

<b>9 January 2014</b>		<b>ITEM: 6</b>
<b>Planning, Transport and Regeneration Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee</b>		
<b>Local Bus Services</b>		
<b>Report of:</b> Cllr Andy Smith, Portfolio Holder for Regeneration, Highways & Transportation		
<b>Wards and communities affected:</b> All	<b>Key Decision:</b> Key	
<b>Accountable Head of Service:</b> Basil Jackson, Head of Transportation and Highways		
<b>Accountable Director:</b> David Bull, Director of Planning & Transportation		
<b>This report is:</b> Public		
<b>Purpose of Report:</b> To explain how local bus services operate and why the subsidised services are so important to members of the community.		

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report explains how local bus routes are administered throughout the country and how local authorities can assist such services where they feel the need is required. This report also explains why transport links are vital to all members of the community.

### **1. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 1.1 To consider retaining the local bus budget to ensure that access for residents is maintained, allowing access to employment, medical appointments, leisure and shopping facilities.**
- 1.2 Looking to the future, investigate and review how to get people into retail jobs and employment.**

### **2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND:**

- 2.1 Public transport is becoming vitally important to local communities, particularly in light of the country's economic situation. Local bus, ferry and train services transport residents across the borough and beyond for employment, hospital**

and medical appointments, education establishments including colleges and recreational facilities such as leisure centres and swimming pools.

- 2.2 The Transport Act 1985 sets out the basis on which bus services are provided by the private sector operators in the country. Any bus company can operate any route and timetable they choose and set fare levels. Services have to be registered with the Traffic Commissioner, but this is an automatic process. A 56 day notice period has to be given to introduce, withdraw or amend a service. Operators will therefore adopt a commercial approach to bus service provision over which the local authority has no jurisdiction, control or responsibility.
- 2.3 The role of the local authority is only to consider the unmet needs of communities outside the commercial network and, if it so wishes, supplement the network with additional journeys on routes. These routes are known as subsidised services and are procured through a process of competitive tendering, although small payments can be made to operators for minor modifications or additions to the commercial network (known as de minimus payments).
- 2.4 Our current bus budget covers the more rural areas such as Fobbing, East & West Tilbury, Bulphan, Horndon on the Hill and transports residents to three hospitals; namely Basildon, Orsett and Long Lane in Stifford Clays as well as over 11 medical centres. Our budgets also assist with the provision of some weekend services. A list of health facilities served by bus routes is attached in Appendix A.
- 2.5 The Council currently has over 23,000 pass holders of which 1,380 have a disability pass and 490 of those residents require a companion to accompany them on their travel. This is a statutory Government scheme; the financial burden of which continues to increase in line with growth in the borough. Free concessionary fares currently cost the Council £1.13 million per annum.

### **3. ISSUES, OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS:**

- 3.1 Many rural public transport services are essential for the elderly or infirm and are an important mechanism for combating social isolation. Operators are reluctant to invest in areas of low patronage since by definition these are unlikely to be economically viable.
- 3.2 Other options for providing transport in rural areas include community transport schemes (run by volunteers), car sharing and taxi schemes. Many examples of these schemes exist around the country, and although they often meet the transport needs of certain communities (e.g. the disabled) they tend to rely quite heavily on the use of volunteers and some can be quite expensive to run.
- 3.3 Non-statutory services are already being considered for budget reductions, meaning that the Council will be considering a partial withdrawal of services

11, 201 & 374 (the last fully subsidised bus routes in Thurrock) next financial year. However, in light of the fact that they serve various hospitals and health centres, officers have sought alternative funding via public health to ensure that residents have access to such sites.

**4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:**

4.1 To ensure that a small number of transport links can remain open in more rural areas it is recommended that the current level of investment in local bus services remains. This will ensure the continuity of travel links, particularly for those members of the community who may otherwise find their travel opportunities severely restricted.

**5. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)**

5.1 None

**6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT**

6.1 This service contributes towards each of the five strategic priorities of the Council, especially to improve the health and well being of our residents. The impact could lead to various members of our community, especially the elderly, being socially excluded.

**7. IMPLICATIONS**

**7.1 Financial**

Implications verified by: **Mike Jones**  
 Telephone and email: **01375 652772**  
**mxjones@thurrock.gov.uk**

The Financial Implications remain unchanged from that set out in the budget report to Cabinet in February 2013.

**7.2 Legal**

Implications verified by: **Courage Emovon, Contracts Lawyer**  
 Telephone and email: **01375 652834**  
**Courage.Emovon@BDTLegal.org.uk**

The content of this report is consistent with the provisions of the Council's Constitution and Local Government Act 2000. The local authority overview and scrutiny function was introduced under the Local Government Act 2000, giving a clearly defined scrutiny role to non-elected members in holding executives of councils to account, and in scrutinising the work of other agencies providing local services. A robust and effective scrutiny process is a vital component in the ethical health and governance of a local authority

7.3 **Diversity and Equality**

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**  
Telephone and email: **01375 652472**  
**sdealyn@thurrock.cov.uk**

A sustainable public transport network ensures that the most vulnerable members of the community have fair access to the public realm. Disabled people, in particular, place a high priority on the provision of such services, without which can leave them socially isolated.

7.4 **Other implications (where significant) – i.e. Section 17, Risk Assessment, Health Impact Assessment, Sustainability, IT, Environmental**

Not Applicable

**BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT (include their location and identify whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):**

- None

**APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:**

- None

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