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HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SERVICE

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REFERENCE: HSB-010-13

**PROPOSAL FOR CHANGES TO THE ZIG ZAG BUS SERVICE
(Trowbridge – Bradford – Melksham – Corsham - Chippenham)**

Purpose of Report

1. To seek Cabinet Member approval for proposed changes to the Zig Zag bus service, in order to achieve financial savings as agreed by the Council in its financial plan for 2013/14.

Background

2. The Council's financial plan, approved in February 2013, requires savings of £180,000 to be made from continued challenge and review of support for bus services. The proposal for changes to the Zig Zag service is one of a number that are being progressed to meet this target.

Rationale for the consultation proposals

3. The rationale for the proposals was set out in the information sheet sent to consultees (**Appendix 2**).
4. The Zig Zag service currently costs the Council £108,000 per annum and carries around 28,500 single passenger trips a year. This is a relatively high cost for the numbers of passengers carried, exceeding the Council's guideline upper threshold of £3.50 subsidy per passenger trip, and this is why the service has been identified for review. The costs of operation are relatively high because it requires the equivalent of two buses and drivers per day to operate it.
5. Whilst reasonable use is made of the service over the Trowbridge – Melksham section of route, use to the north of Melksham has declined in recent years and no longer justifies the number of journeys provided on it. The proposals that were consulted on therefore maintained a similar number of journeys between Trowbridge and Melksham, but reduced the number of journeys between Melksham and Corsham. The service beyond Corsham to Chippenham was proposed to be entirely withdrawn, as use was generally poor and most users would still be able to travel to alternative destinations to meet their needs.

Changes made to the proposals as a result of the consultation

6. The responses to the consultation are summarised in **Appendices 3 and 4**. Following detailed consideration of these, a number of changes have been made to the proposed timetable. These mainly involve the use of other vehicles in the area to provide additional journeys that will meet some of the needs identified by the consultation. A copy of the revised proposed timetable is attached as **Appendix 6** – note that this may be subject to change, and that although it is intended that the final timetable will accord with the principles of the decision made here, the detail will need to be confirmed after award of the new contract for which tenders are currently being invited and completion of negotiations with the other operators who will be asked to provide the additional journeys.

7. Some of the key issues raised in the consultation, and the changes to the original proposals that have been made as a result, include:
- Loss of the 0920 arrival in Bradford on Avon (used to access the Health Centre and to connect with trains and buses to Bath) – an additional journey from Broughton Gifford and Holt arriving in Bradford at 0905 has now been included in the timetable.
 - Loss of 0930 bus from Bradford to Melksham and Corsham (used for shopping in Melksham – the 0900 departure from Trowbridge will now run via Bradford to provide a link to Melksham and Corsham.
 - No return journey from Bradford after 1251 (used for a variety of reasons including shopping, visiting, connecting with buses from Bath) – the 1410 departure from Trowbridge will now run via Bradford to provide a return journey to Melksham and Corsham.
 - No return journey from Corsham after 1130 (used for a variety of reasons, mainly visiting, but also shopping and work) – an additional journey will be provided leaving Corsham at 1337.
 - No bus back to Corsham from Trowbridge / Melksham at 1230 / 1300 – the 1245 departure from Trowbridge is extended to continue as far as Corsham.
 - Loss of service to / from Chippenham (used by people from Bradford, Holt, Broughton Gifford, Melksham, Atworth, Whitley and Gastard for shopping, visiting, doctor, hospital, meeting friends) – community transport groups are being approached to see if they are able to provide a service on certain days of the week.
 - Loss of service from Lacock Corsham Road estate (to Corsham) – work is still under way to identify the needs of the current users and find a cost-effective way of providing an alternative service.
8. Many of the responses also raised more general concerns about the reduction in opportunities to travel and participate in a whole range of activities that would result from reducing the overall frequency of the service, and the impact that this would have on the ability of people without their own transport to lead full and independent lives. While these concerns are understood, they are more difficult to address without the ability to fund higher overall levels of service, and given the relatively low level of use made of the current service.

Main Considerations for the Council

9. Financial savings are required by the Council's financial plan, and a proportion of these are intended to be made from the proposals relating to the Zig Zag service. The decision made should accord with the Council's Guidelines for funding of supported bus services (as published in the Local Transport Plan and reproduced as **Appendix 5**), and will need to balance an analysis of the impacts of the proposals and the responses to the consultation with the availability of funding.

Safeguarding Considerations

10. No significant issues identified.

Public Health Implications

11. Good public transport is important to health and wellbeing by providing access to health services for rural residents, encouraging physical activity through reduced dependence on car travel, providing access to nature, and to cultural activities, improving the ability of vulnerable adults to live independent lives and to continue living at home, and reducing the incidence of mental health problems through improved social connectedness. The revised proposal seeks to reduce the potential adverse impacts on users that were identified by the consultation, although any reduction in the availability of public transport services is bound to reduce the opportunities open to those without their own transport.

Environmental Impact of the Proposal

12. Any reductions in the availability of bus services will make public transport a less convenient and attractive alternative to the private car, and will have a negative environmental impact through encouraging greater car use (offset to a degree by marginal reductions in emissions from reduced bus mileage). The proposal seeks to maintain a similar level of service on the parts of the service that are better used, while reducing provision on those where fewer people travel.

Equalities Impact of the Proposal

13. Equalities impacts have been considered as an integral part of the development and assessment of the proposals, and this report incorporates a summary of the assessment of these impacts and the actions that are proposed as a result.
14. Groups with a potential interest from an 'equalities' perspective were included in the consultation, and equalities impacts have been considered as an integral part of the consideration of alternatives above. The consultation confirmed the initial expectations that reductions in the frequency of the bus service will have a particular impact on older people, young people, people from low income families, and women, who are more likely to rely on public transport; and on people living in the more rural settlements, where there are fewer facilities and opportunities available within close proximity and alternative transport is less likely to be available. The impacts include greater difficulty in accessing important services, facilities or other opportunities, including work, education/training, shopping, personal business, health services, leisure, recreational or cultural opportunities and social visits.
15. The revised proposal seeks to reduce the potential adverse impacts on users that were identified by the consultation, although any reduction in the availability of public transport services is bound to reduce the opportunities open to those without their own transport.

Risk Assessment

16. The cost of the revised service will not be known until tendering has been completed, and there is a risk that the expected savings will not be achieved if underlying increases in operating costs offset the savings from the reduced level of service (see paragraph 17 below). If this is the case it may reduce the ability to agree to fund some of the additional journey options referred to above, and there would be a need to identify higher levels of savings from future service reviews.

Financial Implications

17. The introduction of the revised proposal is expected to yield a financial saving of around £30,000 in a full year compared to the cost of retendering the current level of service. However, it is anticipated that the cost of continuing to provide the current level of service would be considerably higher than the current contract price, due in part to the requirement to introduce low floor buses to comply with PSV disability legislation. The extent to which any reduction in actual spending is achieved will depend on the outcome of the current tendering exercise. It is hoped that some savings will be made that will contribute towards the overall reduction in spending needed to meet the budget allocation set in the Financial Plan.

Legal Implications

18. There is no statutory duty to subsidise a particular level of bus service, and the process of consultation and equalities assessment that has been followed has been designed to ensure that the Council's legal obligations in these regards have been met.

Options Considered

19. The consultation was designed to identify any significant impacts on the travel and access needs of current users of the service that would result from the proposed changes. Whilst it is not possible in a situation where resources are limited to cater for the needs of everyone (even the existing service is far from being able to achieve this), every effort has been made to look for affordable ways of revising the proposals to address the main issues raised:
- (i) A number of changes have been made to the proposed timetable, as identified in the main report, to meet some of the main needs that respondents said would not be met under the original proposals.
 - (ii) A suggestion was received through the consultation for an alternative approach involving the revision of other (commercially operated) bus services in the area so as to replace the south end of the Zig Zag service with a regular service running Trowbridge – Bradford - Holt – Melksham – A350 – Chippenham, and the north end with a regular service running Bath – Corsham – Whitley- Melksham – Bowerhill. This could only be achieved with the agreement and active co-operation of the operators of the commercial services, and although meetings were held, this was not forthcoming. An option will however be included in the Zig Zag tender for operators to propose alternative ways of delivering the proposed Zig Zag service, which could include diverting or amending their commercial services.
 - (iii) Discussions are taking place with community and voluntary transport operators, with the assistance of the community transport team at Community First, to see if community or voluntary transport is able to meet some of the other needs that have been identified through the consultation. These discussions will continue, and any appropriate and affordable opportunities that are identified will be pursued.

Reason for Proposal

20. It is considered that the revised proposals offer the most acceptable balance between meeting the needs of users and ongoing affordability for the Council.

Proposal

21. That:

- (i) The original proposals that formed the basis for the consultation be amended to incorporate the changes referred to in paragraph 7 of this report, and that, subject to the outcome of the tendering exercise that is currently in progress, be adopted as the basis for the changes to the service that will be introduced in January 2014.
- (ii) Discussions continue with community and voluntary transport groups to see whether appropriate and affordable ways can be identified of meeting some of the remaining needs that will not otherwise be met.

The following unpublished documents have been relied on in the preparation of this Report:

Full responses to consultation