

DELEGATED DECISIONS BY CABINET MEMBER FOR ENVIRONMENT (INCLUDING TRANSPORT)

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 12 March 2020 commencing at 2.30 pm and finishing at 2.57 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Yvonne Constance OBE – in the Chair

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor John Howson (for agenda Item 2)
Councillor John Sanders

Officers:

Whole of meeting G. Warrington (Law & Governance); P. Fermer (Community Operations), J. Fellows & D. Harrison (Planning & Place)

The Cabinet Member for Environment considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting, together with and decided as set out below. Except as insofar as otherwise specified, the reasons for the decisions are contained in the agenda and reports, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.

16/20 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

(Agenda No. 1)

None declared.

17/20 QUESTIONS FROM COUNTY COUNCILLORS

(Agenda No. 2)

Councillor Howson

“Why were county councillors not asked for their views on possible routes to be included in the supported bus services bid when some district councillors were circulated about the fund?”

Cabinet Member for Environment

“Thank you for your question and please allow me to clarify. As you know, the timescales for responding to this fund were exceedingly tight as such we were limited

in the opportunities available to us for consultation. We have had only a few weeks to respond so officers have been working very hard to gather input and clarify our position with key stakeholders.

I sent a message to all Town and Parish Councils on the 4th March advising them of the Government's announcement and of our Statement of Intent. Districts were not contacted directly by us. The Parish Transport Representatives, Bus Users Oxford and Oxfordshire MPs were all contacted.

I am pleased that the Government is choosing to put money into public transport services and the high level of interest shown has assisted us in developing this submission as a Statement of Intent to be eligible for Government funding. It will allow us to make some real improvements to the county's public transport network, but we will have to carefully target the money to get the most out of it. For this reason we have set out our intention to distribute the money so that its benefit will be felt across the county, particularly more rural services.

And while the funding is welcome, it should be noted that it represents a small proportion of the resources previously available to the council for bus services. We await the publication of the National Bus Strategy later this year which hopefully will contain details of how the Government's proposed investment in buses will manifest itself for local authorities. We are hopeful that the strategy will include an element of longer-term supported bus funding which will enable us to maintain and develop the network in the future.

I sincerely hope that the spending of this Supported Bus Services Fund on much needed supported bus services across Oxfordshire will help to encourage more travel by bus, thereby reducing traffic and congestion. Fewer vehicles on the road would reduce traffic emissions, contributing to better air quality and reducing the impact on climate change."

Councillor Howson

"Thank you for that. I appreciate that the timescales involved were tight but wondered why unparished areas of the City were not included in this consultation as there are parts of my division and I expect elsewhere in the City where residents are some distance from a bus route."

Cabinet Member for Environment

As I have said the timescales involved were extremely limiting but I am satisfied that officers were able to meet the requirements for consultation under the Supported Bus Services Fund. In addition to consulting with Oxfordshire MPs a previously scheduled meeting of Parish Transport Representatives on 25 February in addition to a separate consultation with the Oxfordshire based Bus Users Group had enabled proportionate engagement with the public. As far as I'm aware the unparished areas of the city were represented on the Bus Users Group and so would have been part of that consultation.

18/20 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda No. 3)

<i>Speaker</i>	<i>Item</i>
County Councillor John Howson	4. Supported Bus Services Fund.

19/20 SUPPORTED BUS SERVICES FUND

(Agenda No. 4)

In February 2020, the Government announced a number of new funds for the provision of bus services, including a new Supported Bus Services Fund (SBSF) for use in the 2020/21 financial year subject to submission of a satisfactory Statement of Intent (Sol), Oxfordshire County Council had been allocated £588,403 of that fund although there was no guarantee that funding would be available in the following year. The Cabinet Member for Environment was being asked to approve the Sol which had been included at Annex 1 to the report CMDE4.

Officers advised on the very short timescale imposed. That had made it impossible to take this to locality meetings although there had been an opportunity to consult with parish transport representatives as there had been a meeting already scheduled with them, MPs and the Bus users Group. A lot of discussion had been focussed primarily on rural areas and on enhancing existing services rather than new services which could be supported but the constraints set by the DfT meant that funding, which needed to be spent by May 2021 made the process for looking at new services very difficult to achieve hence the focus on enhancing services. The strategy had been to reinstate services where it was possible to link that in with an existing school bus service to try and offset some of the cost and for some routes, which were well served during the day but not evenings and Sundays which in turn might boost patronage and, although there was no guarantee of funding next year, help progress some services to a healthy commercial service.

Councillor Sanders was disappointed that the £500K fund represented only a sixth of what the County Council used to spend and was only for one year. Housing development was expected to increase exponentially over the next few years and with it demand for bus services.

Councillor Howson considered the needs of City residents had not been fully considered. Quoting the 14 Service that parts of his division were some distance from a bus stop and in one case 13 minutes.

Officers responded that city services were usually commercial. Service 14 used 2 buses and as an extra vehicle would cost £160,000 for little mileage.

The Cabinet Member suggested to Councillor Howson that he put in a request regarding Service 14 to Stagecoach.

The Cabinet Member summing up felt it important to note that there had been little notice of funding. The requirement to respond by 13 March and spend by May 2021 meant that consultation, by necessity, had had to be constrained and limited. She welcomed the fact that fortuitously a previously arranged meeting had at least presented an opportunity to consult parish transport and bus user group representatives. She noted there had been no response from MPs. She was satisfied that officers had met requirements for this process as set down by the Government noting the intention to essentially support weekend and evening enhancements to existing services with the aspiration to move to commercially supported services and where possible link in with existing school services. Therefore, having regard to the information set out in the report before her and the representations made to her at the meeting the Cabinet Member confirmed her decision as follows:

to approve the Statement of Intent for the spending of Oxfordshire's allocation of the Supported Bus Services fund, for submission to the Department for Transport on 13 March 2020.

In making that decision she noted that under Standing Orders (Section 6.2, paragraph 19 (a) to (c) the Chairman of the Council had agreed that a decision on the proposed Supported Bus Services Fund, which would normally be subject to call-in, should be exempt from that process in order for the County Council to meet the Statement of Intent deadline of 13 March, as if the usual scrutiny process had been invoked it would not have been possible to meet that deadline and, therefore, prejudice both the Council's and public interest.

Signed.....
Cabinet Member for Environment

Date of signing.....