withdrawal by an operator or reduction in funding availability being approved.
- (2) The creation of a contingency of £100k from the existing budget to cover interim periods when KCC is supporting additional services.
- (3) The formation of an Informal Member Group to assist with implementing policies and to consider how integration across all public transport can be improved.

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