



**Service and Community Impact Assessment (SCIA)**

**Directorate and Service Area: Environment and Economy, The Transport Hub**

**What is being assessed: Proposed changes to subsidised bus services and to the Dial a Ride service in Oxfordshire**

**Responsible owner / senior officer: Sue Scane, Director for Environment and Economy**

**Date of assessment: October 2015**

**Summary of judgement:**

The proposal to reduce or withdraw bus subsidies and cease funding the Dial a Ride service will have an impact across Oxfordshire, but risks particularly affecting rural communities, young people, older people and people with disabilities.

We aim to mitigate against this by working with bus operators to try and keep as many subsidised bus services as possible running. We are recommending that the Cabinet allocate (from the efficiency reserve) £500k of one-off, pump-prime funding for groups to bid for, in order to set-up community transport initiatives which meet an identified transport need in their area. In addition we intend to launch a marketing and direct engagement campaign to raise awareness and support the growth of community transport across Oxfordshire, and increase the number of volunteers and new schemes within the sector.

Our evidence-based approach to reducing bus subsidies ensures that people who have no commercial bus alternative are our highest priority when targeting our remaining budget. Following feedback from the public, we are also recommending that the Cabinet include additional criteria that would further protect rurally isolated and deprived communities, if option 2 were pursued.

Further details on specific risks and mitigations are provided below.

**Detail of Assessment:**

**Purpose of assessment:**

This assessment has been undertaken in order to understand the impact of proposals to reduce or withdraw all funding for subsidised bus services, and cease funding the Dial-a-Ride service, on different groups of people in Oxfordshire. The assessment considers how these changes may affect the people of Oxfordshire – with particular emphasis on groups with the protected characteristics listed below – and how this can be mitigated against.

Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 (“the 2010 Act”) imposes a duty on the Council to give due regard to three needs in exercising its functions. This proposal is such a function. The three needs are:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic, and those who do not.

Complying with section 149 may involve treating some people more favourably than others, but only to the extent that that does not amount to conduct which is otherwise unlawful under the new Act.

The need to advance equality of opportunity involves having due regard to the need to:

- remove or minimise disadvantages which are connected to a relevant protected characteristic and which are suffered by persons who share that characteristic,
- take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and which are different from the needs other people, and
- encourage those who share a relevant characteristic to take part in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such people is disproportionately low.
- take steps to meet the needs of disabled people which are different from the needs of people who are not disabled and include steps to take account of a person’s disabilities.

The need to foster good relations between different groups involves having due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

These protected characteristics are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality
- religion or belief – this includes lack of belief
- sex
- sexual orientation
- marriage and civil partnership

## **Context / Background:**

On-going cuts in central government funding mean Oxfordshire County Council has to make approximately £290 million of savings between 2010 and 2018.

On top of those savings, we believe we may need to save a further £50 million. These calculations are based on the Government's broad savings targets across the public sector for the new parliament. We will learn more throughout Autumn and Winter in an incremental way about how the Government will make its savings, how these will impact local government in general and then how changes will impact on Oxfordshire County Council specifically.

As part of our efforts to achieve these significant savings, in February 2015, the Council reduced the overall supported transport budget by a fifth (£6.3 million).

We have already identified that we can achieve nearly £3.7m of these savings by running services in a more efficient and integrated way. However, this still leaves a further £2.6 million to save, and possibly more depending on the extent of any future budget reductions from Central Government. We've therefore had to look at the supported transport services which we are not required to provide by law – subsidised bus services and Dial a Ride. If these services are reduced or withdrawn then this will inevitably impact some people in the county.

On 26<sup>th</sup> 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 ran between 19<sup>th</sup> June and 15<sup>th</sup> September.

## **Proposals:**

Having taken into account the public's feedback through the consultation, our final recommendations to the Cabinet are as follows:

### **Delivery of the agreed Medium Term Financial Plan savings**

**In order to deliver the savings required in the MTFP, the Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to**

1. Consider the consultation feedback regarding subsidised bus services.
2. Proceed with reducing bus subsidies by £2.3 million and:
  - a. Consider the consultation feedback regarding subsidised bus services and decide which services to prioritise – off-peak, peak, or other.
  - b. Update the methodology used for ranking services in the following ways:
    - i. Include additional criteria which ensure that rurally isolated and deprived areas are also prioritised.
    - ii. Agree to continue to pay for (i.e. protect in the methodology) subsidised bus routes which are used to take entitled students from home to school, where on the whole it

is cheaper for us to do so, instead of paying for separate dedicated school transport. (This will vary routes available on a year by year basis as school cohorts change).

iii. Ensure a consistent methodology by treating all providers in the same way, whether they are external providers, OCC fleet or community transport providers.

The impact on subsidised bus services of option 2, if either off-peak or peak services are prioritised, is provided in results tables in Annex B. These tables also show the impact on the results of accepting our recommended changes to the methodology used for ranking bus services, when compared with the previous results we originally consulted on.

3. Cease funding the Dial a Ride service as of April 2016.

If cabinet approves this request, then approximately two-thirds of the subsidies due to be withdrawn would cease in April 2016, and the remaining third would cease in June 2016. The £2.3m savings under option 2 would be realised in financial year 16/17, assuming notice was served in November / December 2015.

The exact details cannot be finalised at this stage due to variables including whether contract renewal renegotiations are required, which could alter costs.

#### **Delivery of further savings subject to Council approval**

4. The withdrawal of all bus subsidies would deliver the full £3.7m savings if the cabinet makes this decision, subject to full council's approval in February 2016 to further reduce the Supported Transport budget.

If Council approves this request, then routes would cease throughout 2016, from April onwards.

#### **Allocation of one-off, pump-prime funding**

**The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:**

5. Allocate (from the efficiency reserve) £500k of one-off, pump-prime funding for groups to bid for, in order to set-up community transport initiatives which meet an identified transport need in their area

#### **Exploring a new approach to Transport**

**The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to:**

6. Approve the suggested implementation approach, including the request to explore the option of undertaking a larger scale commissioning exercise which includes a range of supported transport services, in addition to subsidised bus services.

Depending on the cabinet's decision on whether to withdraw all bus subsidies, this commissioning exercise will either include the remainder of the subsidy budget, or exclude it if cabinet decides to withdraw all funding.

## **Evidence / Intelligence:**

In total, 2656 responses to the consultation questionnaire were received, as well as numerous emails and letters, 13 detailed submissions and 7 petitions. 275 people attended public and specific stakeholder meetings regarding the proposals we put forward.

As part of ORCC's role as an independent facilitator and advisor during the consultation, they were tasked with reviewing and analysing all the consultation responses which were received and detailing their findings in a report to the Council. The ORCC consultation report details the breakdown of responses to each of the consultation questions, summarises the main reasons people gave for their answers, and draws out common themes and issues which emerged across submissions. ORCC's consultation report can be found in Annex C.

The key findings in ORCC's report are summarised in the final consultation report to the Cabinet, which forms the basis of our recommendations.

### **Proposal 1 – subsidised bus services**

We deliberately pursued an evidence-based approach when developing our proposal to reduce bus subsidies by £2.3m (option 2); following a strict methodical process to calculate which bus subsidies are best value for money, and which are worst value. Feedback from the public has led to a number of recommended changes to this methodology, including adding certain criteria that would prioritise rurally isolated and deprived areas. Details of how and why we have updated the methodology can be found in Annex A, with the results of these changes available in Annex B.

### **Proposal 2 - Dial a Ride**

We know that currently 238 people across Oxfordshire use Dial-a-Ride as a regularly scheduled service. We have reviewed these people (by district) and found that, overall, 215 of them are able to walk. Of these, 160 are within 400 metres walking distance of a bus stop and the majority have concessionary bus passes that allow them free travel at off-peak times.

## **Alternatives considered / rejected:**

### **Subsidised bus services**

When originally developing our proposal to prioritise off-peak services, we also considered different ways we could prioritise services and reduce funding. We considered two other approaches:

- Prioritising services running at 'peak' hours during weekdays (06:30-09:30 in the morning, and 16:00-19:00 in the evening).
- Prioritising services running in the evening and at the weekend, which are commonly used by people to access leisure activities.

When launching the consultation, we provided a table of results which showed how services would be prioritised if we adopted these different approaches.

As we stated at the time, we decided against following these different approaches for a number of reasons:

- While all our subsidies support services which are of value and significance to the communities they serve, the council's first duty is to protect our most vulnerable public transport users. This is part of our overall corporate commitment to provide a 'safety net' of support and resources for our most vulnerable residents.
- Off-peak services are less likely to ever be taken up on a commercial basis by operators, given the relatively low number of people that use them. They are also often cheaper to subsidise than other services, as they run at times when operators have spare vehicles available. This means that prioritising off-peak services leads to more services / service enhancements being protected.
- In contrast to off-peak services, peak hour services are usually far more expensive in terms of their total contract cost because running a peak route often requires a bus company to purchase an additional vehicle.

ORCC's consultation report shows that there was a strong show of support (47%) for our preferred method of targeting remaining funding towards off-peak services, which tend to be used by older people and people with disabilities. Only one quarter of respondents disagreed with this approach, with 20% describing themselves as neutral.

Nonetheless, many people (including neutrals and those in favour of protecting off-peak) raised concerns about reducing peak services, and the impact this would have on young people and commuters in the County, who tend to travel on these services. Many people felt that these services were just as important as off-peak, and also highlighted the potential negative impact on the economy of losing peak services. In light of this, some respondents suggested that we should assess each subsidised service on a case-by-case basis, and consider additional factors such as demand.

Given this lack of consensus, we are not making a recommendation to the Cabinet regarding which type of services to prioritise, but are instead inviting them to consider and weigh up the feedback received.

### **Dial-a-Ride**

We considered maintaining the service as it is. However, we decided to reject this option for a number of reasons:

- We need to find big savings and unfortunately this means looking at services which we aren't required to provide by law.
- Dial a ride users pay an annual subscription fee of £5. This contrasts with people going to Council day centres, who have to pay £5 per journey, and we think this inconsistency is unfair.
- The service uses specialist transport resources which arguably would be better allocated towards higher need SEN (special educational needs) users travelling to school.

- We've already had success setting up an alternative voluntary scheme in the City, and so think this is an option worth pursuing across the rest of the County.

## Impact Assessment:

### Proposal 1 - Subsidised bus services

#### Option 1: withdraw all bus subsidies

**Annex B** provides a table of all subsidised bus services in Oxfordshire – all of which would stop receiving a subsidy under this option. It also shows which services are only partially subsidised, and which parts of the route the subsidy is provided for so that people can see exactly which part of their route is affected by the option.

#### Option 2: reduce bus subsidies by £2.3m

**Annex B** provides a table which sets out the results of reducing funding by £2.3m when taking the following three different approaches:

- **Consultation Option 2:** reduce subsidised bus services by £2.3million, and prioritise off-peak services where possible (the option we consulted on)
- **Updated Option 2 - Off Peak:** reduce subsidised bus services by £2.3million, and prioritise **off-peak** services where possible. In addition, rural services are prioritised and special exemptions made for deprived areas and school routes (additional criteria raised during through consultation)
- **Updated Option 2 - Peak:** reduce subsidised bus services by £2.3million, and prioritise **peak** services where possible. In addition, rural services are prioritised and special exemptions made for deprived areas and school routes (additional criteria raised during through consultation)

There may be instances where our preference would be to "withdraw" and to "retain" subsidies for separate services that are covered by the same contract.

In these cases it is likely that the contract would have to be modified to include only the parts we wish to retain. As a result the contract cost may increase (or decrease). This might mean that service(s) close to "the line" may be affected (potentially withdrawn).

The routes which were not removed would then remain in place until the end of 2016/17. During that time we would undertake a commissioning exercise with the remaining budget, aimed at procuring the best possible subsidised bus transport network for Oxfordshire. This exercise would be outcome-based, guided by the Cabinet's preferred approach for prioritising services, but focused on meeting the identified transport needs of communities, rather than specific routes.

Either option will have an impact on those communities which currently use subsidised bus services. These tend to be rural communities and, in general, those most affected would be people without a public transport alternative or a car. In the

'Impact on Individuals and Communities' section we have assessed the impact of these proposals on four community groups with protected characteristics which we think are potentially particularly at risk: rural communities, young people, older people and people with disabilities.

### Overall mitigation

Under either option we will work with bus operators to try and keep as many services as possible running. We are recommending that the Cabinet allocate (from the efficiency reserve) £500k of one-off, pump-prime funding for groups to bid for, in order to set-up community transport initiatives which meet an identified transport need in their area. In addition we intend to launch a marketing and direct engagement campaign to raise awareness and support the growth of community transport across Oxfordshire, and increase the number of volunteers and new schemes within the sector. Details of a number of community-based schemes which have been proposed during the consultation can be found in ORCC's final report in Annex D.

### **Proposal 2 - Dial-a-Ride**

If our proposal is agreed, we will cease funding for the Dial-a-Ride service as of April 2016 and current users will have to find alternative methods of transport. In the 'Impact on Individuals and Communities' section we have assessed the impact of this proposal on three community groups with protected characteristics which we think are potentially most at risk: rural communities, older people, and people with disabilities.

### Overall mitigation

We are recommending that the Cabinet allocate (from the efficiency reserve) £500k of one-off, pump-prime funding for groups to bid for, in order to set-up community transport initiatives which meet an identified transport need in their area.

We have already been successful in securing a community transport service in Oxford City and will be offering a package of support, including one-off pump-prime funding if made available, to help get new schemes up and running in other parts of the County.

## **Impact on Individuals and Communities:**

### **Subsidised bus services**

#### Rural communities

The majority of subsidised bus services are run in the County's more rural areas. This is because bus subsidies are provided for services which are uneconomical for bus companies to provide on their own, and these tend to fall in rural areas where there are less people, and therefore less prospective passengers than necessary to make a service profitable.

Specific mitigations:



Our methodology for ranking subsidised bus services under option 2 aims to prioritise those services which serve addresses without any commercial bus alternatives, thereby favouring those rural communities most at risk of isolation.

In addition, in light of feedback from the public, we are recommending that the Cabinet update the methodology used for ranking services under option 2 so that rurally isolated communities are further prioritised.

#### Older people and people with disabilities

We know that some older people and people with disabilities rely on public transport to help them stay independent, particularly if they are no longer able to use a car. There is therefore a risk that reducing or withdrawing subsidised bus services will make it harder for some of the County's older people or people with disabilities to stay active and get out and about.

Specific mitigations:

As already stated, our methodology for ranking subsidised bus services under option 2 aims to prioritise those services which serve addresses without any commercial bus alternatives.

In addition, the Cabinet can mitigate the impact on these groups further by choosing to prioritise off-peak services, which tend to be used by older people and people with disabilities, who have concessionary bus passes that allow them free travel on such services.

#### Young people accessing employment

There's a risk that young people currently reliant on a subsidised service – and who are less likely to have the means to own a car – will be hindered in their ability to access employment or training opportunities.

Specific mitigations:

As already stated, our methodology for ranking subsidised bus services under option 2 aims to prioritise those services which serve addresses without any commercial bus alternatives, thereby favouring those communities, including young people, most at risk of isolation.

In addition, in light of feedback from the public, we are recommending that the Cabinet update the methodology used for ranking services under option 2 so that deprived communities (where access to a car is likely to be low) are protected.

We have recently launched a community sector 'Wheels-to-Work' pilot scheme, to provide young people with a means to travel independently to their employment, education or training. Initially the scheme will be run as a pilot in the Vale district in 2015/16, but if proven sustainable it could be extended to the rest of the County in the future.

Under all options we are recommending that cabinet allocate £500k of one-off, pump-prime funding for groups to bid for, in order to set-up community transport initiatives. The allocation of funding and the community transport advertising

campaign will target areas most in need, including the groups we have identified with protective characteristics.

#### Other protected characteristics

We have not identified any other groups with protected characteristics which would be disproportionately affected by these proposals.

#### **Dial-a-Ride**

##### Rural communities

While Dial-a-Ride is a countywide service, those users who live in rural areas are less likely to have a transport alternative if the service is ceased.

Specific mitigation:

We are recommending that the Cabinet allocate (from the efficiency reserve) £500k of one-off, pump-prime funding for groups to bid for, in order to set-up community transport initiatives which meet an identified transport need in their area.

##### Older people and people with disabilities

The service is used by older people and people with disabilities, who predominantly use it to go shopping.

Specific mitigation:

We've looked at those people currently using the service, and have found that 160 of 238 are able to walk and live within 400 metres of a bus stop. We also know that the majority of these people hold a concessionary bus pass that allows them free travel on Oxfordshire's buses during off-peak times.

Therefore, if the Cabinet chooses to retain some subsidised bus services and prioritise off-peak, this will help to mitigate the impact of ceasing to fund Dial a Ride.

Under all options we are recommending that cabinet allocate £500k of one-off, pump-prime funding for groups to bid for, in order to set-up community transport initiatives. The allocation of funding and the community transport advertising campaign will target areas most in need, including the groups we have identified with protective characteristics.

#### Other protected characteristics

We have not identified any other groups with protected characteristics which would be disproportionately affected by this proposal.

<b>Impact on Staff:</b>
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There are no redundancy implications associated with these proposals. This area of work will be assessed after the Cabinet's decision and as part of the Integrated Transport Hub review, which will take place in the New Year.

### **Impact on other Council services:**

None.

### **Impact on providers:**

#### **Bus companies**

If either option is pursued then bus companies will face a reduction or total withdrawal of the money they receive from the Council.

We are in conversation with Oxfordshire's bus operators about these proposals and will continue to keep them abreast of and actively engage them regarding any developments.

Operators have highlighted the fact that removing one subsidised bus route could have a negative knock-on effect on other connected nearby routes (either subsidised or commercial) by reducing the number of bus passengers, and therefore making them less viable to run.

It was also highlighted that that some distinct service numbers use the same bus and driver, forming a single timetable but have been 'scored' as distinct entities in our methodology.

While we recognise that there may be practical benefits to combining routes where they use the same bus and/or driver, this does not necessarily reflect transport need. Rather, it relates to an operational issue around the management of the bus network and configuration of timetables. This can be discussed with operators to attempt to minimise any negative knock-on impacts as much as possible.

We recognise this to be an area of concern for bus users, and will ensure that we properly assess the potential consequences of removing subsidised routes on the wider network, if Cabinet asks us to proceed with reducing subsidies. This will involve us having more detailed discussions with bus operators before any changes are implemented.

#### **Community transport providers**

If our proposals are approved then it's likely that there will be an increased pressure on the community transport sector to provide more journeys.

We are offering a package of support to help existing and new schemes with this potential increase in demand, and are recommending that the Cabinet allocate (from the efficiency reserve) £500k of one-off, pump-prime funding for groups to bid for, in order to set-up community transport initiatives which meet an identified transport need in their area.

**Action plan:**

<b>Action</b>	<b>By When</b>	<b>Person responsible</b>
Continued engagement with bus operators regarding impact of proposals and possible mitigations	On-going	Alexandra Bailey, Service Manager for Supported Transport , OCC
Continued engagement with community transport providers regarding impact of proposals and possible mitigations	On-going	Oxfordshire Rural Community Council and Josephine Elliott. Supported Transport Programme Manager, OCC
Engagement with users of subsidised bus services and Dial-a-Ride to understand impact of proposals and possible mitigations, through public meetings, focus groups and other outreach work	Completed – findings available in Annex C	Oxfordshire Rural Community Council
Assess consultation responses and consider whether any community groups with protected characteristics are disproportionately affected by the proposals	Completed – detailed in this SCIA	Oxfordshire Rural Community Council and Josephine Elliott. Supported Transport Programme Manager, OCC
Update SCIA throughout consultation process as and when relevant feedback is provided	Completed	Josephine Elliott, Supported Transport Programme Manager, OCC

**Monitoring and review:**

**Person responsible for assessment: Alexandra Bailey, Supported Transport Service Manager, OCC**

Version	Date	Notes (eg Initial draft, amended following consultation)
V1.0	June 2015	First draft
V2.0	October 2015	Final version - updated following closure of the consultation
V3.0	October 2015	Paper updated following legal input

Final Version	October 28 2015	Updated following further legal input
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