

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING/ DECISION MAKER:	Cllr Warren and Cllr Samuel	
MEETING/ DECISION DATE:	17 th March 2023	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 3456
TITLE:	2 month extension of supported bus service 672	
WARD:	Chew Valley and Mendip	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM AN URGENT ITEM (ACCESS TO INFORMATION PROCEDURE RULE 3.5.16)		
List of attachments to this report: Please list all the appendices here, clearly indicating any which are exempt and the reasons for exemption		

1 THE ISSUE

1.1 This report sets out the case for a further 2 month extension to the supported bus service 672.

2 RECOMMENDATION

The Cabinet Member for Climate and Sustainable Travel is asked to;

Release up to £70,000 from the Council's earmarked public transport reserves to enable a 2 month extension to the 672 supported bus service until 30 July 2023.

3 THE REPORT

3.1 The West of England Combined Authority (WoECA) is responsible for contracting non-commercial or supported bus services within the sub region considered to be socially necessary. These services are funded from the Transport Levy which is the pooled resources of the three UAs. The B&NES levy contribution is £1.03m.

3.2 Costs for the current network of supported bus services significantly exceed the available budget, therefore work has been undertaken to establish how best to

prioritise the services, taking into account the wider BSIP investment (specifically the Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) and Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) routes).

- 3.3 The West of England Combined Authority Committee decided on 18 January 2023 to continue to support existing bus services within the city of Bath and for five services (82, 179, 768, 172, 672) in North East Somerset to continue as conventional scheduled bus services for an additional two months (April-May 2023) as transitional protection while a new WestLink demand responsive transport service is introduced.
- 3.4 Following this decision a number of representations have been made by residents and communities across B&NES seeking additional support for services which had been scheduled for withdrawal. These have been carefully considered.
- 3.5 The unique geography and size of the Chew Valley, and the distinct rural population combined with limited local services, necessitates this additional help. The 672 bus runs two return journeys each day on a circular route to and from Broadmead and Bedminster in Bristol out to the villages of the Chew Valley, including Dundry, Chew Magna, Stanton Drew, West Harptree and to Blagdon, Redhill and Bristol Airport. For many of the villages along its route, the 672 is the only public transport option, for residents accessing employment, education, shopping and health appointments.
- 3.6 There are no other commercial, supported or BSIP funded bus services which serve the Chew Valley.
- 3.7 Whilst the 672 service has not recovered to pre-Covid patronage levels, it is estimated by the WECA that there will be over 7,500 journeys made in 2022-2023.
- 3.8 A number of representations have been to B&NES through the Chew Valley Area Forum Climate and Nature Emergency Working Group, including most recently at Cabinet on the 9th March, where the views and needs of reliant users of the 672 were set out.
- 3.9 These representations have been shared with WECA, alongside repeated requests from Cllr Warren to the WoECA Mayor, as the leader of the Local Transport Authority, requesting funding for an extension of the 672, or the delivery of additional spinal services within the Chew Valley to support the DRT system.
- 3.10 Funding has not been released by the WECA to continue the 672, meaning that it will end on the 31st May 2023, when the funding already committed by B&NES to extend the 672 service runs out.
- 3.11 For these reasons, it is considered that the presence of a supported service for an additional two months within the Chew Valley is of vital importance and will help better support the establishment and efficiency of the DRT system throughout its bedding-in phase. Extending the contract for the 672 until the end of July 2023 will provide a longer period for residents to transition to a new DRT service and protect many critical journeys to education services until the end of the school term.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS

4.1 A decision is needed urgently under rule 3.5.16 of the Access to Information Procedure rules on the 672 for the following reasons:

- A Decision is required before the pre-election period. Delaying until after the pre-election period would leave insufficient time for the decision to be made, and notice given to the current operator to ensure that they will be able to continue the service after the current extension expires on the 31 May 2023. Communities need the reassurance that the 672 will be preserved while the DRT system beds in, giving them further time to transition to DRT. The DRT system will be introduced on 3 April 2023 and other supported services withdrawn on the 2nd April, with the exception of the services afforded a 2 month extension by B&NES.
- The pre-election period commences on the 20th March, limiting the ability of Members to make a decision
- The current price for the contract extension is affordable, delaying the decision could lead to a change in the price.

4.2 A decision taken under this rule cannot be called in.

5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

5.1 One-off funding has been identified from the Council's earmarked public transport reserve, and the use of the reserve has been approved by the Section 151 officer in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Resources and the Chief Executive.

6 RISK MANAGEMENT

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

7 EQUALITIES

7.1 An EIA was carried out by the WoECA for the purposes of the 18th January 2023 Committee Meeting. A separate EQIA has been developed for this report.

8 CLIMATE CHANGE

8.1 B&NES has declared a Climate Emergency, and made a commitment for net zero by 2030. Supporting our communities in using public transport rather than private vehicles is an essential element of achieving this commitment.

9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 Option 1: Do not fund further extensions

- Communities are concerned that the DRT system will not be fully operational by the 3rd April. It is recognised that the bus services provide a vital link for our communities and therefore support is required where there are limited or

no alternative public transport options to ensure continued access to key services including education, health facilities, and employment.

9.2 Option 2: Fund further transitional protection for all extended bus services

- The 82, 179, 768 and 172 routes all share elements of route which will be covered by the 522 BSIP service, which provides a 6 day a week, hourly service from April 2023. This service will support the DRT system.

10 CONSULTATION

10.1 Under the requirements of rule 3.5.16 the Chair of the Climate and Environment Scrutiny Panel has been consulted on and approved this decision and the requirement for urgency. The Scrutiny Panel chair welcomed that this demonstrates the Council is listening to communities and has acted in response to concerns raised.

10.2 This report has been cleared by the S151 Officer, Monitoring Officer and Chief Executive.

Contact person	<i>Pam Turton (Pam_Turton@bathnes.gov.uk)</i>
Background papers	<i>List here any background papers not included with this report, and where/how they are available for inspection.</i>
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	