

Wiltshire Council

Environment Select Committee

19 September 2017

Final Report of the Public Transport Review Task Group

Purpose of the report

1. To present the findings and recommendations of the task group for endorsement by the committee and referral to the Cabinet Member for response.

Background

2. The budget for 2015/16 included strategic savings of £0.5m to result from a complete review and transformation of public transport in the county.
3. During the debate on the budget proposal, the Cabinet Member invited early engagement by overview and scrutiny in order to provide positive challenge during the review period.
4. The Management Committee, in recognising the cross-cutting nature of the review, agreed that a joint task group with representation from all of the select committees be established with the Environment Select Committee taking the lead.
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6. The Business Plan 2013-15 includes the following under the heading “what we will do to deliver the 12 key actions”:
 - a. We will develop sustainable, community-based local transport supported by local volunteers, to improve Wiltshire’s transport infrastructure and influence the government for improvements to rail links and key road networks, such as the A303 and A350
 - b. We will develop sustainable, community-based local transport – we will work with communities to explore the potential to develop community owned and operated transport schemes supported by local volunteers.

Terms of reference

7. The following terms of reference for the task group were endorsed by the Environment Select Committee on 1 September 2015.
 - a. To scrutinise the pre-consultation(s) and consultation(s) and recommend that the range of transport option(s) offered take into consideration the needs of communities in rural and urban areas.
 - b. To scrutinise the pre-consultation(s) and consultation(s) and recommend that the option(s) offered take into account the impact of reducing spending on public transport and that the scope for alternative methods of delivery and / or mitigation of the impacts is adequate.
 - c. To scrutinise how the public transport funding is invested and recommend that community priorities are reflected and that investments represents the best value for money, whilst supporting the delivery of outcomes related to health and wellbeing, education, economy and employment. To recommend, where appropriate, that consideration is given to an integrated transport strategy.
 - d. To scrutinise the decision to be made on the adoption of a new policy / strategy framework, in the light of future budget availability. If applicable, to engage with the development of the policy / strategy framework.
 - e. To monitor the implementation of the option(s) selected following the public transport review.

Membership

8. The task group comprised the following membership:

Cllr Peter Evans (Chairman)
Cllr Mollie Groom
Cllr Jacqui Lay
Cllr Magnus Macdonald
Cllr Graham Wright

Methodology

9. The task group has received written and/or verbal evidence from the following witnesses:

Wiltshire Council witnesses:

Cllr Philip Whitehead
Cllr Horace Prickett
Parvis Khansari, Associate Director for Highways and Transport
Ian White, Head of Service - Passenger Transport
Robert Murphy, Principal Officer Transport Policy, Sustainable Transport
Matthew Croston, Project Officer, Programme Office

10. The task group also considered the following evidence sources:

- LTP Public Transport Review 2015: Overview and Scoping Paper

- Passenger Transport Review 2015/16: Project Board Terms of Reference
 - Wiltshire Local Transport Plan Public Transport Strategy Review: Pre-Consultation Paper
 - Wiltshire Local Transport Plan Public Transport Strategy Review: Public Consultation Paper
 - Councillors Briefing Note No. 259: Consultation on proposed changes to the Connect2 Wiltshire Hopper service to the Royal United Hospital
 - Passenger Transport Review 2016: Task Group 20th April 2016 Briefing Paper
 - Wiltshire Local Transport Plan 2011-2026 Public Transport Strategy Review
 - Results of Supported Bus Service Savings Options Consultation (Report to Environment Select Committee and Cabinet)
 - Passenger Transport Review (Report to Cabinet)
11. The task group members attended meetings with bus providers, community transport groups and other community-based organisations, and internal stakeholders to gather information prior to the pre-consultation.
 12. The task group was also invited to appoint a representative to the Public Transport Review Board. Cllr Peter Evans, as Chairman of the task group, was appointed and the invitation from the Executive was appreciated.
 13. The task group met eight times between 10 June 2015 and 28th September 2016.
 14. Early on the task group appreciated how difficult any decision would be as efficiency had been strived for over the past few years. Recommendations on the consultation were made at the 03 December 2015 meeting, and recommendations on work to be done regarding the data collected from the consultation were made at the 20 April 2016 meeting.

Evidence

Pre-Consultation:

15. A review of public transport had already been held previously, starting in 2009 and reporting in 2011. This had looked at all areas of public transport, including procurement and design. The overall policy review looked at discretionary areas (withdrawal of denomination home to school transport which achieved a £300,000 savings) and led to a revised procurement strategy.
16. Since the previous review in 2011 £5M in savings have been achieved, but £2.5M of further savings had been identified from passenger transport. It was acknowledged by the task group that passenger transport played a key role in the vision for Wiltshire, as it underpinned a vast number of services.
17. Concessionary fares were noted as a statutory duty. The reimbursement of fees to bus operator is based on a national formula. Wiltshire Council's reimbursement was placed on the lower side of the national average.

18. Home to school transport and SEND were respectively the first and second highest of Wiltshire's statutory passenger transport costs.
19. Where potential savings were identified, various options were considered beyond simply withdrawing a service.
20. Task group members attended the 16 meetings planned with operators, with different members to attend different meetings. Task group members also attended the 4 pre-consultation workshops as well as different workshops throughout the consultation.
21. Included in the 200+ responses to the questions asked during the pre-consultation was that people would prefer less frequency over 5 days than maintaining the same frequency over 3 days.
22. The answers to the pre-consultation demonstrated that it may be difficult to apply a "one size fits all" approach. This was because there were significant differences in what the different bus operators and community schemes were prepared, or able to do regarding expanding or changes to the routes. There were differences in the needs and usage across the county, such as urban and rural.

Consultation

23. The task group received a short presentation on the current routes in Wiltshire and the options considered:
 - Option 1: withdraw funding for all supported evening services (running after 7pm);
 - Option 2: withdraw funding for all supported Sunday services;
 - Option 3: reduce the hourly services Mon-Fri to a two-hourly service on the strategic bus network which links the small market towns and larger villages in Wiltshire with the nearest large town;
 - Option 4: reduce rural bus services to 2-3 buses a day on regular routes and withdraw most of the infrequent services except those that are the only service to a group of villages;
 - Option 5: reduce town services to 2-3 buses a day on regular routes. Existing buses used by pupils within Warminster, Devizes, Bradford on Avon and Melksham would be retained;
 - Option 6: withdraw all funding for council-supported services.
24. Following the consultation there had been a high number of responses, with at least 3,000 responses from bus users (these were classified as questionnaires which were completed on buses).
25. 22% of the people having responded to the consultation would support Option 6 (Withdraw all funding for all Council subsidised services).
26. Some responses had been about all bus services, despite the consultation making it clear that it was not about commercial services.

27. Evening services were defined as services from 7pm onwards. Officers met with Option 24/7 to look at the options proposed, and there was continued engagement with bus operators.
28. The task group was also informed of the changes to legislation (Bus Bill) which would give local authorities more power to run buses themselves with community interest groups, with greater power around partnership working.
29. No surprises had been identified in the results from the consultation, which matched with the results of the pre-consultation. The results reflected the national trends from other local authorities.
30. One small surprise noted was the number of respondents to the consultation (11,000), which was much better than some other local authorities.

Other Work

31. The task group also considered the following areas during their work:
 - Any actions to be taken to lobby government regarding funding for Public Transport;
 - Raising public awareness of existing services (“use them or lose them”) and being able to link the different services (either maps displayed in Town Hall/ Tourist Information Centre or on-line);
 - In market towns ask all supermarkets to consider co-ordinating their buses to provide better coverage;
 - Increase advertising for car sharing schemes
32. The proposed changes to the Connect2 Wiltshire Hopper bus had been taken out to consultation and made available through online and paper copies (also available on the Hopper service itself). People had been asked to supply their postcode which would enable a “geographical analysis” of the answers received.

Conclusions

Pre-Consultation:

33. During the task group’s consideration of the pre-consultation responses the following points were observed:
 - Supported routes were not seen as viable without funding;
 - Services were marketed on the commercial services;
 - No scope had yet been identified to improve usage on rural services;
 - There were difficulties in recruiting volunteer drivers (availability and issue of cost with required training);
 - Adjusting charges is actively looked at on a regular basis;
 - The knock-on cost to other services of the council (e.g. adult care, social services, etc.) could not be identified, although some services were already thinking about alternatives;

- Stakeholders would be consulted again when the options have been identified.

Consultation:

34. The task group expressed a few concerns including: Clarity over the number of regular “bus users”; How to use the data collected if a lot of responses to the consultation were provided by people who are not regular “bus users”; How to provide accurate information to the public about the availability of services; Ensuring that the “right people” are targeted to complete the questionnaire.
35. A full list of recommendations was presented to the executive regarding the consultation; questionnaire; public consultation paper; frequently asked questions document; and advertising/promotion of the consultation. These are included as Appendix A of this report.
36. The task group supported all the suggestions made by the Public Transport Review Board, as these were similar to suggestions the task group had made during its briefing.
37. The task group provided the following suggestions to the executive at their meeting on 20th April 2016 on further work to be done with the responses to the consultation:
 - Investigating the reason(s) for the reduction in number of volunteers for community transport schemes;
 - Cross-referencing the responses to the specifics of the people responding (e.g. age group, disability, etc.);

Other Work:

38. Regarding the Hopper Bus consultation, the task group felt that based on the assumed customer base for the service (with 15,000 journey a year) there had been a good number of responses to the consultation.

Proposal

39. To endorse the report of the Task Group and refer it to the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport for response at the Committee’s next meeting.

Recommendations

That the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport:

- 1. Note the report and recommendations made regarding the Public Transport Review over the course of the task group’s work.**

That the Environment Select Committee:

- 1. Receive an update in 12 months regarding the implementation of the options selected following the public transport review.**
 - 2. Cease the work of the Public Transport Review task group.**
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Cllr Peter Evans, Chairman of the Public Transport Review Task Group

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – Task Group Recommendations on Public Consultation – 03 December 2015

Background documents

None

Appendix 1 – Task Group Recommendations on Public Consultation – 03 December 2015

Resolved

The task group made the following recommendations.

Consultation

To find out the savings achieved for different times for the evening services (there may be areas where the services are commercially viable after 7pm) and consider the different impact at different times (and on different days) as part of the EIA.

Questionnaire

To add a question about ownership of bus passes (and whether the bus pass is used in Wiltshire or elsewhere).

To add information about the frequency of the service in the tables showing the service number for each options (agenda pages 49-52, document pages 40-43).

To keep a record of the number of paper questionnaires returned to inform future consultations.

To have packs including the questionnaire, FAQs and public consultation paper available on buses and “promoted” by the drivers if possible when issuing tickets.

The on-line questionnaire to show people the progress they have made in completing it (e.g. 25% complete, etc.) and to indicate how long completing it should take.

To include the savings to be achieved in the introduction paragraph “This survey is part of...”.

To add an option for people to quantify how each option would have a big impact on them personally (if they tick the “this would have a big impact on me personally” add a line for “reason(s)”).

To consider whether there would be a way for the IT system to “split” the responses provided to the consultation according to the type of bus users; as this would ensure that the information provided by regular users can be fully taken into account.

This would probably be best as two categories, such as regular users (at least 5 days a week, 2-3 times a week, once a week) and non/low user (once or twice a month, a few times a year, i never use the bus) based on question 7 “how would describe your use of bus services in Wiltshire”.

Public consultation paper

To include the number of people and percentage of the population using buses in Wiltshire.

To include the figures on usage of the routes that would be affected (in terms of number of people using the route).

To include all the information in the document presented to the task group today, but to start by explaining the financial constraints and savings that must be achieved (rather than the importance of public transport).

FAQs

That the task group would be sent the FAQs in their draft form so that they could contribute to it.

To avoid receiving suggestions that would not be legal options to include in the FAQs information, about the options having already been dismissed on that ground (e.g. charging a small fee for people with bus pass, etc.)

Advertising / promotion of the consultation

Information to be provided to all councillors to enable them to promote the consultation to their constituents and town and parish councils.