



Committee and Date

Cabinet

27th July 2016

Shropshire Council Bus Strategy 2016 - 2021

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1. Summary

The purpose of this report is to update the Council on the proposed Bus Strategy and service prioritisation process 2016 – 2021, and the proposal to undertake full public and stakeholder consultation prior to its adoption.

2. Recommendations

Cabinet is recommended to:

1. Approve the proposal to undertake full stakeholder and public consultation of the draft Bus Strategy and service prioritisation process.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

Equalities implications

1. An initial ESIIA has been undertaken to inform the creation of this report. No equalities implications have emerged. A full, robust and inclusive consultation process will ensure that the Bus Strategy 2016-2021 is able to be adopted without grounds for future challenge.
2. Future local consultation and a commensurate ESIIA process will be also undertaken on a route by route basis following the outcomes of periodic future prioritisation and network changes.

Environmental implications

3. None arising directly from this report. The Environmental implications of any revised Local Bus network in line with the Bus Strategy 2016-2021 are

considered as part of the proposed prioritisation process. The methodology for such is described in more detail in Appendix A, P.3, Objective 1 para 3.

4. Financial Implications

1. None arising from this report. The proposed prioritisation approach within the Bus Strategy allows subsidy costs to be managed within set budget targets.

5. Background

1. Under the Transport Act 1985 s63 Shropshire Council has a statutory duty to; *“secure the provision of such public passenger transport services as the council consider it appropriate to secure to meet any public transport requirements within the county which would not in their view be met apart from any action taken by them for that purpose”*.
2. The Council has always sought to support appropriate public bus services in Shropshire. The implications on people’s ability to access essential services, social exclusion, rural isolation, economic and environmental impact are important elements when considering service provision.
3. The subsidised network is in addition to those services which are provided on a commercial basis within the County. The Council currently hold 29 subsidised local bus service contracts. These contracts are awarded to a number of local bus operators following an open market tender process. Contracts are for a maximum 5 year duration before retender.
4. The Bus Policy up to 2016 defined a minimum level of service that Shropshire Council sought to maintain to ensure that those people who are reliant upon public transport can continue to access essential; services and amenities upon which they are reliant. The overall public transport network was then built upon this minimum level of service.
5. Current revenue spend on the subsidised network is circa £1.8m per annum (2016/17). There is the potential requirement to reduce this, in line with wider Council budget plans, by up to 75% over the next four years.
6. There is therefore a requirement to update the Councils approach to Local Bus strategy post 2016 with an approach that is fit for purpose within the current financial environment, and which allows reactive, equitable and informed change to the subsidised network on a less prescriptive basis than earlier strategy approaches.
7. The Bus Strategy 2011/16 sits within the suite of supporting documents that form the Councils overall approach in managing its Highways and Transport responsibilities under the current Local Transport Plan.

Stakeholder and public consultation

8. The stakeholder consultation invitation will be aimed at individuals, groups and stakeholder organisations who have a vested interest in transport within Shropshire either as part of their work, or on behalf of the people they represent. This will include, but is not limited to, the following groups;

Elected members
Town & Parish Councils

Local Joint Committees
Bus Users Shropshire
Senior Citizens Forum
Young people / youth parliament
Local Bus Operators
Schools and colleges
Shropshire Community Transport Consortium
Neighbouring Local Authority Areas

9. The bus strategy will be publicly available on the Shropshire Council online Consultation Portal. The opportunity for the public to comment of the proposals will be widely publicised through all channels available through the Media Team.
10. The Consultation period will run from early August 2016 to late October 2016 (c.12 weeks)

Summary of Bus Strategy 2016-2021

11. Shropshire Council, in meeting its statutory duty to consider gaps in the provision of Public Transport not otherwise provided by operators on a commercial basis, will only consider providing subsidy to routes and services in line with the following criteria:
 - a- Where such a service meets the wider Council ambitions to support communities and residents in accessing essential services (Health, medical and shopping) in a cost effective and financially sustainable way. As part of this evaluation, wider consideration would be given to alternative ways of delivering such services to a community removing or reducing the need to travel.
 - b- Where such a service would provide the most cost effective transport solution to the Council as a whole for those groups entitled to transport under statute (including pupils and students)
 - c- Where such a service is provided in line with developer obligations and financial contributions resulting from a section 106 agreement
 - d- Where such a service can be provided through application to external funding streams. In such cases, the Council would not assume any liability to replace external funding with its own base budget at the time such funding expires.
 - e- Where such a service has been identified as a priority as part of the Place Planning process and where a service, over the lifetime of a three year subsidy contract, has been identified as having the potential to exit on a financially sustainable basis (fare income offsets all subsidy costs, subsidy costs offset by local or external funding)
 - f- Where a service meets the needs of vulnerable resident groups (elderly, disabled) in accessing essential services that are not accessible in any other way (e.g. Community Transport services, Community Car service)
 - g- Where such a service can be provided within the Councils overall available revenue budgets.

12. In line with the current capital programme evaluation process elsewhere in the Local Transport Plan, it is proposed that future subsidised bus routes will be evaluated against fixed criteria and weightings. These weightings continue to acknowledge and prioritise the social, economic and community access principles within current policy, but also allow the Council to prioritise spend of its limited revenue subsidy budgets in line with short and medium term budget commitments.
13. As such, the subsidised network will no longer be an absolute, to be maintained at a cost in excess of available budgets (particularly where operator tender costs increase due to local or external factors / lack of local competition etc.), rather the spend will be fixed in line with budgets and the size of the network will become flexible as required.
14. In order to prioritise services against available revenue budgets, the prioritisation approach described (Appendix A/1) will be used.

Timescales

Public and Stakeholder consultation – Aug – October 2016 (12 weeks)

Consultation report to Cabinet – November 2016

Publication of Strategy – November 2016

<p>List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bus Strategy for Shropshire 2011 – 16, Shropshire Council, 22 December 2010. • Initial ESIIA informing Cabinet Paper
<p>Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) Councillor Simon Jones – Portfolio holder for Highways and Transport</p>
<p>Local Member All Members</p>
<p>Conflicts of interest declared by members</p> <p>None</p>
<p>Appendices Appendix A –Shropshire Bus Strategy 2016-2021</p>