

CABINET

17 October 2023

TRANSPORT NETWORK REVIEW BUSINESS CASE & POST-16 TRAVEL OPTIONS

Report of the Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport and the Environment

Strategic Aim:	Sustainable lives	
Key Decision: Yes	Forward Plan Reference: FP/280423	
Exempt Information	Yes, Exempt Appendices	
Cabinet Member(s) Responsible:	Cllr C Wise, Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport and the Environment	
Contact Officer(s):	Penny Sharp, Strategic Director of Places	01572 758160 psharp@rutland.gov.uk
	Emma Odabas, Interim Senior Transport Manager	01572 720923 eodabas@rutland.gov.uk
Ward Councillors	All	

DECISION RECOMMENDATIONS

That Cabinet:

1. Approves the recommendation as set out in exempt Appendix C.
2. Note the outcomes of the post-16 (P16) transport options review (stage 1) as set out in exempt Appendix B.
3. Approve next steps of the P16 transport options review (stage 2).
4. Delegates authority to the Strategic Director of Places in consultation with the Portfolio Holder with responsibility for Transport, to approve associated procurement and spend.

1 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide an update on the review of transport provision undertaken since the previous Cabinet Report in February 2023 on the:

A) Public Bus Network Delivery Review; and

B) Post 16 (P16) Transport options review.

- 1.2 The report considers the results of exempt The Public Bus Network Review Business Case, at Appendix A and the outcome of the exempt P16 transport stage 1 options review, at Appendix B.
- 1.3 The report draws conclusions from the findings to identify the wider implications of changes proposed.
- 1.4 The report makes recommendations to Cabinet on the best options for the Council which balance cost of service with community need.

2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council continues to operate in a challenging budget position, with the Council's expenditure exceeding its income by around £2m per annum. The Council is committed to being financially sustainable, ensuring that the budget is balanced. The Financial Sustainability Strategy agreed by Council in November 2022 envisages revenue spending being supported by reserves for the next 4 years whilst also making savings.
- 2.2 To identify planned savings that achieve long term financial sustainability for the Council, workstreams are in development to explore opportunities to transform services that not only help to tackle the financial gap but that will also deliver services differently to ensure we are as effective and efficient as possible in the way that the Council works.
- 2.3 Neither public bus service subsidy nor post-16 transport assistance are statutory duties for a Local Transport Authority (LTA). The review of the public bus network delivery model and post-16 provision are identified as key workstreams aiming to transform how services are delivered to meet objectives at a lower cost.
- 2.4 The financial objective of the bus network review is to achieve an affordable transport network for the county, which must operate at a lower cost than the existing subsidy whilst retaining suitable accessibility to key services. Levelling Up Funding, whilst helping to meet the capital costs of implementing improvements and investment into the service, will not fund the on-going revenue costs and these must be met by the Council.
- 2.5 There is a need to review our P16 transport offer to identify the best approach to achieving longer term sustainability and affordability. Although P16 transport support is non-statutory, the provision contributes to 5 of the strategic aims within RCC's corporate strategy as detailed in exempt Appendix B.
- 2.8 The P16 Transport options review considers all possible options for future provision and delivery of P16 assisted transport so that it achieves a balance of affordability and access to services/opportunities for our young people.
- 2.9 Transport delivery costs are continuing to rise at a time when we are identifying efficiencies. P16 Transport Study is included as exempt Appendix B.

3 NETWORK REVIEW BUSINESS CASE

- 3.1 Public transport provides a key service to many residents, particularly in relation to

travel to employment, education, health care and social needs. An effective public transport network enables communities to thrive, promoting economic prosperity, inclusion, health and wellbeing and sustainability for all.

- 3.2 Provision and improvement of public transport is a key element of the national decarbonisation strategy. It provides the opportunity to replace some private car trips and deliver associated carbon emission reductions (as well as air quality and traffic congestion benefits).
- 3.3 Rising costs and low levels of patronage, coupled with restricted public resources, means that sustaining the existing county bus network within the current available revenue budget is now unachievable.
- 3.4 Whilst there is a need for cost savings to be achieved against the authority's public transport budget, this must be balanced against at least maintaining, if not improving, the current level of service.
- 3.5 All public transport work is supported by RCC's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) and associated Enhanced Bus Partnership Scheme plan (EP). Close working with our transport sector partners to achieve improvements is a requirement of the National Bus Strategy agenda. Current plans can be viewed on RCC's website <https://www.rutland.gov.uk/busserviceimprovementplan>
- 3.6 The network review business case is provided at Exempt Appendix A.

4 NETWORK REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 The existing county bus network is unaffordable and no longer sustainable without additional revenue budget being made available. A comparative assessment of potential bus network delivery models for the county identified options that show potential for economic value and financial savings to be achieved compared to the existing network.
- 4.5 Delegation of authority is being sought to progress a new public bus network to achieve best value within budgets whilst maintaining access to services and meet the needs of the county's passengers.

5 POST 16 (P16) REVIEW

- 5.1 RCC's current P16 transport policy details our service offer to families to support access to further education opportunities. Detail of existing provision can be found in Appendix B. The current P16 transport policy can be viewed on RCC's website <https://www.rutland.gov.uk/roads-transport-parking/transport/school-transport/post-16-transport-0>
- 5.2 Due to the non-statutory nature of P16 transport provision, local authorities annually review their provision in-line with the fees & charges process as income from parental contributions is essential to off-setting operational costs of service provision.
- 5.3 Stage 1 of the P16 transport options review includes consideration of all possible options for future service provision which could deliver savings. Benchmarking with other Local Authorities has also been undertaken.
- 5.4 Options are detailed in exempt Appendix B.

5.5 This report seeks approval to move to stage 2 of the review of post-16 transport which will include:

- Detailed investigation of any preferred options.
- Risk mitigation.
- Links with the bus network review /benefits of integrating service offers.
- Stakeholder engagement.
- Equality & diversity assessment.
- Policy review.
- Cross-boundary considerations.

5.6 Once stage 2 of the review is complete, the intention is to return to Cabinet with a detailed option work-up in 2024.

6 REVIEW RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1 Recommendations are set out in exempt Appendix C.

7 CONSULTATION

7.1 RCC host both a bus users panel and a bus users forum which take place quarterly. In addition to this, over 30 drop-in sessions have taken place this year to provide opportunities for existing and potential passengers to feedback on public transport provision in Rutland. 6-monthly bus passenger satisfaction surveys take place as part of RCC's EP scheme to monitor satisfaction, performance and collect feedback from the public.

7.2 Consultation on any proposed P16 policy changes would take place in 2024 with a minimum window of 3 months to feedback.

7.3 Transport operators, neighbouring LA's and local P16 establishments will be consulted on any proposed changes.

8 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

8.1 Continuing with the current bus network is not affordable and will not lead to achieving savings.

9 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 Options have been identified which will lead to reductions in spend whilst providing a re-designed service offer to residents and visitors.

9.2 Capital costs for vehicles and equipment will be covered by the Levelling Up fund grant (LUF)

10 LEGAL AND GOVERNANCE CONSIDERATIONS

10.1 All procurement to resource delivery will be conducted in partnership with the Welland Procurement Unit, in line with the requirements of the Public Contracts Regulations 2015 and the Council's Contract Procedure Rules.

10.2 Legal advice on any tendering and award will be sought at the appropriate stages of the procurement process.

11 DATA PROTECTION IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There may be Data Protection implications in relation to the options under consideration. Options for implementation must comply with GDPR legislation which would be written into any procurement and contractual documentation.
- 11.2 A Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) will be completed before implementation of an option to ensure compliance with data protection regulations.

12 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 12.1 At the point of a decision to implement, an Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken. At this stage it is considered that the option(s) progressed seek to provide access to more people in the County.

13 COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 An effective and reliable public transport offer for the county provides access to services which can lead to a reduction in rural isolation which benefits all residents, in particular our young people. Providing affordable travel choices is known to contribute to reductions in anti-social behaviour.

14 HEALTH AND WELLBEING IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 Through better connecting people to vital healthcare facilities and social opportunities, health and wellbeing can be improved. The aims of these studies include providing better connectivity across the County to facilitate these movements.

15 ORGANISATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

- 15.1 Implications for the transport team members are set out in exempt Appendix C.

16 SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 16.1 By connecting our economic centres, for retail, leisure, education and employment, public transport supports local communities and enables economies to thrive.

17 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 17.1 The proposals include purchase of new vehicles which will have more efficient engines and reduced emissions.
- 17.2 Encouraging more people to take public transport instead of using their own vehicles will support reductions in overall vehicle mileage on the roads, reducing the overall environmental impact of road transport.
- 17.3 The proposals also seek efficiency in public bus operations, reducing empty vehicle miles wherever possible.

18 CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY OF REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

- 18.1 This report asks the Cabinet to:
- Approve recommendations set out in Appendix C. It is the intention to update members on progress via briefing notes as the project implementation

progresses. Outcomes and passenger satisfaction will also be reported via our existing BSIP & Enhanced Partnership 6-monthly and annual progress report processes.

- With delegated authority to the Strategic Director for places in consultation with the portfolio holder for Highways, Transport and the Environment, to progress and begin to work towards achieving our main aims of providing a greener, more sustainable and affordable transport network which meets the needs of residents and visitors in and around the county.
- The transport element of the LUF project is monitored and reported on through the LUF project board. Appropriate governance will be put in place for the network review implementation.

19 BACKGROUND PAPERS

19.1 Rutland Bus Service Improvement Plan

19.2 Rutland Enhanced Partnership Scheme & Plan

19.3 Rutland Local Transport Plan 4 – Moving Rutland Forward

19.4 All background papers are published here: <https://www.rutland.gov.uk/my-community/transport/transport-strategy/>

20 APPENDICES

20.1 Exempt Appendix A – Bus Network Review Business Case

20.2 Exempt Appendix B – Post-16 Stage 1 Options Report

20.3 Exempt Appendix C – Private Report to Cabinet

A Large Print or Braille Version of this Report is available upon request – Contact 01572 722577.