



Scrutiny Committee 6 September 2017

Final Report of the Review of Public Transport Services

Purpose of report

To present the final report and outcomes from the Scrutiny Panel review of Public Transport Services

1.0 Background

1.1 This Committee decided to review the provision of Public Transport in the district as part of its 2015/16 work programme. Cllrs Helen Howell Janet Pinnock and Geoff Shacklock were appointed to carry out the review. The panel held its first meeting in August 2015.

1.2 The Terms of Reference for the review were agreed by the Committee on 9 September 2015 as follows

- i. To establish the commercial and voluntary public transport services provided in the district and connections to public transport in adjoining areas.*
- ii) To evaluate public transport services in the district and identify any gaps in the services provided in relation to:-*
 - a) Access to medical facilities*
 - b) Access to leisure facilities (including Rushden Lakes and Stanwick Lakes)*
 - c) Access to locations providing employment opportunities for younger people.*
- iii) To make recommendations to the Scrutiny Committee on measures that East Northamptonshire Council could take to improve or promote public transport access to the above facilities/locations.*

1.3 The Review Panel met a further five times. An interim report was presented to Committee in June 2016 and a further update in November 2016.

2.0 Review Activity

2.1 Background Research.

2.1.1 To inform the three initial focus areas of public transport activity in the district: outlined below (see 2.2 -2.4) , the Panel members also reviewed the following information:

- Report from ENC Scrutiny Review of Community Transport 2007 – which established need for current grant scheme
- Northamptonshire County Council's Bus Services Scrutiny Review 2014.
- ENC Transport Study 2015 – mapped current travel patterns etc.

- Information on current scheduled bus service provision across the district (the position in respect of this changed during the course of the review due to budget reductions for subsidised services (see section 2.2.3).
- Presentation to Scrutiny Committee June 2016 by Serve/Voluntary Action Oundle which outlined the services they provided to residents of the District, with case studies to illustrate their work.

2.1.2 The Panel also invited Town and Parish Councils to submit representations on public transport services in their area. The one representation received was considered by the group. The Panel also organised a survey of major employers and further education providers to establish their staff and student transport. (See section 2.2.6).

2.2. Public (Scheduled) Bus Services.

2.2.1 The review of existing bus routes in the District identified a number of areas where there were gaps in the services where buses did not run at particular times of the day/week or did not connect to particular locations. The 2014 Northamptonshire County Council's Bus Services Scrutiny Review had received evidence from the Principal Bus and Train Development Officer, Northamptonshire Highways, who was invited to meet the Panel Members.

2.2.2 The discussion was wide-ranging and covered, amongst other issues:

- scheduled and on-demand services operating in the District;
- the concessionary fares scheme where it was noted that NCC pays 39p in the pound (of usual fares) to bus operators for concessionary fares on scheduled services only
- improvements to bus services currently being developed to provide access to employment and leisure sites, principally using S.106 Agreement contributions. It was estimated that provision of an additional bus on a scheduled route would involve a subsidy of approximately £100k a year and it generally takes 18-24 months for a service to become established.
- additional data relating to concessionary fare passes and Call-Connect usage in the District. It was reported that there were 12,149 elderly and 657 disabled concessionary bus passes in use by East Northants residents. There are 1,375 registered members for Call Connect from East Northants with an average of 59 passenger journeys per day on Call Connect which start and/or finish in East Northants.
- changes in the County Council's budget for subsidised bus services where there had been a reduction in the bus subsidies budget from £3.2m in 2010/11 to £1.35m in 15/16 and there was a proposal for a further reduction in budget for 2016/17 of £200,000.
- deletion of Service 125 (Hargrave – Wellingborough via Chelveston, Caldecott, Newton Bromswold, Rushden and Higham Ferrers), which had the highest level of support per passenger carried at around £19 per journey, from 25/6/16.

2.2.3 It was noted that that issues were arising in the Oundle/Kings Cliffe area where the Call Connect service operates between 7am-7pm 6 days per week because there was only one bus available at any time. This means that at peak times it was often unable to cope with demand for access to employment/training demands and thus people have to find other solutions. However it was able to meet some access to social/leisure activities although it does not operate in the evening or weekends. It was estimated that an additional vehicle for Call Connect would need a subsidy of approximately £75k a year for a 16 seat vehicle.

- 2.2.4 Members recommended that Call Connect be promoted to relevant local residents by the Council's Communications Team. This was and is being done at regular intervals.
- 2.2.5 It was also reported during the meeting that the County Council were currently looking at the possibility of using buses provided by further and higher education colleges to assist with transport to employment. In addition it was thought a number of employers may provide buses which could be pooled/used for other people to access employment opportunities.
- 2.2.6 Following this lead, Members then undertook a survey of larger employers and senior schools/colleges in the district to establish:
- whether they were experiencing recruitment difficulties due to travel issues
 - whether there would be any interest in a car sharing scheme
 - opportunities to better utilise any buses or vehicles they operated for other users.
- Despite extending the deadline and also highlighting the survey to Town and Parish Councils the level of responses was disappointing, with only 4 responses being received from local businesses and one from a school.
- 2.2.7 None of the businesses who responded provided any travel assistance to staff, with car sharing known only to be taking place at one of them. Two businesses identified problems with recruitment relating to transport difficulties. These were related to the problems of shifts starting or finishing before or after the majority of public transport provision. Shift patterns and young people without access to their own cars were also cited as possible barriers to car-sharing schemes. No business was positive about company car sharing schemes but all would be willing to advertise such a scheme to staff if the council were to promote one. The single education provider noted that 30% of the students travel from outside their catchment area and they had to organise and heavily subsidised transport for those students.
- 2.2.8 Members were then made aware that the University of Northampton was working with Northamptonshire County Council to try to improve bus transport in the area by better co-ordination through a social enterprise, including both the public and community transport including hospital patients, the elderly and people with disabilities. The government pledged £750,000 in funding towards this 'Total Transport' initiative.
- 2.2.9 Although Members indicated to NCC their willingness to assist with the project and delayed the publication of their final report to accommodate the outcome, this offer to assist has not been taken up, despite an earlier indication that there would be opportunities for Districts to be involved in the Autumn of 2016. It was suggested that the use of S106 monies was an area where Districts might have particular experience. The latter approach is how another group of ENC councillors, with appropriate BCC officers, have shaped the provision of scheduled bus-services between Raunds and Rushden Lakes to widen access to employment at both locations.
- 2.2.10 The report to NCC cabinet in November 2016 showed that the county primarily were looking to explore "the development of a social enterprise model for a new organisation to provide county-wide data gathering and analysis and to use the information (on an almost live proactive basis) to procure transport on-demand in a collaborative, intelligent and integrated manner." The plan was for the social enterprise to be formed by 31/3/7 to fit in with the end of the government funding for Total Transport. A range of possible founding partners was noted, and although the

project did engage with a wider range of organisations, these did not include District Councils. No further contact has been made with this council in relation to the project. From analysis of a further report to NCC Cabinet in March 2017 it became clear that the Total Transport project would not overlap with the objectives of this review and would be focused on meeting the needs of NCC and University of Northamptonshire to realise substantial savings on operational transport budgets which could be partially reinvested in the provision of transport.

2.2.11 In the interim NCC had been involved in a different car-sharing approach driven by the reduced car-parking available at their new offices. (See 2.4.6)

2.3 Community Transport Schemes.

2.3.1 In addition to the general presentation to Scrutiny Committee noted in 2.1.1, separate meetings were also arranged between representatives of “Serve” and Volunteer Action (Oundle) and members of the review panel. They also met with Mike Greenway (Community Partnerships Manager) who provided an outline of the Community Support Grant made by ENC made to these two organisations on a three year service level agreement basis to provide community transport services across the district.

2.3.2 The primary role of these services is the provision of transport for patients to medical facilities. These journeys could be lengthy, to Hospitals in Leicester, Cambridge and Oxford for example, or could be to relatively local facilities. The service delivery varied between the two partners, with VA (Oundle) primarily using cars whilst Serve did use some small minibuses. “Serve” was only available to elderly residents. It was also acknowledged that for patients with more serious illnesses, use of voluntary car transport was preferable to using a bus service. Patients pay to access these services but these trips are not eligible for concessionary travel pass use.

2.3.3 It was concluded by the Panel during the review that access to medical facilities is currently appropriately covered by the voluntary transport services operating in the District with ENC grant-aid. In addition they are able to provide some limited facilities for access to other social based activities. However it was noted funding levels for this grant had not been increased for six years.

2.3.4 In addition it was clear that the demand for these services is likely to rise significantly because of:

- growing numbers of older people
- proposals for 7 day NHS hospital service delivery;
- increasing recognition of the contribution that social isolation can make to ill-health
- potential impact of any further reductions to the county council budget for subsidised bus services.

Also petrol prices have increased over the past six years and were even more likely to do so in the next three years and whilst some driver related costs were recovered from users, an increasing amount was likely to fall on the provider. It was therefore agreed to recommend to the Policy and Resources Committee that the budget for Community Transport grant be increased by £5,000 in 2017/18 with a further review for 2019/20 to see if demand had increased significantly. This was accepted by the committee in December 2016.

2.3.5 It was also recommended that the Council’s Communications team could assist with a marketing campaign to recruit additional voluntary drivers. An offer was made to

the two organisations but no further information was forthcoming.

2.3.6 Finally consideration was given to whether Serve could move to the WelliBus model (which operates in Wellingborough). This would mean moving from a service registered under Section 19 of the Transport Act 1985 to a service registered under Section 22 of the Act. This would entail keeping the organisation as a non-profit making body, but providing a service to members of the public rather than on a membership only basis as required under a Section 19 registration. This would open the service to the concessionary fares scheme and perhaps offer more ability to improve access to social/leisure activities in the area not served by Call Connect.

2.4 Gaps in service provision from the above

2.4.1 From the activities noted above, Members identified potential gaps in relation to access to employment sites for those without cars, particularly those where young people are likely to work and access to medical facilities and social activities for older people, particularly in rural areas. The Group discussed the potential for promoting car sharing schemes to improve access to employment locations as a possible solution. This type of arrangement could particularly suitable for smartphone Apps, with examples being noted from elsewhere in the country although usually for longer trips.

2.4.2 Members reviewed existing smartphone Apps which were available to facilitate car sharing and had presentations from two companies. The first was Liftshare which is a social enterprise company which provides both a car-sharing app and wider sustainable transport solutions through working with bus operators and offering personalised travel plans which include walking and cycling routes. Liftshare generally works with larger employers but they also run area wide schemes (such as that covering the whole of Devon) through its liftshare.com website. These public car scheme are free to use with the Liftshare only charging for use of the online payment facilities). Members in private/company based scheme can choose to open their journeys to an area based scheme.

2.4.3 The Liftshare website calculates estimated cost contribution for users for fuel and wear and tear. This is set at a level that complies with requirements for tax and insurance purposes and avoids the need for taxi licences etc. It also provides an estimate of annual savings for regular sharing. Each Liftshare user is given a rating by users which encourages good reliability.

2.4.4 It was noted that for an area wide scheme the cost of design and build of the system would be a one-off £3,000 together with an annual licence (costing £3,500) for two years. If the council can attract large employers into the scheme the costs reduce by £500 by every single introduction (for as long as those companies remain in the scheme). Liftshare also guarantee that in year 3 costs won't go up by more than 5%. The council would need to provide a local champion – usually part of job for a couple of hours a week to do mostly reporting tasks.

2.4.5 Members were very impressed with the potential of the offer and felt they would like to include a recommendation to try a local based scheme. It was proposed that consideration of a North Northants based scheme might give access to the widest employee/college travel network.

2.4.6 As noted above, after looking at the Liftshare offer, Members were made aware that NCC were working with a different app provider to resolve the specific parking issues arising from moving to their new HQ building which has limited parking spaces. NCC

is working with Faxi whose approach has more of a focus on sharing within one workforce rather than the general public (although that is an option).

- 2.4.7 Faxi takes its name from Friends as a Taxi is a relatively new company focusing on transport solutions for corporate organisations who have either on site parking issues or traffic volume management problems at arrival/departure times. Faxi is also app based but needs a mobile phone to access to use ride-share /reserved parking. The app offers a similar ride share facility to Lifeshare but with payments made using a digital wallet (via Pay Pal which is added to user bill) for ride costs (currently at 10p per mile with £1 minimum but this may have to increase to 20per mile to increase incentive. Faxi note that the larger the user catchment the more likely that you will be able to get ride sharing options and that over time regular car-sharers tend to generally regular pairing work out their own arrangements and not use Faxi unless they need to access limited car-parking spaces.
- 2.4.8 The Faxi solution also enables companies to monitor car-sharing and allocate specific car-spaces on that basis. This aspect is what appeals to NCC who use it to control the limited spaces available and who have linked it to other car-park facilities in the town. It is also used by Peterborough City Hospital for similar reasons. Faxi have also been asked to administer the new park-and-ride at Northampton Saints rugby club where the Faxi app has been upgraded to extend its functionality to include auto payment, access and the provision of a digital bus ticket.
- 2.4.9 There will be a separate Faxi enterprise scheme being set up for Northampton University which will be open to the public. Faxi makes no charge to community groups for the software but the groups have to do their own their administration of the scheme and vetting. Faxi can also offer an option to vet for MoT/age of cars. 800 such community groups have been established but Faxi advise that you really need of about 500 people going to any one location which will tend to generate 60% ride-share opportunities to be successful It was felt that this was unlikely to fit the East Northamptonshire area.
- 2.4.10 Having reviewed the functionality of both apps/approaches, Members concluded that an app based car-sharing scheme was likely to offer significant additional access to employment and other activities for local residents, particularly young people. Therefore they recommend that a Liftshare type scheme should be promoted for the East Northamptonshire (or North Northamptonshire) given that it appeared unlikely that the county project would impact on this area.

3.0 Summary of Recommendations still to be implemented

- 3.1
- i) Officers write to the County Council to request that ENC be given prior notice should any proposed reduction to the bus subsidies budget impact on East Northamptonshire, including the subsidies provided to CallConnect, in order that representations can be made if necessary.
 - ii) The Communications Team should continue to promote the CallConnect service at regular intervals
 - iii) Officers should contact Volunteer Action (Oundle) and Serve to establish if any further recruitment drives for volunteer drivers were planned and what assistance the Communications Team could offer to promote these.
 - iv) The Community Partnerships team explores the possible options and partners for the implementation of a car-sharing app to cover the East

Northamptonshire area, including a procurement brief and potential resource implications, to improve sustainable access to employment and education sites. This work to be presented the Policy and Resources Committee in 2018.

4.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

4.1 Improvements to public and community transport services in the area will have a positive impact on many groups of people who do not have access to private cars.

5.0 Legal Implications

5.1 There are no known legal implications arising from in this review report. As individual recommendations are implemented further reports will be required which will include assessment of legal implications of the actions proposed.

6.0 Risk Management

6.1 Failure to enable effective non-car access to employment or social activities will impact on the well-being of a wide range of residents. This risk is likely to increase as public transport budgets reduce and the number of very old people increases. The solutions recommended in this report could help reduce this risk.

7.0 Resource and Financial Implications

7.1 There is no resource or financial implications arising from the proposals. As individual recommendations are accepted and implemented further reports will be required which will include assessment of resource and financial implications of the actions proposed.

8.0 Constitutional Implications

8.1 This report has no direct constitutional implications.

9.0 Customer Service Implications

9.1 Regular promotion of community transport options and the Call Connect service will assist residents without access to private cars. The car-sharing app could also increase the financial well-being of residents by increasing access to employment opportunities and reducing commuting costs.

10.0 Corporate Outcomes

10.1 The recommendations in this report support the corporate outcomes Good Quality of Life – Sustainable by proposing improvements that could increase the options available to those who do not have access to a private car for journeys.

11.0 Recommendation

11.1 The Committee is recommended to support the recommendations of the Review Panel summarised in paragraph 3.1.

[Reason: to implement cost-effective improvements to the provision of public and community transport across the District]

Legal	Power: Localism Act 2011				
	Other considerations:				
Background Papers:					
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