

CABINET
14 NOVEMBER 2019**WORCESTERSHIRE PASSENGER TRANSPORT STRATEGY**

Relevant Cabinet Members

Mr A T Amos

Mr M J Hart

Relevant Officers

Director of Economy and Infrastructure

Director of Children's Services

Recommendation

1. **The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education and Skills recommend that Cabinet:**
 - (a) **adopts the proposed Passenger Transport Strategy, which has been informed by a robust and comprehensive public consultation;**
 - (b) **authorises the Director of Economy and Infrastructure to implement the Strategy and formulate operational policies with an appropriate implementation schedule having regard to the Strategy and in consultation with the above Cabinet Members with Responsibility in relation to any strategic impacts; and**
 - (c) **authorises the commencement of a full review by the Director of Economy and Infrastructure of the Council's Passenger Transport network in accordance with the adopted Strategy, which will incorporate Home to School Transport, Public Transport, Community Transport and Social Care Transport.**

Background

2. In 2013/14, the Council undertook an extensive public consultation exercise on proposals relating to financially-supported bus services. The objective was to understand people's priorities for provision and the likely impact of proposed service changes.
3. The recent changes in the commercial bus market led to calls for Worcestershire to subsidise former commercial routes. Our new Passenger Transport Strategy will ensure that we can make effective decisions about all Passenger Transport provision and delivery options based on a robust performance management framework model. The model will take into account a variety of factors: financial, social and practical to arrive at a consistent decision-making methodology.

4. In June 2019, the Cabinet approved the Strategy for public consultation. The consultation ran for 13 weeks (13 June to 13 September 2019). The consultation questionnaire and documents were widely available throughout Worcestershire, including libraries and tourist information centres, and online on the Council's website. Surveyors and Council staff attended roadshows/local markets, shopping centres and various local events to distribute leaflets and promote the consultation supported by social media.

5. In addition, briefing sessions were held with Local Members, District Council representatives, bus operators, Community Transport providers, schools and colleges and some local businesses and, where appropriate, their suggestions were acted on to promote the Strategy.

6. The Council spends circa £30m gross per annum on a range of transport services therefore a robust Passenger Transport Strategy is required to provide a clear direction for the next 10-20 years in line with the Corporate Plan and Local Transport Plan 4. Findings from the public consultation will be considered during the review of Passenger Transport services and will require the formulation of new and a review of existing operational policies.

7. On the 31 January 2019 Cabinet supported a review of Passenger Transport services following the findings of the Overview & Scrutiny Report (13 December 2018). This prompted the need for a Passenger Transport Strategy which would provide clear policies detailing the Council's position on Passenger Transport provision and would highlight future approaches to be adopted.

8. On 6 June 2019, Cabinet endorsed a public consultation with all stakeholders on the draft Passenger Transport Strategy, covering key areas:

- Home to School Transport – The provision of the Council's statutory duty for pupils entitled to free school transport, predominately for mainstream pupils, and specialised transport for pupils attending Special Educational Establishments as determined by the Council's Home to School Travel Policy. This is provided by commercial companies and internal resources providing bespoke transport solutions
- Public Transport – Subsidised services are provided by commercial operators under contract to the Council. This entails the provision of registered service routes traditionally delivered in areas where the Council has considered its duties. Lower levels of patronage have resulted in withdrawal of commercial services. Whilst most of public transport services are provided by traditional timetabled bus routes, a smaller number of routes have been provided by Community Transport Schemes
- Community Transport – services that are established and operated by community organisations on a not-for-profit basis. Community Transport provides a valuable service for everyone in the county, particularly those from vulnerable groups, helping them access key services and activities that they cannot reach using conventional public transport. This is likely to include working with existing Community Transport operators as well as groups and organisations representing their communities for example, Parishes Councils. This will provide a valuable link to communities and available services to avoid social isolation and provide access to essential services.

- Social Care Transport – The Council operates a number of scheduled Passenger Transport services providing access to Adult and Older People’s Day Services. Access to these facilities is subject to a Comprehensive Needs Assessment carried out by Adult Services. Transport is also provided on a ‘call out’ basis for Social Services’ service users, most commonly by minibus or taxi.

9. The public consultation was undertaken from 13 June to 13 September 2019. The results analysis is detailed in Appendix 3.

Passenger Transport Strategy

10. The findings of the Passenger Transport consultation have informed the Passenger Transport Strategy. Adoption of this Strategy would provide a clear direction on the Council’s position on transport provision and the future service delivery models.

11. The Worcestershire Passenger Transport Strategy takes a strategic and holistic view of all public and Community Transport provision, including Home to School transport arrangements, fares and ticketing, concessionary travel, infrastructure and information. The Strategy is informed by a Passenger Transport Review of needs and demands (including future development), together with an assessment of how well these are met by current services.

Consultation Feedback and Analysis

12. The Consultation feedback (Appendix 3 Passenger Transport Analysis Report) supports the ‘Pillars of Wisdom’ of the draft Strategy which are:

- To prioritise support for local centres – urban connections, inter-urban connections and areas of medium population density taking journey purpose into account
- Alternative provision – to expand the existing network where possible, e.g. Community Transport (including the use of concessionary bus passes) between smaller towns/villages in rural areas. This would be where traditional bus services are considered unsustainable
- To embrace technology to provide quality infrastructure and improved dissemination of information as well as providing confidence that Passenger Transport Services will arrive e.g. bus shelters and RTI (Real Time Information) boards
- The Council will take a lead role in developing and delivering a bus information strategy to promote passenger services and develop a clearly defined and understood brand for the Worcestershire Passenger Transport network
- To work with Partners to develop innovative ticketing and payment solutions that encourage passenger growth whilst maintaining a viable commercial network
- To focus on providing an integrated passenger transport network along key commuter corridors. Routes will focus on primary journeys including employment, education and training, healthcare, shopping and social and leisure activities including libraries given that, during the recent Library consultation, there was huge public support to ensure that these facilities remained open as they were seen as an integral part of local communities.

- The Council to lead on the co-ordination and dissemination of information and to be proactive in promoting bus services and Community Transport in general, in conjunction with operators.

13. Over 90% of respondents, representing 2218 people, answered the survey as a Worcestershire resident. 17% (412 respondents) work in the county, whilst just over 200 (8.5%) were people who regularly visit Worcestershire. This acknowledges that some respondents have completed the questionnaire both as residents and as working in the county.

14. We received 1149 responses from people aged 65 and over, 1123 aged 20-61 and 142 responses from people aged 19 and under. Almost half of all respondents indicated that they were retired. Almost a third of respondents were employed, with just over 6% saying that they were in full-time education at school, college or university. Less than 5% (112 respondents) were self-employed, with 3% (73 respondents) suggesting they were unemployed. Although the response for under 19 is lower, we contacted all Worcestershire school/colleges and the University throughout the consultation exercise and visited some schools where bus usage is high. We encouraged responses through social media channels whilst acknowledging that it is notoriously more difficult to engage with the under 19 age group. (Analysis Report Figures 2 and 4)

15. 63% of respondents (1406 respondents) reside in areas classified as 'urban', whilst just over 36% (811 respondents) live in areas classified as 'rural'. As part of our consultation exercise, we visited all major towns within the Districts and attended various local events. We engaged with Local Members to identify key locations and hard-to-reach groups. (Analysis Report Figure 6)

- **To prioritise support for local centres – urban connections, inter-urban connections and areas of medium population density taking journey purpose into account**

We will do this using the Performance Management Framework Model. Whilst only 40% of all respondents were in favour of the proposal on how to decide if a particular bus service is supported (Analysis Report, Figure 25), the Model will enable a transparent, consistent approach countywide (Model is referenced on pages 20-22 of the draft Strategy). Only 15% of respondents disagreed with the proposal (Analysis Report Figure 25). The Strategy acknowledges the fact that there were respondents who did not know whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement.

Respondents across all stakeholder groups agreed with the methodology when considering only positive or negative responses (Analysis Report Figure 25c).

Over 60% of all respondents agreed that the proposals would be a sensible way to spend Council funds (Analysis Report Figure 26) to help make it possible for people to travel around Worcestershire on Passenger Transport. Over 80% (Analysis Report Figure 26c) of all stakeholder groups agreed with the proposals when considering only positive or negative responses.

- **Alternative Provision – to expand the existing network where possible, e.g. Community Transport (including the use of concessionary bus passes)**

between smaller towns/villages in rural areas. This would be where traditional bus services are considered unsustainable

85% of respondents agreed that we should explore alternative and local transport solutions (Analysis Report Figures 21 and 21b). 89% focus on meeting people's essential transport needs in the most cost-effective way. 60% agreed with the statement 'Transport solutions, including Integrated, Demand Responsive and Community Transport, can offer an alternative to traditional Passenger Transport services' (Analysis Report Figures 16 & 16b).

- **To embrace technology to provide quality infrastructure and improved dissemination of information e.g. bus shelters and RTI Boards**

Over 80% of all respondents agree or strongly agree with the statement 'Infrastructure for Passenger Transport Services should be improved, such as bus shelters' (Analysis Report Figure 23).

Over 80% of all respondents agreed with the statement Worcestershire County Council should consider supporting new technology initiatives (Analysis Report Figure 20). Only 3% of respondents disagreed with this statement but enhancement of the network in this way will improve user experience and therefore encourage use.

- **Worcestershire County Council to take a lead role in developing and delivering a bus information strategy to promote passenger services. To develop a clearly defined and understood brand for the Worcestershire Passenger Transport network**

A high proportion of respondents agree with the statement 'Publicity for Passenger Transport Services should be improved'. 90% agree with this, whilst almost a half of respondents strongly agree (Analysis Report Figure 22).

- **To work with Partners to develop innovative ticketing and payment solutions that encourage passenger growth whilst maintaining a viable commercial network**

Feedback from the Strategy indicates that the cost of public transport can be a prohibiting factor in its use, however this varies depending on demographic (Analysis Report Figure 13). We recognise that the success of one of the 'Pillars' is dependent on partnership working to promote growth. This is a long-term aspiration for the Council.

- **To focus on providing an integrated Passenger Transport network along key commuter corridors. Routes will focus on primary journeys including employment, education and training, healthcare, shopping and social and leisure activities**

Over 90% of respondents agreed that the 'Passenger Transport network should be joined up (integrated) such as connecting to train services' (Analysis Report Figure 18).

- **Worcestershire County Council to lead on the co-ordination and dissemination of information and to be proactive in promoting bus services and Community Transport in general, in conjunction with operators.**

90% of respondents agree with the statement 'Publicity for Passenger Transport Services should be improved'. Only 4% disagreed with this statement. (Analysis Report Figure 22).

16. Limited funding and competing demands for resources means that there has to be a clear method of evaluating the benefits of supporting each service compared to other identified needs. There is also a requirement to evaluate the ongoing effectiveness of existing subsidised services to determine whether support should be continued.

17. A Performance Management Framework Model has been developed (Draft Strategy page 20-22) to appraise the relative performance of subsidised services and help analyse funding priorities. The framework model allows for fair comparisons to be made between services and provides the Council with a robust methodology to appraise each service and determine which provide the best value for money whilst endeavouring to deliver the minimum service levels detailed above. Without a robust Framework Model there would be difficulty prioritising local centres and could result in inefficient use of the resources that would ultimately lead to a network that would not provide the greatest benefit for the residents of Worcestershire.

18. Each contract will be scored on seven categories, reflecting the feedback from the consultation, in order to assess the benefit and value of the services provided. These are:

- The primary journey purpose
- The availability of alternative services for the journeys being made
- The deprivation index for the areas served by the service
- The number of concessionary journeys
- The average number of passengers on each journey (particular those with protected characteristics, e.g. the elderly)
- The actual cost per passenger carried
- The car ownership level of the areas served

19. The scores for each category will be weighted to reflect the overall relevance and priority type of service provision as identified through the consultation exercise. This is the most objective and effective way of prioritising expenditure. Following review of the responses on journey purpose, the withdrawal of Passenger Transport services would have a greater impact on journeys associated with education and employment. Other categories will be prioritised accordingly (Analysis Report, Figures 7-12).

Legal, Financial and HR Implications

20. The Council's statutory duties with respect to the provision of public transport are set out in Sections 63 and 92 Transport Act 1985. These state:

Section 63(1) - In each non-metropolitan county of England and Wales it shall be the duty of the county council—

(a) 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;

(5) For the purpose of securing the provision of any service under subsection (1)(a)...above [the] council shall have power to enter into an agreement providing for service subsidies; but their power to do so—

(a) [in England and Wales, shall be exercisable only where the service in question would not be provided, or would not be provided to a particular standard, without subsidy;

Section 92(1) - An authority responsible for expenditure on public passenger transport services shall, in the exercise and performance of their functions in relation to agreements providing for service subsidies, [have regard to the interests of the public and of persons providing public passenger transport services in their area].

21. The legislation surrounding the provision of home to school transport is covered in sections 508A, 508B, 508C, 508D, 509AD s508E s508F s508G, s508H, s508I S509AA, S509AB, S509AD, S509A and Schedule 35B and C of the Education Act 1996. The Council must meet its legal duties to arrange home to school transport for eligible students. This is set out in the Home to School Transport and Travel Policy.

22. The Council should consider the transport needs of its residents and provide financial support for local bus services where appropriate, to meet those needs. It must also have specific regard to the needs of elderly and disabled people. Given these statutory requirements, it is important we adopt a Passenger Transport Strategy for Worcestershire.

23. Once the Strategy is endorsed by Cabinet, there will be a Passenger Transport review to consider all of the elements that make up the Council's estimated gross £30m spend on transport activities as outlined above.

Equality and Diversity Implications

24. The Council recognises that Public Transport is of particular relevance in the lives of individuals who share Protected Characteristics such as Age and Disability. The aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty (in particular Advancing Equality of Opportunity for Protected Groups) are promoted through the provision of accessible and reliable public transport. The Passenger Transport Strategy recognises the importance of public transport in the lives of protected groups and sets out the Council's approach to the delivery of efficient and integrated public transport.

25. The Strategy has been screened for a potential Equality and Public Health Impact Assessment which has indicated there is no adverse effect at this stage. Further assessments will be undertaken at the appropriate stages of the implementation process. The implementation of a Strategy which promotes consistent and transparent decision-making and planning is likely to benefit protected Groups.

26. All analysis will accord with data protection requirements. Additionally, any detriment to services that have potential to impact on Equality will also be assessed. As part of the implementation of the Strategy, the findings will be taken into account in future planning and decision-making.

Risk Evaluation

28. A comprehensive risk assessment has been carried out by the members of the Transport Strategy Board to identify the short, medium and long-term risks. Production of a holistic Risk Register has enabled a thorough planning and mitigation process.

Public Health Impact Assessments

29. A Public Health Impact screening exercise has been undertaken and assessments will be carried out throughout the implementation process.

Recommendation

30. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways and Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Education and Skills recommend adoption of the Worcestershire Passenger Transport Strategy.

31. This will enable officers to begin an implementation plan and apply all the principal themes outlined above to the existing network. This will be a comprehensive exercise, conducted methodically on a district by district basis.

Supporting Information

- Appendix 1 Worcestershire Passenger Transport Strategy (available electronically)
- Appendix 2 Executive Summary of Responses
- Appendix 3 Passenger Transport Analysis Report (available electronically)

Contact Points

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Specific Contact Points for this report

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List of Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Director of Economy and Infrastructure) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

Agenda papers for the meetings of Cabinet held on 13 December 2018, 31 January 2019 and 6 June 2019