

**DEPUTY LEADER AND CABINET MEMBER FOR HIGHWAYS, STREETSCENE AND BROADBAND – COUNCILLOR JOHN THOMSON**

**HIGHWAYS AND TRANSPORT SERVICE**

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**REFERENCE:** HSB-

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**PROPOSAL FOR CHANGES TO THE CONNECT2 WILTSHIRE BUS SERVICES  
IN CALNE AND THE KENNET VALLEY**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To seek Cabinet Member approval for proposed changes to the Connect2 Wiltshire bus services in Calne and the Kennet Valley, in order to achieve financial savings.

**Relevance to the Council's Business Plan**

2. The services that have been reviewed make a strong contribution to all three of the priorities that underpin the Business Plan:
  - To protect those that are most vulnerable – the bus service provides a vital link allowing those who do not have their own transport, including many older and less mobile residents, to access services and facilities and to lead full and independent lives.
  - To boost the local economy – by allowing people to access jobs, training and education, and by bringing people into the towns to support local businesses.
  - To support and empower communities to do more for themselves – by allowing people to play a part in society, even if they do not have access to private transport.

However, the proposed changes to the services are needed to make financial savings that are required by the Financial Plan that underpins the Business Plan.

**Main Considerations for the Council**

3. Financial savings are required by the Council's financial plan, and a proportion of these are intended to be made from the review of the Connect2 Wiltshire services. 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.

**Background**

4. The Council's financial plan requires savings to be made from continued challenge and review of support for bus services during 2014/15, and further savings will be required in future years. The review of the Connect2 Wiltshire services in the Calne and Kennet Valley area is one of a number that are being progressed to meet these requirements.

## Rationale for the consultation proposals

5. The proposed changes to the services, and the rationale behind them, were set out in the information sheet sent to consultees (**Appendix 2B**).
6. The cost to the Council of supporting these services is currently around £140,000 per annum. This excludes the cost of transport for schoolchildren entitled to free transport who are also carried on the services. Around 33,000 single passenger trips are made per annum, again excluding entitled schoolchildren. This equates to a cost of around £4.30 per passenger trip, which is considerably higher than the Council's normal guideline for support of up to £3.50 per trip. The proposals therefore seek to reduce the cost of supporting the service by:
  - Operating a fixed route timetabled service in place of the current service, which is partly fixed route and partly flexibly routed. This will save the costs of the call centre and booking software that are needed to operate the demand responsive elements of the current service;
  - Reducing the number of vehicles required to operate the service from three to two, achieving a significant saving in the operating cost while still providing a regular (but less frequent) service that it is hoped will still meet the majority of the needs of existing users, and
  - Withdrawing the Marlborough – Avebury Night Bus and the Marlborough – Devizes TaxiBuzz (although there would be a new Thursday bus from Marlborough to Devizes market running via Pewsey), as these services are particularly expensive in relation to the number of passengers carried.

## Changes made to the proposals as a result of the consultation

7. The responses to the consultation are summarised in **Appendices 3 and 4**. These have been given detailed consideration and, where feasible and affordable, changes have been made to the proposed timetables. Unfortunately, however, many of the responses relate to a general concern about the reduction in opportunities to travel and participate in a whole range of activities that will result from reducing the overall frequency of the bus 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 recognised, 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 some of the current services.
8. Some of the more specific issues raised in the consultation, and the changes to the original proposals that have been made as a result, include:
  - (i) Withdrawal of the diversion to Winterbourne Monkton and Berwick Bassett. This was introduced a number of years ago in response to requests from local residents, but is poorly used (on average 1-2 passenger trips a day in each direction). It is, however, seen as an important link by the villages to their local town, and is also used by pupils returning from after school activities. The villages do have a frequent alternative service from the main road to Swindon, Devizes and Trowbridge.

**The proposals have been amended** to divert a bus from Marlborough at 1715 via Winterbourne Monkton on request (this would replace the current 1645 departure which is used by two thirds of the current passengers travelling to the village), and to provide a journey from Winterbourne Monkton into Marlborough at 0955, and a return journey from Marlborough on request at 1200, for medical appointments and shopping. It has been suggested to the Parish Council that a lift giving scheme might be developed locally to take residents to the bus stop at Avebury if they need to travel at other times.

- (ii) Poor service to Yatesbury. The original proposal reduced the number of journeys that divert up to the village to one towards Calne and two back, reflecting the low level of passenger use of the existing service.  
**The proposals have been amended** to provide two journeys via the village towards Calne and three back, providing a wider range of travel options.
- (iii) Service to Compton Bassett – several users complain that the proposed timings are inconvenient, giving a stay in Calne of either 1 hour (too short) or 2 ½ hours (too long).  
**The proposals have been amended** to provide an additional return bus from Calne (at 1230), offering a wider range of travel options.
- (iv) Withdrawal of the 1645 departure from Marlborough – this journey is used by shoppers, schoolchildren returning from after school activities, and some people returning from work.  
**The proposals have been amended** to provide a departure at 1715, replacing the current 1645 and 1745 departures. There will also be a journey departing at 1740 but on college days only and running direct via the A4, not diverting into the villages.
- (v) Reduction in service to Stockley and Heddington. The original proposal reduced the service from five to three round trips a day, including withdrawal of the 0800 to Calne and 1755 return. Respondents said that this would remove the ability to use the service to travel to and from work, and would make it less convenient for medical appointments and other travel.  
**The proposals have been amended** to provide an additional journey into Calne at 0900, offering a wider range of options for medical appointments and other travel. The 0800 and 1755 journeys are used on average by less than one passenger a day from Stockley and Heddington, and the cost of replacing them would not be justified.
- (vi) Withdrawal of the service to Blacklands. Responses suggest that there is at least one passenger who would be left without transport.  
**The proposals have been amended** to divert one journey in each direction via Blacklands to provide a limited service into Calne.

9. Copies of the revised proposed timetables are attached as **Appendix 6** – note that there may still be minor changes to these before implementation as timetables are finalised with the new operators of the contracts.

### **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 proposals seek 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).

## **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 and its appendices incorporate 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 proposals seek to reduce, as far as possible, the potential adverse impacts on users that were identified by the consultation, although it is clear from the responses that 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. There is a risk that by reducing the frequency of service, passengers will be deterred from using it and that this will reduce the social benefits it provides and make it less sustainable in the future. Unfortunately, however, funding is not available to maintain the current level of service. The assistance of parish councils and others would be welcomed in promoting use of the service in their community, so that it is well supported and is able to continue to provide an essential link for those who rely on it.

## **Financial Implications**

17. The introduction of the revised proposals will yield a financial saving of around £44,000 in a full year. This will contribute towards the overall reduction in spending needed to meet the budget allocations 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 original proposals that were put out for consultation were developed with the intention of achieving financial savings by reducing the costs of operation, while maintaining a reasonable level of service that will continue to meet the needs of the majority of existing users of the services. An alternative option would have been to seek to increase fares income by expanding the use made of the services, through a combination of service improvements and promotional activity. However, experience

suggests that this approach is only likely to be successful on services that are already relatively frequent and where there are a sufficient number of potential users to generate significant volumes of extra traffic, and that regrettably cost reduction was the only option in this case that would generate the required level of financial saving.

20. The consultation itself was designed to identify any significant impacts on the travel and access needs of current users that would result from the proposed changes, and every effort has been made to look for affordable ways of revising the proposals to address the main issues raised. A number of changes have been made to the proposed timetables as a result. However, it is not possible in a situation where resources are limited to cater for the needs of everyone, and it is unfortunately not affordable to maintain a higher frequency of service overall, or to restore some of the diversions to outlying villages where use of the service has been low.
21. Community transport has been, and will continue to be, considered as an option for meeting needs that cannot be served cost effectively by the bus service. For example, it was suggested to Winterbourne Monkton Parish Council that a lift giving scheme might be developed locally to take residents to the bus stop at Avebury, if it was not possible to continue to divert buses via the village. It is now proposed to divert a limited number of buses to meet the main demands, but a lift giving scheme could supplement this to provide transport for residents who need to travel at other times. It is possible that local lift giving could also be developed in other areas where there are important needs that will no longer be met by the bus service. The Community Transport Development Fund is available to support the setting up costs of new community or voluntary transport schemes or expansion of the services provided by existing schemes.

### **Reason for Proposal**

22. 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**

23. That the original proposals that formed the basis for the consultation be amended to incorporate the changes referred to in paragraphs 8-9 of this report, and be adopted as the basis for the changes to the service that will be introduced on 27 October 2014.

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

Full responses to consultation