

## **CABINET – 15 March 2016**

### **PROPOSALS ON THE FUTURE OF SUBSIDISED BUS SERVICES**

#### **Report by Director for Environment and Economy**

#### **Executive Summary**

1. On 10 November 2015 Cabinet considered the results of the consultation on the future of Subsidised Bus Service and agreed to the full withdrawal of subsidised bus subsidies, subject to full council's approval, which was given in February 2016.
2. Cabinet also agreed the method by which bus subsidies would be prioritised should money be found to fund the subsidisation of services. The methodology used to prioritise services was based on the need for the service, not the current usage of the service.
3. During the consultation which informed Cabinet's decision, requests were made for usage data and we made available the limited data set we had used to test the methodology. However it has now become apparent there is more usage data available. Although we do not consider that this information changes our methodology, or the decision made, we consider it important that members of the public have a chance to review this data for themselves. This report seeks Cabinet approval for this course of action.
4. This report also affords Cabinet an opportunity to let the public know that following feedback from the public on the importance of there being a clear end date for subsidies, it has been agreed with operators that all subsidies will end on 20 July 2016, to coincide with the end of the school academic year. This decision costs approximately £140,000 more than ceasing contracts as soon as legally allowed, but affords greater clarity for the public.

#### **Further information**

1. On 26 May 2015, the Cabinet approved the launch of a full public consultation on proposed changes to subsidised bus services and Dial a Ride. The consultation document is attached as Annex 1. The methodology used to prioritise routes is attached as Annex 2.
2. In February 2016 a number of requests were received by the council for full usage data. A full review of available usage data was conducted by the Transport Hub and it was identified that the council held more usage data than had previously been understood.

3. A full analysis has been conducted of this data and is attached at Annex 3.

The conclusion of the analysis is that even if the fuller set of usage data had been used rather than the month's sample, the methodology and recommendation would have remained the same as:

**1. Usage data does not consider commercial alternatives and could bias against rural areas**

Although a subsidised service is well used, this does not mean that the people on it didn't have any other option. For example, some subsidised services serve rural communities and end in town centres. When nearing the town along a major transport corridor (e.g. Banbury Road), many people might use the bus because it is the first one that comes by, meaning high usage. A service that visits predominantly rural areas may have less users, but for them there is no commercial alternative (their need is greater).

**2. The usage data is limited in its quality and completeness and so we cannot fairly rely upon it:**

- The data is incomplete across the last 2 years (68% of patronage data points over the past 2 years do not exist).
  - The amount of data available for each 6 month period varies considerably.
  - The most complete time period is April 15 to September 15 (the most recent). The least complete is April 14 to September 14.
  - There is no data yet for the last 6 months (October 15 - March 16).
  - There is data available for different operators for different time periods.
4. Cabinet is asked to recommend the publication of all available usage data and to begin a communications campaign to ensure all affected bus users are aware of the end of subsidised routes on 20 July 2016.

## **Recommendation**

5. Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to:
- (a) note the availability of the usage data attached as Annex 3.
  - (b) note the limits of the data and that it does not impact upon the methodology or the decision made by Cabinet.
  - (c) agree to publish the usage data and seek comments from members of the public from 16 March 2016 to 14 April 2016.
  - (d) receive a further report in May to review the responses from the public on the usage data.

SUE SCANE  
Director for Environment & Economy

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Annexes: Annex 1 - the consultation document 2015  
Annex 2 - methodology used to prioritise routes  
Annex 3 – analysis of available usage data

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