



Annex 3: Service and Community Impact Assessment (SCIA)

Directorate and Service Area:

Environment and Economy, Fleet / Integrated Transport Hub

What is being assessed: Termination of subsidised bus services and Dial a Ride service in Oxfordshire

Responsible owner / senior officer:

Sue Scane, Director for Environment and Economy

Date of assessment:

Initial assessment undertaken in October 2015, published for Cabinet in November 2015, following the public consultation

This updated assessment was undertaken in April 2016, following the Feb 2016 Full Council decision to terminate all subsidies and to provide an update on the activities being undertaken to mitigate impact.

Summary of judgement

The decision to withdraw bus subsidies and the Dial a Ride service will have an impact across Oxfordshire, but will particularly affect rural communities, young people, older people and people with disabilities.

We are working to mitigate this impact by:

- working with bus operators to try and keep as many subsidised bus services as possible running commercially
- delivering a marketing campaign to raise awareness and support the growth of community transport across Oxfordshire, and increase the number of volunteers.
- developing a pilot scheme to utilise downtime of Council fleet vehicles to provide a service for people without access to alternative transport

1. Detail of Assessment:

1.1 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

1.2 Context / Background:

On-going cuts in central government funding mean Oxfordshire County Council has to make significant savings to its budget.

In February 2015, the Council reduced the overall supported transport budget by a fifth (£6.3 million). We have already identified savings from running services in a more efficient and integrated way, being delivered through the Supported Transport Programme, but this alone will not achieve our savings target. We therefore have had to look at savings against the supported transport services which we are not required to provide by law – subsidised bus services and Dial a Ride.

On 26 May 2015, Cabinet approved the launch of a full public consultation on proposed changes to subsidised bus services and Dial a Ride. The consultation ran between 19th June and 15th September 2015.

On 10 November 2015, Cabinet met to consider public feedback to the subsidised bus service and Dial-a-Ride service proposals that we put forward in the consultation, and to make a decision about how to make the savings needed from these services

At this November meeting, Cabinet took the decision to withdraw all subsidies paid to run 118 subsidised bus routes in Oxfordshire, subject to ratification at the council's overall budget setting meeting in February 2016. It also made the decision to cease funding Dial a Ride from 31 March 2016.

Cabinet stated that if the County Council's funding position contained any scope for less deep savings, this surplus would, where possible, be used to continue a small number of subsidised bus services. The decision on which subsidies remained would be based on a need ranking, including prioritising off-peak services, rural and deprived areas.

Unfortunately, the Council's financial settlement from government was worse than predicted and therefore no surplus was available to protect the highest need routes. On 17 February 2016, Full Council ratified the Cabinet decision to terminate all subsidies. Later that month, termination notices were sent to all bus operators.

1.3 Proposals:

- 1) Terminate all bus subsidies on 20 July 2016 (this effects 118 routes)
- 2) Cease funding the Dial a Ride service from 31 March 2016
- 3) Explore options to mitigate the impact of these savings, by:
 - working with bus operators to try and keep as many subsidised bus services as possible running commercially
 - delivering a marketing campaign to raise awareness and support the growth of community transport across Oxfordshire, and increase the number of volunteers.
 - developing a pilot scheme to utilise downtime of Council fleet vehicles to provide a service for people without access to alternative transport

1.4 Evidence / Intelligence:

Dial a Ride

Evidence gathered at the time of the decision to cease funding Dial a Ride:

- 238 people across Oxfordshire use Dial-a-Ride as a regularly scheduled service.
- We 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.

Latest update:

Letters were sent to all Dial a Ride users (regular and non-regular) in November 2015, after the Cabinet decision was made to end the service. Reminder letters were also sent again in March 2016. As well as the letters, users were called to ensure they were aware and that they had received the letter (non-regular users called in February 2016 and regular users called in March 2016). All users were called at least twice.

The following information about alternative arrangements was gathered from phone calls to Dial a Ride users:

- We do not have information for 30% of users (either because they did not provide the information, we were unable to make contact, or they were deceased).
- Therefore, for the 70% of users who did provide this information:
 - 41% had made alternative travel arrangements
 - 37% had not made alternative arrangements
 - 22% did not need / use the service, or were not well enough to use it at present

Since some of these calls were made, the Banbury and District Dial a Ride service was set up, and Aspire (providing Dial a Ride in the City) is looking to expand and is already taking some additional bookings outside of this city boundary. Therefore, some of the people without alternative arrangements may now be booked on these or an alternative service.

Subsidised bus services

Evidence gathered at the time of the decision to terminate bus subsidies:

- In total, 2656 responses to the consultation questionnaire were received last year, 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**, published with November 2015 Cabinet papers.

- An evidence-based approach was also used to produce a prioritised list of routes according to need. This would have been used to decide which subsidies continued if there had been sufficient funding to make partial rather than full termination of subsidies. However, due to a worsened financial settlement from central government, a full termination was confirmed in February 2016. (Detail on this prioritisation methodology, which was also consulted on, can be accessed in **Annex A** and **Annex B**, published with November 2015 Cabinet papers).

Latest update:

- After serving notices to bus operators on the termination of subsidy, we have been working with many of these operators to try to keep as many routes running commercially. Some parish and town councils have also been in discussion with operators about supporting them to continue. The Council ran an event in January for Parish Transport Representatives to meet with key bus operators to discuss the future of specific routes, and kick off this engagement activity.
- As of 29 April 2016, a significant number of operators have confirmed they will be continuing some routes, in an amended form and/or with increased fares. However, there are still several operators yet to confirm their intentions for routes, and it should also be noted that these routes will only be sustainable in the long term if they are well utilised by the local public.
- We have been looking at the availability of S106 funding to support the continuation of routes, where these run through an area of growth and are eligible for S106 funds from developers. This only applies to a small handful of routes, but can support these routes to continue until they can become commercially viable through increased use.
- As part of our efforts to deliver cost effective Home to School routes for entitled children, we have identified a small number of opportunities to move children from private tendered school buses on to public school buses. This is only being done where it is appropriate to do so and provides best value. However, this additional income (from student season tickets purchased by the Council) can support some operators to continue running some routes commercially.
- The Council, in partnership with Community First Oxfordshire, delivered a marketing campaign to recruit volunteer drivers into the local community transport sector, in recognition of the potential increase in demand. Approximately 70 enquiries were received as a result of this Volunteer Driver campaign.

1.5 Alternatives considered / rejected:

Subsidised bus services

The 'do nothing' (maintain subsidies) option was considered, but in order to achieve the scale of the savings required we have to look at cuts to services we aren't required to provide by law.

Several options were explored for how to prioritise routes under the 'partial subsidy removal option'. When launching the consultation, we provided a table of results which showed how services would be prioritised if we adopted these different approaches. Details of these can be found in the November 2015 Cabinet papers.

As we stated at the time, we opted for prioritisation on the basis of need, prioritising off peak services, in rural and deprived areas. 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

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.

2. Impact Assessment:

These saving will inevitably have an impact on communities, particularly 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 which we think are potentially particularly at risk: rural communities, young people, older people and people with disabilities.

Overall mitigation

We are working to mitigate the impact of these savings by:

- working with bus operators to try and keep as many subsidised bus services as possible running commercially
- delivering a marketing campaign to raise awareness and support the growth of community transport across Oxfordshire, and increase the number of volunteers
- developing a pilot scheme to utilise downtime of Council fleet vehicles to provide a service for people without access to alternative transport

The first two points are covered in Section 1.4. Further detail about the third mitigation are detailed below, this is a new mitigation action proposed earlier this year and one of the reasons why this SCIA has been updated.

Fleet pilot scheme:

It is recognised that, even with all of the efforts described above to keep routes going, some residents will be left without a convenient local bus service. To reduce this impact, we are developing an exciting new pilot scheme which will utilise fleet downtime and offer journeys to anyone without suitable access to transport.

The pilot will provide a completely flexible and affordable service where anyone can request us to provide transport (individuals of all ages, groups, schools, Parish Councils, etc.). The service will offer the ability to book one-off journeys, repeat journeys, and regular scheduled routes (similar to public bus routes).

Further work is required to develop this pilot, as it is a completely new way of operating council owned vehicles. A launch date needs to be agreed, but it will be ahead of the termination of subsidies on 20 July 2016.

The intention is for the pilot service to be funded by users, covering our costs but on a not-for-profit basis under our current Section 19 operator permit. It is anticipated that individual customers will book and pay for blocks of miles, and groups and organisations setting up regular routes will be charged at a flat rate. Where appropriate, individual who have some flexibility over when they want to travel will be able to join their journeys with those of other customers to reduce the costs of travel; the more people that want to travel at the same time the cheaper the journey for everyone.

Recognising that the cost of journeys will reduce significantly if more people use it, we are encouraging local groups to coordinate bookings and share the costs.

Where certain rural parishes are particularly adversely affected by the termination of local routes, there is an opportunity to utilise this new service to meet the shared transport needs of residents. For example, the fleet vehicles could be booked for a regular weekly trip from a village to the nearby town and supermarket. A number of Parishes are in discussion with Fleet to fund and set up regular bus style routes for their communities.

To pump-prime this usage, we are proposing to offer certain parishes a number of 'free credits' to book the vehicle as a trial. The intention is that over the course of the trial, enough people will find this service useful and then, with a high level of usage, they will be able to afford the low cost of the journey.

In order to identify which parishes should be eligible for these 'free credits', we will re-run the analysis of need that was undertaken in the consultation on terminating subsidies last year. 'Need' in this case relates to how far people live from a commercial bus service. The value of 'credits' given will depend on the amount of parishes this is given to, as we only have a finite budget. This will be decided in June 2016.

2.1 Impact on Individuals and Communities:

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.

Mitigation:

- Use of the Fleet pilot scheme described above
- Community transport provision

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.

Mitigation:

- Use of the Fleet pilot scheme described above
- Community transport provision

Young people accessing employment or education

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, education or training opportunities.

Mitigation:

- Use of the Fleet pilot scheme described above
- Community transport provision
- 'Wheels to Work' scheme (funded by grant from Department for Transport)
- Note that entitled school children will still have transport arranged by the Council Council to get them to school

Other protected characteristics

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

2.2 Impact on Staff:

There are no redundancy implications directly associated with these proposals. There have already been savings made to the Supported Transport team.

2.3 Impact on other Council services:

Whilst there is no direct impact on other council services, there will be indirect impacts where service users of other Council services are affected, for example Adult Social Care and Children, Education & Families. Both of these teams are

represented in the overarching Supported Transport programme and therefore engaged in the proposals and implementation of these savings.

2.4 Impact on providers:

Bus companies

Bus companies will face a reduction or total withdrawal of the money they receive from the Council. We have been in conversation with Oxfordshire's bus operators about these proposals since the start of the consultation in June 2015. They have therefore had a long period of notice that these savings proposals were coming. The legal termination notices were served in February 2016, giving an end date of 20 July 2016 for all routes (5 months' legal notice of termination).

As explained in Section 1.4, we have been engaged in positive discussions with several bus operators who run routes which may be eligible for S106 or where we may be able to purchase season tickets for transporting entitled children to school.

At the time of writing, in April 2016, whilst several operators are yet to confirm their intentions, several operators have done so. Positively, there are a number of routes which are continuing as a result of the bus operators finding ways to continue a service commercially, often with an amended timetable, route or increased fares.

Community transport providers

The reduction in local bus services may result in increased demand within the community transport sector. We are offering a package of support to help existing and new schemes with this potential increase in demand. The Council continues to work with Community First Oxfordshire (previously ORCC) to support the establishment and growth of community transport organisations across the county, including start-up grants for local car schemes and we have delivered a successful campaign to increase the number of volunteer drivers.

3. Action plan:

Action	By When	Person responsible
Continued engagement with bus operators regarding impact of proposals and possible mitigations	On-going / 20 July 2016	Service Manager for Supported Transport, OCC
Continued engagement with community transport providers regarding impact of proposals and possible mitigations	On-going / 20 July 2016	Oxfordshire Rural Community Council and 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 of November Cabinet papers	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 SCIA for November Cabinet	Oxfordshire Rural Community Council and Supported Transport Programme Manager, OCC
Update SCIA throughout consultation process as and when relevant feedback is provided	Completed	Supported Transport Programme Manager, OCC

4. 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 (V4.0)	28 October 2015	Updated following further legal input
5.0	29 April 2016	Updated following Full Council (Feb 2016) ratification of decision to withdraw all subsidies and reflecting progress of termination and mitigation activities.
5.1	04 May 2016	Updated with legal input Appended to Cabinet Report on agenda for 24 May 2016