

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PERFORMANCE BOARD

25 MAY 2022

PUBLIC TRANSPORT UPDATE

Summary

1. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways & Transport and Assistant Director for Highways & Transport Operations have been invited to update the Board on the plans for Passenger Transport in Worcestershire.

Background

2. Worcestershire County Council (the Council) submitted its Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) to the Department for Transport (DfT). The bid was for £86 million to improve the Worcestershire Passenger Transport network and to fulfil Worcestershire's vision to develop a long term, sustainable and enhanced public transport network.
3. On 4 April 2022, the Council received confirmation from the DfT that it was unsuccessful in its BSIP bid. To add further context, with the cessation of the Bus Recovery Grant (BRG) funding later this year, this is likely to result in further service reductions across Worcestershire.

Current Position

4. The combination of BSIP and cessation of BRG as well as increased operating costs has resulted in bus operators reviewing current services and either reducing frequency or ceasing services. This is based on current patronage levels which are around 70% of pre-covid levels. This has had an adverse effect on the commerciality of services. The Council was able to provide mitigation for some of the key, well used services, that were scheduled to cease. This arrangement is temporary to enable the review of the network.
5. In response to the BSIP decision, Worcestershire has requested urgent feedback, along with other neighbouring authorities (Herefordshire, Warwickshire and Shropshire). A response is still awaited.

Network Reviews

6. The DfT has asked the Council to undertake a full review of the commercial network within Worcestershire. A consequence of the Covid-19 pandemic is that passenger demand has changed, impacting on viability of commercial services and resulting in reductions in fare income.
 7. The DfT recognises that Local Transport Authorities (LTA) must act as the lead in response to this. The LTA and operators (who receive funding from DfT) will be required to jointly conduct a network review of local transport service provision and submit this to the DfT.
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8. The review with operators of commercial services has started in Worcestershire and the Council will submit this to the DfT by the deadline of 1 July 2022. This document will be key in enabling LTAs to understand current patronage levels and commerciality of services. This will then facilitate the future plans to mitigate any impact and establish support going forward, in line with the aims outlined in the Council's Worcestershire Passenger Transport Strategy.

Worcestershire Passenger Transport Strategy

9. The Worcestershire Passenger Transport Strategy was developed in 2019 and preceded submission of the BSIP and still remains the Council's overarching strategy. This supports the Worcestershire's Local Transport Plan 4 which aspires to deliver an efficient, resilient and integrated system for all.

10. The main providers of passenger transport services in Worcestershire are commercial organisations that operate local bus services on a profit-making basis. The aspiration, based on deregulation of the market in 1985, was to enable profitable commercial bus services outside London.

11. It is acknowledged that attractive, efficient and stable commercial bus networks are what residents need. These can also contribute to Council policies, for example reducing congestion and vehicle emissions.

12. Commercial bus services are outside the Council's direct control, however we the Council will continue to work collaboratively with commercial operators to meet its long-term vision

13. Following completion of the network review, the immediate next steps will be to understand the data and impact. The Council will then design a 'fit for purpose' bus passenger transport network to meet current and future requirements. The design of this network within a (yet to be determined) financial envelop will embrace latest technology, innovative vehicle and route solutions utilising the many transport options open to us (for example Demand Responsible Transport, Community Transport, links to Rail).

Purpose of the Meeting

The Board is asked to

- consider the approach in response to BSIP,
- determine whether any further information or future Scrutiny is required at this stage; and
- agree any comments to highlight to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Highways & Transport.

Contact Points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) there are no background papers subject matter of this report:

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)
