

Overview of Responses and Recommendations

Budget Proposals 16/17: Public Transport		Mark Edwards - Head of Highways and Transport	19 January 2016 Version 2 (Exec)
Proposal:	To reduce the Public Transport Budget by £320,000 in the next financial year.		
Total budget 15/16:	£1,463,090	Recommended officer saving 16/17:	£320,000 (21.9%)
Initial proposed saving 16/17:	£320,000 (21.9%)	Final recommendation to Executive 16/17:	Progress with the proposed savings, based on a methodology of passenger usage rather than cost.
Nos of responses:	<p>414 in total. 350 were users of the bus services, 36 were not, and 28 did not declare whether they were or weren't.</p> <p>Of this total, 14 were received from the following Town / Parish Councils; Aldermaston, Basildon, Burghfield, Chaddleworth, Compton, East Garston, Hungerford, Inkpen, Kintbury, Lambourn, Pangbourne, Purley, Stratfield Mortimer and Tilehurst.</p> <p>A further 10 were received from organisations. These were Eight Bells for Mental Health, Fare Wise Travel, Lambourn Volunteer Group, Newbury College, Pangbourne and District Volunteer Service, Parish of Saint Catherine (Tilehurst) and Saint Birinus (Calcot), Supply My Office Ltd, Valley Community Bus, West Berkshire Green Party and White Horse Consulting Services Ltd.</p>		
Key issues raised:	<p>The Key concerns raised were that the ending, or severe reduction, of any of the current contracted local bus services would result in residents being isolated from vital services. In particular, isolation from medical services (174 responses), shops (163 responses), educational establishments (164 responses), employment (126 responses), sports and leisure facilities, (29 responses) and libraries (6 responses). 5 people alleged they would have to move house if they lost their village bus service.</p> <p>The key consequences of such isolation were cited as reduced life opportunities, reduced quality of life possibly resulting in depression and loneliness.</p> <p>The loss / reduction of local bus services was believed by 8 respondents to threaten the economic well being of the local economy, especially the towns where much shopping and business was carried out by the rural population.</p> <p>53 responses believed that further congestion and pollution would result from current bus passengers having to travel by car.</p> <p>Three responses stated that access to the countryside, particularly for hikers, would be adversely affected by the proposed</p>		

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	<p>savings.</p> <p>Four responses feared some current bus drivers would lose their jobs.</p> <p>36 respondents bemoaned the fact they needed the buses to get to rail stations.</p> <p>The bus services cited in the responses were:</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th data-bbox="479 555 1070 584">Service</th> <th data-bbox="1093 555 1413 584">Number of Responses</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr><td>Newbury and District 2</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr><td>Newbury and District 3</td><td>37</td></tr> <tr><td>Newbury and District 4</td><td>89</td></tr> <tr><td>Newbury and District 6/6A</td><td>31</td></tr> <tr><td>Newbury and District 8</td><td>4</td></tr> <tr><td>Thamesdown 20, X20 & X22</td><td>12</td></tr> <tr><td>Reading Buses 28</td><td>0</td></tr> <tr><td>Thamesdown 46/46A</td><td>5</td></tr> <tr><td>Newbury and District 75</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr><td>Barnes Coaches 82</td><td>54</td></tr> <tr><td>Go Ride 90 (Hungerford to Lambourn)</td><td>94</td></tr> <tr><td>Go Ride (Lambourn to Swindon)</td><td>96</td></tr> <tr><td>Newbury and District 101</td><td>29</td></tr> <tr><td>Newbury and District 102</td><td>3</td></tr> <tr><td>Newbury and District 104</td><td>30</td></tr> <tr><td>Newbury and District 105</td><td>32</td></tr> <tr><td>Newbury and District / WBC 107</td><td>22</td></tr> <tr><td>Thames Travel 143</td><td>11</td></tr> <tr><td>Horseman 154</td><td>6</td></tr> <tr><td>WBC H1</td><td>5</td></tr> </tbody> </table>		Service	Number of Responses	Newbury and District 2	3	Newbury and District 3	37	Newbury and District 4	89	Newbury and District 6/6A	31	Newbury and District 8	4	Thamesdown 20, X20 & X22	12	Reading Buses 28	0	Thamesdown 46/46A	5	Newbury and District 75	3	Barnes Coaches 82	54	Go Ride 90 (Hungerford to Lambourn)	94	Go Ride (Lambourn to Swindon)	96	Newbury and District 101	29	Newbury and District 102	3	Newbury and District 104	30	Newbury and District 105	32	Newbury and District / WBC 107	22	Thames Travel 143	11	Horseman 154	6	WBC H1	5
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Equality issues:	<p>The main people believed to be adversely affected by the proposed public transport savings were: The elderly (258 responses), the disabled / infirm (96 responses), job seekers (13 responses), non drivers / those without access to a car (243 responses), those on a low income (62 responses) and pupils & students, including those with SEN (164</p>																																											

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	<p>responses).</p> <p>The responses and recommendations received suggested using existing resources more efficiently (e.g. not running journeys that carry low numbers or using smaller vehicles for these journeys) and getting better returns from these resources (e.g. increased promotion of the services and raising fares). It was suggested we could introduce other low cost transport services into the district such as the post buses and opening our closed door home to school contracts to the public. Changes to commercial services to cover areas where bus services may be withdrawn were also put forward, as were changes to the statutory Off-Peak National Bus Pass Scheme.</p>		
Suggestions for reducing the impact on service users:	Suggestion	Council response	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Changing the terms and conditions of the National Off-Peak Bus Pass such that a minimum fare is charged (24 responses). b) Charging a fee for the issue of a bus pass(1). c) Only issue the pass to the disabled (1). d) Extend the pass to be used on the volunteer car schemes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) The terms and conditions of issue and use of the bus passes are set by the Department for Transport (DfT). Local Authorities must meet these. However, they can enhance them (such as issue of the companion bus pass) at their own cost. b) The Council may not legally request any fare, even if this is voluntary, be charged by bus pass holders when their pass is correctly presented for free travel. c) The Council cannot charge for issuing the passes or limiting the pass to the disabled. d) The Council could reimburse the volunteer car schemes for accepting the bus pass (as this is an enhancement to the scheme) although there would be a cost implication for doing this. 	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Charge higher fares (13) Charge lower fares (1) 	<p>Bus fares in West Berkshire have historically been high when compared to the rest of the south-east. Over a number of recent years we have held our fares stable in an attempt to redress this imbalance. Our fares are still relatively high and this could be a disincentive for some to travel on the buses. If we did raise fares we would have to increase the rate at which we reimburse the bus operators for accepting the national off-peak bus pass in the district; the rate they receive is related to the fare tables. This would significantly reduce the benefit of raising the fares. Raising fares could bring in more revenue to the Council, but it is expected this would be minimal, especially if some saw this as the reason not to travel by bus. It is expected that some fares will be raised modestly in line with increases in commercial Jet Black 1 fares later this year.</p>	

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		One respondent believed that lowering fares would lead to more travelling on the buses and more revenue to the Council. This could certainly be true in the urban areas where the potential to grow the bus market is higher than in the rural areas.	
	Promote bus use (17)	<p>It was believed better promotion of the bus services would lead to more travelling by bus. The budget for marketing bus services in the district has been the subject of earlier savings. As a result of these savings the district's public transport map and guide is now only available on the web. The travel guide timetable booklet is only published once a year, formerly it was twice. The Getting There Guide, a general guide to transport services in the district, has an uncertain future because of the savings.</p> <p>The Council does maintain all the roadside timetable displays of the services it contracts. The Council also operates Real Time Passenger Information at certain key bus stops in the district and currently contributes towards the national journey planning and timetable information 'Traveline' service.</p>	
	Reduce the number of journeys (64) or use smaller vehicles on less well used journeys (42)	<p>Rather than lose their service altogether, many residents suggested reductions in the timetable, or operating the service on less days of the week. It is true that some journeys are less well patronised than others. However, these journeys are often undertaken to get the bus into position to operate the next journey where numbers are expected to be higher. Less well patronised journeys could be operated in smaller buses, but may well have to be switched back to a bigger bus for the next journey in the timetable. Operating a service with a combination of large and small vehicles to better match demand for each journey could be expected to increase costs as the number of drivers and vehicles needed to deliver the service would be greater.</p> <p>Reducing a service to less days of the week could deliver savings, but this would mean the service would have less appeal to, for example, those who rely on Monday to Friday peak time journeys to work in Newbury. Once the peak time journeys have been secured, the off peak journeys are often operated at marginal cost, so little is to be saved by not operating the off peak journeys.</p>	
	Open closed door school buses to the public (2)	This may be achieved in certain instances. However, it depends on the operators having the appropriate vehicles, licences and drivers to convert a closed door contract to a local bus service. From 1 January 2016, all bus services operated by vehicles (of more than 22 seats which would include school buses) allowing use by the general	

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		public will need to be accessible to wheelchair users. School bus services do not, of course, operate on non school days, and are not currently classed as accessible.	
	Introduce a Lift Share Scheme (11)	The Council operates a car sharing scheme for its staff (Journey Sharing with Faxi). It was believed the general public would benefit if the Council promoted a similar lift sharing scheme, especially for those out in the villages. This would put those who are able to offer a space in their car in touch with those who would benefit from this. A national liftshare scheme (liftshare.com) exists for those that wish to use it.	
Alternative options for applying the saving in this area:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Replace existing services with demand responsive services / Dial-a-Ride services / Volunteer services / Taxis (18)	Such services may well be able to meet some of the demand along some of the current bus corridors where numbers travelling are low. The volunteer sector already operates services in some of our villages which are remote from the public transport network and where numbers wishing to travel are low. Taxis and demand responsive services could have a role to play in similar areas and possibly deliver a small amount of savings. Eleven respondents warned that the existing community transport schemes in the district had a shortage of volunteers so it would not be easy for this sector to operate more services.	
	The Council look to operate all the services in-house (1).	The Council is already operating some local bus services in-house under a Section 22 Permit. Further expansion of the bus services it can operate is being considered. It is believed it would be uneconomical for the council to operate any vehicle larger than a 16 seat minibus due in part to the differences in licensing regime required.	
	Have feeder services from the villages to the main bus routes (1)	Feeder services may be able to deliver some savings. Hopefully the Total Transport study will highlight any such opportunities. However, there is a general reluctance amongst the population to transfer from one vehicle to another on relatively short journeys, when the place of transfer is open to the elements and connections are not guaranteed.	
	Increase expenditure on local bus services (33)	The counter argument to savings was to increase expenditure on bus services to deliver improvements. This could attract more patronage and fares revenue. This would possibly be the case in the towns where more people could benefit from any such improvements. The impact in the rural areas would probably be less because of	

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		the lower numbers of people living there.	
	Don't build the Wharf Bus Interchange (1)	There is a need for the buses to have a terminus and turning point in Newbury, more so if the pedestrianised area of the town centre is to be preserved.	
	Raise Council Tax or Parish Council Precepts (4)	This would be a matter for the Council Members and Parish Councils to decide.	
Suggestions for how others may help contribute:	<p>Four respondents suggested that charities or big businesses could operate or fund the bus services under threat. However, it is doubtful whether charities would have the funds available to finance operation of the tendered bus network. Businesses and housing developments do often make contributions to the local bus services in terms of their Section 106 contributions. However, other than this, there is a general reluctance for businesses to fund local bus services as they don't view this as their remit. Charities, other than our community transport operators, and businesses in general would in all likelihood not be in a position to operate the services under threat in this consultation.</p> <p>Two respondents thought it would be helpful to bring back the Post Buses. The Council has no legal powers to request this. It is considered unlikely the privatised Post Office would consider this, especially at a time when many village post offices are closing.</p> <p>11 respondents believed that the council should seek changes to commercial bus services. However, the council has no legal powers to compel an operator to change the route or timetable of its commercially operated services. Officers of the Council do make such requests for changes, but these cannot legally be demands.</p> <p>12 respondents believed that the Council's members and officers should face further cuts to their benefits / salaries / pensions / expenses.</p>		
Officer conclusion as a result of the responses:	The public transport consultation attracted 414 responses, the second highest response rate of the 47 areas included in the Public Consultation. However the exercise has not highlighted any impacts that are not already anticipated, such as social isolation; potential increase in congestion and increased difficulties for many residents to access essential services.		
Officer recommendation as a result of responses:	<p>Feedback has not uncovered any further issues which would prevent the council from proceeding with this proposal. It's therefore recommended to implement this proposal to reduce the budget.</p> <p>The consultation document suggested this would target those services with the highest cost per passenger journey to the Council. After reviewing the feedback from the consultation, alternative proposals are being considered which would retain a bus service in most areas, albeit with a much reduced service based primarily on existing passenger usage rather than cost.</p>		

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