

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **CABINET**

DATE: **TUESDAY, 18 SEPTEMBER 2012**

REPORT BY: **DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT**

SUBJECT: **DEMAND RESPONSIVE TRANSPORT SERVICES**
 UPDATE

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To update members on the proposal to re-tender the Demand Responsive Transport Services and to seek approval for the withdrawal of the Theatre Shuttle Bus Service to the Theatre Clwyd.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 On the 20 September, 2011 the Executive considered a report, which outlined proposals for the re-tendering of Flintshire's Demand Responsive Transport (DRT) bus services. The report was considered by the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on the 6th October, 2011 and 18th January, 2012 following 2 Call-in notices of the decision of the Executive.

The Call-ins focussed on the lack of consultation in respect of the proposed withdrawal of the Theatre Shuttle Service which provided access to culture and arts and the effects on public transport services providing access to employment opportunities and sites, particularly in Deeside.

2.02 At it's meeting on 18th January, 2012 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolved that:

(a) the Committee support the proposals within the report for Deeside Shuttle Services, subject to the verbal commitments given by the Director of Environment to be included in the future Executive report;

(b) the funding for the Theatre Shuttle Service be terminated but work continue to facilitate an alternative service; and

(c) funding is continued to provide transport for the FUSE Group.

2.03 Further work was identified and agreed by the Director of Environment that needed to be carried out in respect of the provision of Demand Responsive Bus Services within the County before a subsequent report was submitted to the Executive for it's consideration.

- 2.04 At the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Budget Scrutiny meeting on 18th January, the Director of Environment committed to a fundamental review of the Councils subsidised bus services to ensure best value was being obtained from them.
- 2.05 Also in early 2012, Welsh Government made 3 separate announcements that there would be major reductions in transport funding allocations to Local Authorities, Bus Operators and Community Transport Operators for 2012/13. They also stipulated that they were reviewing how transport funding would be allocated from 2013 onwards with a requirement that Local Authorities demonstrate better collaborative working across the regions in delivering transport services in the future.
- 2.06 The proposed cuts were 27% for the Local Transport Services Grant (LTSG) awarded to Local Authorities annually, 25% to Bus Operators through the Bus Services Operators Grant which is a fuel duty rebate and around £85k per annum to Community Transport operators in Flintshire.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.01 Welsh Government have recently announced that the cut to the LTSG allocation will be 10% from 1st October, 2012 to Local Authorities; this is the equivalent of 20% for a full year. However there are a number of working groups and consultation exercises still continuing on funding for Bus Operators and Community Transport funding as well as how funding from Welsh Government for Local Authority Transport Services will be allocated and managed from 2013 onwards.
- 3.02 Flintshire County Council officers are working with the 5 other local authorities in North Wales and the Taith Regional Transport Consortium on the development of an Outline Business Case to submit to Welsh Government on how transport services can be delivered more effectively across the region in the future.
- 3.03 The situation is further complicated by a number of factors including:
- a) The Deeside area served by the Demand Responsive Transport Bus Services has been awarded Enterprise Zone status and we subsequently received a major outline planning application for the Northern Gateway site which was approved with conditions. A further application for the southern part of the Northern Gateway site is expected shortly. This has major implications for the provision of sustainable transport in this area and in particular the provision of bus services to existing and future employment sites in Deeside.
 - b) Merseytravel and Cheshire West and Chester Council have now

received substantial funding through the Local Sustainable Transport Fund in England to develop services, in turn, will impact on cross boundary transport services to existing and potential employment sites in North Wales and Merseyside and Cheshire. Officers are working closely on how we can improve sustainable transport and better integrate our existing cross boundary bus services in particular.

c) Flintshire officers are working with Welsh Government on the potential for a new bus service to link Wrexham and Deeside which would include a number of major employment sites within Flintshire. This proposal would initially be funded by Welsh Government and the Council would manage the service on their behalf.

d) Our proposed changes to the Council's DRT bus services submitted to the Executive in September, 2011 incorporated additional funding from Cadwyn Clwyd to provide rural transport services linking in with services to Deeside. Due to the changes that have happened since the 18th January 2012 Environment Overview and Scrutiny meeting outlined above, it was not considered practicable or timely to progress this and Cadwyn Clwyd have decided to reallocate the funding offered to support transport services in rural areas in Flintshire to other projects. Cadwyn Clwyd have agreed that £50k will be retained for a revised proposal to be put forward for transport initiatives to serve the rural areas in Flintshire.

e) Staff shortages in the Transportation team have not helped the situation. The Transportation Manager position has now been filled with effect from October, 2012 which will enable significant progress to be made on the review of bus services in Flintshire described in 2.04.

3.04 Theatre Shuttle

3.04.1 The Theatre Shuttle Service was initially launched in 2002 to attract new theatre goers from the Communities First areas in Flintshire to increase the audience base at the Theatre Clwyd. After an initial period of 12 months the project did not proceed further due to lack of take up by local communities.

3.04.2 The Theatre Shuttle Service has continued to be funded by the Council and provides a demand responsive car/minibus service to users primarily on weekdays between 5.30pm and 11.00pm. It costs £2.50 for a single or return trip and costs the Council £22376 pa, to provide through a local transport operator in 2011/12 .

3.04.3 Users of the service include a group called FUSE who use the service during school terms on Monday evenings to attend sponsored drama groups and are young people with special educational needs. Their sponsorship runs out in April, 2013.

- 3.04.4 The other 2 groups who use the service are workers at the theatre and theatre goers.
- 3.04.5 The total number of trips recorded to the theatre from January to the end of November 2011 was 1578. Of these 514 were trips for the FUSE group, 528 were workers at the theatre and 536 were theatre goers. If all of the trips are return trips, this equates to the Council subsidising each individual, including workers, for an average of £29 per visit to the theatre after they paid their £2.50 fare. Some visits by theatre goers and workers cost considerably more than this.
- 3.04.6 A further meeting and discussions have been held with the operator of the service and they are prepared to continue to transport the members of the FUSE group to Theatre Clwyd on Monday evenings as they have built up good relationships with the young people and their parents over a long period of time. They are best placed to understand the needs of the users of this service.

3.05 **CONCLUSIONS**

- 3.05.1 There are many factors which need to be considered further on how we develop and deliver all of our transport services in the future in Flintshire and across North Wales. It is clear that there is the potential for these to result in a major impact on local bus services, due to how funding is allocated and managed from Welsh Government.
- 3.05.2 It is not considered appropriate or cost effective at this time to make changes to the Deeside DRT bus services which continue to work well and serve our most populated areas near to existing and potential employment areas.
- 3.05.3 The Theatre Shuttle Service is not cost effective and is significantly subsidised by the Council.
- 3.05.4 Alternative ways to support the FUSE group have been pursued and it is considered that for continuity purposes the existing transport provider of the service should continue to transport members of the FUSE group to Theatre Clwyd, at the same £2.50 fare currently charged per person. This equates to a subsidy of around £10 per person per visit, which is significantly less than the £29 subsidy outlined in 3.04.5.

4.00 **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 4.01 That a further report on the development and delivery of transport services in Flintshire and North Wales is considered at a future Cabinet meeting.

- 4.02 That the Theatre Shuttle Service is terminated, but funding is continued to provide transport for the FUSE group.
- 4.03 That alternative ways of providing transport services to Theatre Clwyd are considered as part of the review of transport services in Flintshire, outlined in 2.04.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.01 The withdrawal of service provision, as set out in the report, creates an £18,000 efficiency, however, and as noted in para 2.04 the Council is also proposing to undertake a detailed service review of all of its subsidised bus services and this efficiency will assist in supporting this further review

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

- 6.01 The Deeside Demand Responsive Transport bus service is generally used by low income earners without access to a car who may struggle to find access to employment opportunities.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

- 7.01 The Demand Responsive Transport Services provide the potential to reduce travel further by private car and reduce carbon emissions.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 8.01 None

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.01 None

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

- 10.01 None

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

- 11.01 Liaison with J&D Autos
Liaison with Theatre Clwyd representatives
Consultations with transport operators who provide Demand Responsive Transport services in Flintshire
FUSE Group and theatre goers

12.00 APPENDICES

- 12.01 None

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985
BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

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