

CABINET – 10 NOVEMBER 2015

PUBLIC CONSULTATION REPORT – SUPPORTED TRANSPORT (SUBSIDISED BUSES AND DIAL-A-RIDE)

Comments from the Performance & Scrutiny Committee

Background

At its meeting on 5 November the Performance & Scrutiny Committee considered the feedback from the public consultation and the report to Cabinet on 10 November in order for the committee to give their views on the proposals to be considered by Cabinet.

The Committee AGREED: that the following views be passed to Cabinet for consideration and Cabinet be RECOMMENDED to support proceeding with reducing bus subsidies by £2.3m rather than £3.7m and to support updating the methodology to include additional criteria for the rurally isolated and deprived areas.

Focus of discussion at Committee

- Further consideration was needed on the dial-a –ride proposals on a number of grounds:
 - Concerns over the level of consultation and engagement with users and in particular whether the focus groups referred to in the report had been held;
 - Questions over whether the impact assessment and mitigation were sufficiently robust with concrete measures in place. Reference was made to the powerful assessment that users were within 400 yards of a bus stop and most could walk. It was noted that this was a self-assessment provided by users and was not provided in relation to this piece of work and therefore it was possible that its use could be challenged.
 - The Aspire pilot was seen as an aspirational alternative rather than a concrete proposal to mitigate the impact. More work was needed to ensure it was extendable to rural areas.
 - Access for the frail elderly to do their own shopping was of value to their overall well-being and could impact on costs to the local authority if they become isolated. Any proposals should actively involve adult social care
- The Committee noted from their own experience talking to users and with regard to comments from ORCC that people may be willing to pay more and asked that this be considered. In particular bus operators should be urged to consider fare increases prior to cutting currently subsidised routes altogether.
- The Committee heard that it was not possible to legally require payment for concessionary passes and asked that Cabinet be urged to pursue this with Government and in the meantime the Committee supported measures to encourage voluntary payments for concessionary passes or individual journeys.
- There was some discussion of the methodology and concern that the complexity of how some services were provided (with one bus doing a number of different routes) could make a service as a whole unviable if part was withdrawn. Some Members felt that there was no possible way to choose which subsidies to remove. The Committee emphasised the need to treat people fairly and that decisions be based on detailed information.
- The Committee considered how services might work in future and noted the opportunities to engage with operators to find new more integrated models of provision. There was some optimism that some services would remain even where the subsidy was lost. There was strong support for future market testing.

