

9 December 2015	ITEM: 3.1 01104338
Cabinet	
Local Bus Service - Fobbing	
Wards and communities affected: Corringham & Fobbing	Key Decision: Key
Report of: Cllr Oliver Gerrish Portfolio Holder for Highways & Transport	
Accountable Head of Service: Ann Osola, Head of Service for Highways & Transportation	
Accountable Director: David Bull, Director of Planning & Transportation	
This report is Public	

Executive Summary

This report is a response to the motion unanimously agreed at Full Council on Wednesday 25th November to the provision of a bus service for Fobbing, as soon as possible, to cover the Christmas season. The service will be provided three days a week starting from 15th December (assuming short notice dispensation to waiver 56 days' notice) to 31st March 2016.

1. Recommendation(s)

That Cabinet:

1.1 Agrees to fund bus service route 14, for three days a week over the Christmas season and New Year, from 15th December to 31st March 2016, and indicates a preference for the service to be run either:

Option A: Westbound between Corringham, Fobbing and Basildon costing £10,000, or

Option B: Eastbound between Fobbing, Corringham, Stanford Le Hope, Grays and Lakeside costing £9,000.

1.2 Agrees to investigate provision of a bus service for Fobbing and Horndon on the Hill from April 2016.

2. Introduction and Background

- 2.1 On the 25th November 2015, Council unanimously agreed a motion calling for 'Thurrock Council to immediately fund an alteration to the bus route to serve Fobbing over the winter months'. (Please see Appendix A)
- 2.2 Public transport is 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.
- 2.3 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 days' 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. In certain circumstances in relation to a subsidised route the Traffic commissioner will see the required 56 days' notice period waived if it is shown by the local authority that there is an urgent need for a service to be introduced.
- 2.4 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. Fobbing meets those criteria.
- 2.5 Operators were asked to submit options to provide Fobbing with a service at a short notice. Options A & B as stated below were the only two options submitted with ability to start before January 2016.
- 2.6 Two options for Service 14 to serve Fobbing over the Christmas period:
- Option A: three or four trips per day, three days a week between Corringham, Fobbing and Basildon, costing £10,000, and
Option B: three trips a day, three days per week between Fobbing, Corringham, Stanford Le Hope, Grays and Lakeside, costing £9,000.
- 2.7 Officers are also investigating a provision of a service, for the next financial year, that links Fobbing and Horndon on the Hill to the commercially established bus network. There was insufficient funding in the current financial year to provide all communities with a bus service and the Portfolio Holder's decision resulted in Fobbing, Linford, East Tilbury, West Tilbury and Horndon on the Hill receiving no service. One Operator then offered to operate a commercial service with a de minimus payment in order to provide a service for Linford, East Tilbury and West Tilbury. In addition to this the operator of

the subsidised service to Bulphan offered to reroute the service to include Horndon on the Hill at no additional cost.

- 2.8 The Council are currently out to tender for a bus service for 2016/17 which will include Horndon on the Hill and Fobbing. Once the tenders close on the 8th January 2016 the Council will be in a position to identify the costs.
- 2.9 Currently no funding exists for any of these services and any new services will add to the existing budget pressures of the Council. The budget for 2015/16 has already been identified and the cost of the Fobbing service between December 2015 and March 2016 will be no higher than £10,000.
- 2.10 Members will already be aware that the Council faces budget pressures in excess of £28m over the next four years with a pressure of circa £4m in 2016/17. An additional pressure for this service should only be considered against all other pressures and impacts on services.

3. Issues, Options and Analysis of Options

- 3.1 Many rural public transport services are considered 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. In this case it is the view of the Full Council that the needs of residents of Fobbing require a bus service over Christmas and the New Year.
- 3.2 Officers have contacted the main bus operators in the borough and two viable options have been proposed. A further third option was rejected as the operator could not provide the service before January 2016 and it was preferred for the service to start as soon as possible in order to access shopping facilities during the festive period.
- 3.3 If approved at Cabinet on 9th December 2015, Service 14 will be implemented as quickly as possible but this is dependent of the goodwill of the Traffic Commissioners. Every operator for a bus service (new, altered or withdrawn) MUST notify the Traffic Commissioner giving 56 days' notice of the relevant change, but the facility exists for a short notice change if the Traffic commissioner determines. The new bus service will be monitored over the operating time to identify the level of patronage. The service will be monitored by the Council's Monitoring Officer together with information supplied by the operator to identify the number of passenger usage. These details will be reported back to Cabinet at the conclusion of the service.

4. Reasons for Recommendation

- 4.1 To ensure that Fobbing retains a limited public transport service, it is recommended that the temporary local bus Service 14 be approved with Cabinet confirming which option is preferred. 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 A consultation was carried out between July 2015 and September 2015 to identify those rural areas not covered by commercial services for their needs for 2016/17. The preference is for a service for Fobbing linking the residents with Corringham and Basildon. Also, the Overview & Scrutiny met twice, 29 July 2015 & 16 September to discuss this issue and recommended that funding be found to provide this community with a service.

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 if the service was not provided. The service to Fobbing was withdrawn with 56 days' notice prior to the 1st April 2015.

7. Implications

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Sean Clark**
Head of Corporate Finance

The financial implications remain unchanged since the approval by Cabinet of the agreed budgets for 2015/16 and this service will put pressure on the budget going forward and therefore additional resources need to be identified. The proposed Service 14 is likely to cost £9,000 (option B) or £10,000 (option A) for three months up until March 2016.

Members need to be clear that there were a number of reductions to services across the Council made in 2015/16 and others that have been agreed for 2016/17. Agreeing additional expenditure in this way is not allowing for this growth to be considered against those previous decisions.

In addition, the budget report on this agenda is clear. There is currently a small operational surplus forecast but this is dependent on no further pressures being identified over the winter months. The report also sets out that there is still an estimated pressure from the Serco pension position of £3m that still needs to be identified and that any operational surplus should be used to help meet this pressure.

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **David Lawson**
Deputy Head of Legal Services and Monitoring Officer

This report considers the funding of local bus services in particular council subsidised services and the likely need to identify alternative sources of funding to achieve their maintenance over other transport options. It recognises their importance to local communities linking them with leisure, health and work destinations.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Natalie Warren**
Community Development and Equalities Manager

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. Staff, Health, Sustainability, Crime and Disorder)

Not Applicable

8. Background papers used in preparing the report (including their location on the Council's website or identification whether any are exempt or protected by copyright):

None

9. Appendices to the report

- Appendix 1 – Motion to Full Council 25th November 2015.

Report Author:

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Highways & Transportation

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Motions Submitted to Council

In accordance with Chapter 2, Part 2 (Rule 15) of the Council's Constitution

Motion 3

Submitted by Councillor Stewart

"We call on Thurrock Council to immediately fund an alteration to the bus route to serve Fobbing over the winter months."

Monitoring Officer Comments:

This motion relates to a matter which affects the authority or the authority's area and for which the authority has relevant function. The motion uses the words "Call on" and as such is a request for a consideration of this option by the executive within the approved budget.

Section 151 Officer Comments:

For a three day per week service until the end of the financial year, a cost of £9,000 has been calculated.

When considering this, Members should note that the Cabinet considered a report at their meeting in November that spelt out a number of financial pressures that are being faced in this financial year and this would add to them.

In addition, Members should also consider why a service should be supported for this area and not for others that would then increase this estimated amount.

Is the above motion within the remit of Council to approve?

Yes

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