

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING	Planning, Transport & Environment Policy Development & Scrutiny Panel
MEETING DATE:	14 January 2014
TITLE:	Cross boundary bus services (Wiltshire/Somerset)
WARD:	All
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM	
List of attachments to this report: Appendix 1 – Summary of cross-boundary bus services to and from Wiltshire and Somerset	

1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 The Panel has asked for a Report on cross-boundary bus services to and from Wiltshire and Somerset.

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That the Panel note this Report.

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 3.1 In 2013/4, the Council is contributing £47,511 towards non-commercial bus services that operate across the boundary into Wiltshire, including £44,704 towards contracts held by Wiltshire Council. Following the award of new contracts by Wiltshire Council in July 2013, the annualised values are now £50,073 and £47,265 respectively.
- 3.2 In 2013/4, the Council is contributing £39,174 towards non-commercial bus services that operate across the boundary into Somerset.
- 3.3 There are no resource implications arising from this Report.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

- 4.1 The Sustainable Community Strategy contains the ambition “to lead Bath & North East Somerset to an environmentally sustainable, low carbon and climate-resilient future.” The provision of a good network of public transport services is a key part of that ambition.

5 THE REPORT

- 5.1 The current network of bus services that run across the boundary of Bath & North East Somerset into Wiltshire and Somerset is summarised in Appendix 1.
- 5.2 Bus services developed during the first half of the twentieth century as commercial ventures to meet the needs of an increasingly mobile population. In the area that is now Bath & North East Somerset, a network evolved that linked most communities with nearby towns and cities, regardless of local authority boundaries.
- 5.3 There are long-established bus services linking Bath with towns and cities in Wiltshire (such as Salisbury, Melksham, Chippenham and Trowbridge) and Somerset (such as Wells and Frome). These principal services operate on a commercial basis at most times. Three inter-urban corridors are sufficiently viable to sustain competition between rival bus companies.
- 5.4 Some of the principal cross-boundary bus services are not commercially viable during the evenings or on Sundays and Public Holidays. Also, there are many bus services – particularly in rural areas – that are not viable as commercial operations. Local authorities can procure services through a competitive tender process to fill any such gaps in the commercial network.
- 5.5 The apportionment of costs for revenue support of contracted bus services that cross local authority boundaries can be made by means of:
- (i) the proportion of the route mileage in each area,
 - (ii) the proportion of passengers using the service that are resident in each area,
 - (iii) an assessment of the economic benefit of the service to each area or
 - (iv) a combination of these factors.
- 5.6 In recent years, pressures on spending have caused Wiltshire Council and Somerset County Council to reduce their revenue support for local bus services, including some that run into Bath & North East Somerset. Each cross-boundary service at risk has been considered by this Council on its merits and retained if it provides a demonstrable benefit to our residents or to the economic well-being of the area – provided that it offers good value for money and that funding is available within the budget.
- 5.7 At the same time, the growth in economic activity on Sundays has meant that a number of bus services that formerly needed revenue support on Sundays are now viable as commercial operations, including cross-boundary services such as

267 Bath – Frome (since April 2009), 173 Bath – Wells and 376 Bristol – Wells (since April 2011), and 264 Bath – Trowbridge (since July 2013).

- 5.8 Somerset County Council proposes to make further reductions in revenue support for bus services in 2014 and the implications of these will be considered when bus operators have had an opportunity to assess whether they will continue any services without revenue support.

6 RATIONALE

- 6.1 In considering the implications of reductions by neighbouring councils in revenue support for non-commercial cross-boundary bus services and in making recommendations to the Cabinet for the award of new contracts for such services, officers and the Cabinet Member for Transport consider the needs of the residents of Bath & North East Somerset and the local economy.
- 6.2 Bath & North East Somerset Council has been able to broadly maintain its network of bus services whilst bringing down the cost to taxpayers by means of regular review of contracts, constructive dialogue with bus operators, encouragement of competition and support for community transport initiatives.

7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 None

8 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 The Finance Officer was consulted electronically and given the opportunity to comment on this Report.
- 8.2 No other consultation has been carried out in the preparation of this report apart from telephone conversations with officers of Wiltshire Council and Somerset County Council.
- 8.3 Routine consultation with officers of Wiltshire Council and Somerset County Council on cross-boundary bus services takes place as and when necessary.
- 8.4 Surveys of service users are carried out on supported bus services as part of the process of contract review.
- 8.5 Consultation with parish and town councils, bus user groups, bus operators and other stakeholders takes place as part of the process of contract review.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT

9.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

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Background papers	None
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