

STRATEGIC COMMISSIONING: GETTING MORE OUT OF OUR SPENDING

Proposal 5: Stockport Local Transport Update

**Lead Portfolio: Adults Social Care; Children's Services; Education;
Communities and Housing; Economy and Regeneration**

1.0 Summary of report

- 1.1 In the November Scrutiny cycle members were provided with an update of the proposals for reviewing our key transport services across Stockport. At these meetings details of the proposed consultations were presented.
- 1.2 This report provides a summary of the proposals and the recent determinations of Cabinet members. The accompanying appendixes provide details of the consultation methodology adopted and responses received to date to the consultation. The consultation for the Metroshuttle will remain open until 18th January 2019, and for the Free School bus passes until the 25th January 2019 and final results will be provided to Cabinet in February 2019.
- 1.3 Members of the Scrutiny Committees were also informed of the second phase of the review which involved a more detailed review of specialist travel arrangements we currently have for SEND children and young people, and for some of our older residents. This paper highlights the work we have developed to date and our future intentions.

2.0 Proposal Update

- 2.1 Members are reminded that the individual proposals were as follows
 - a) To cease funding for the free Stockport Metroshuttle service after the current contract ends on 27th April 2019.

There are no changes to the proposal to remove the free Stockport Metroshuttle service.
 - b) To change the entitlement criteria for Free School Transport to statutory levels i.e. low income defined as:
 - i. Pupils who qualify for free school meals,
 - ii. Pupils whose parents/guardians are in receipt of their maximum level of Working Tax Credit.

Cabinet members have given further consideration to this proposal especially in the light of the uncertainty of the impact of the introduction of Universal Credit. They have also reviewed the responses that have been provided to date in the consultation. Cabinet members have decided that the proposal relating to changing the eligibility criteria for Working Tax Credit should be postponed at this time, but a further review and consideration will take place once the Universal Credit roll out in Stockport has been completed.

- 2.2 To remove the faith element of free school travel eligibility. This will involve omitting catchment and associated Catholic school areas in the Free School Transport Policy in favour of: *The nearest School to the pupil's home address with places available*. And omitting the criteria regarding provision of funding or assistance to pupils wanting to attend faith institutions outside of the Borough, where there isn't provision within the Borough boundaries.

Cabinet members wish to continue to proceed with the Faith Schools proposal. However after hearing the concerns of the parents and in light of other responses to the consultation, have agreed to phase the introduction of this proposal in order to mitigate the impact on parents and families who have already made choices regarding their child's school. Officers will now develop a proposal from a phased introduction which will be published as part of the future admissions processes.

- 2.3 **Phase two** of this review focusses on local travel provision in Stockport. A range of travel services are commissioned by the Council and Partner agencies to help people access services, school, or their local area. We intend to undertake a piece of work to consolidate these approaches and develop a Stockport Local Specialist Travel Plan

The major part of the review will continue to identify efficiencies in the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities transport budget supporting 19 – 25 year olds. We will complete the review ensuring that we are fully compliant with SEND legislation and all statutory requirements. We are aware that the SEND population is likely to increase at a higher rate than the general population, and a likely effect is more pupils requiring specialist provision and hence eligible for transport too. This exacerbates the need to ensure that we are securing value for money in all our procurement activities.

- 2.4 Specialist transport commissioning expertise will be sourced for a period of 6 months to review all the transport provision provided by the Council. This will include reviewing all other transport programmes, suppliers and contracts in order to secure efficiencies through improved commissioning, procurement and contract management. The current commissioning arrangements are complex and indicate an expenditure of £3 million with over 133 providers.

The range of transport services in scope of this review include:

Home to educational settings (excluding nurseries) travel for children and young people aged 0-25 with special educational needs or disabilities. This is provided through free bus passes for local bus services, coaches, minibuses, taxis, private hire cars and personal budgets. It also includes the provision of passenger assistants where required and independent travel training. We currently transport 548 pupils on 130 different routes and we have another 49 who are in receipt of a personal budget. Demand levels are expected to increase.

Any transport proposal needs to be seen in the context of Transport for Greater Manchester and their activities in this area. This may result in current service provision changing, a review of eligibility and a determination of more efficient travel routes which take into account individual children's needs. The review needs to ensure that the money available to subsidise transport best serves those with the greatest needs and that our transport system as a whole meets strategic priorities across the Stockport Partnership.

The key aim of this work is to identify a new approach that meets the needs of the wider Stockport Partnership, schools and colleges, health and social care providers, respite providers and residents in general and achieves savings in operational costs of at least £0.300m by April 2020.

A report on the options and stakeholder presentations/workshops are the expected outputs of this phase of work. It is anticipated that up to 3-4 options may be generated as the plan develops and that a workshop will be held with key stakeholders including families to identify the preferred options to be incorporated in the final plan. The outputs that will be incorporated in the options report include

- The aspirations and potential projects already identified by key stakeholders need to be captured as an early element of the option generation process.
- 3-4 potential options which should include information about potential timescales e.g. short, medium and long term, approximate savings, benefits and risks. The options promoted should consider minimum, optimal and aspirational solutions.
- The draft implementation plan, resource requirements and analysis of potential impact
- A strategic case for the future delivery of travel services, leading to a clear vision for the future
- An understanding and analysis of key stakeholder aspirations and planned projects
- A transport capacity analysis (taking into account future forecast demand as well as current demand and recent trends)
- Detailed analysis of the committed transport and non-transport projects that impact on, or are impacted by, the proposed changes to transport provision.
- Development of preferred options for future travel provision for children and young people with SEND and adult community travel within Stockport. These options should include information about potential timescales e.g.

short, medium and long term, the potential savings to be achieved and risks and benefits.

In addition we will also review Community Transport for adults with mobility difficulties or disabilities who are unable to use public transport. This is currently delivered through the Stockport Car Scheme volunteer driver service and Easy-Go accessible vehicles. We will explore whether this model provides further opportunities for service delivery enhancements.

3.0 Consultation update summary – Full report in the Appendix 1 and 2

3.1 Town Centre Shuttle Bus.

Consultation methods included publicly available online questionnaire, posters on buses, at key transport locations, libraries and council public reception areas, social media messages, targeted communication through local business networks, targeted consultation with Disability Stockport. There have been 309 responses to the consultation as at 2nd January 2019. The service currently has 4,000 passengers a week.

The majority of respondents so far (237, 77%) either disagree or strongly disagreed with the proposal. A lower proportion of respondents either agree or agree strongly with the proposal (54, 17.5%). There were 14, 4.5% of respondents that neither agreed or disagreed and just 3 respondents chose Don't Know.

Based on feedback from the results of the consultation exercise, included below are details on how the issues would be mitigated against if the proposals were to be implemented.

Issue identified in the consultation	Mitigating Action
There is particular concern for vulnerable groups, notably elderly and disabled residents who use the bus	<p>Provide publicity and inform users of the services of alternative bus routes which may cover part of their journey</p> <p>Provide publicity and inform users about Community Transport services such as Ring and Ride, Easy-Go and Stockport Car Scheme.</p> <p>Continue to seek alternative funders and if successful reintroduce the service at the same or a different frequency.</p>
Concern that the only alternative for people without cars to get around the Town Centre would be taxis and that these are too expensive.	Provide publicity and inform users about Community Transport services such as Ring and Ride, Easy-Go Community Transport and Stockport Car Scheme.

Lack of availability of alternative direct routes on public transport from key points around the Town Centre	<p>Discussions to be held with local transport providers regarding the potential to run new routes.</p> <p>Provide publicity and inform users of the services of alternative bus routes which may cover part of their journey.</p>
Concerns about personal safety if people had to walk around the Town Centre.	<p>Provide publicity and inform users of the services of alternative bus routes which may cover part of their journey</p> <p>Provide publicity and inform users about Community Transport services such as Ring and Ride, Easy-Go and Stockport Car Scheme.</p>
Impact on Town Centre growth and viability of shops	<p>Continue to seek alternative funders and if successful reintroduce the service at the same or a different frequency</p> <p>Continue discussions with TFGM</p>

3.2 Free School Bus Passes

Consultation methods included publicly available online questionnaire, targeted communication to all families in receipt of school bus passes, targeted communication to all schools served by the school bus service, social media messages. There have been 294 responses to the consultation as at 2nd January 2019 with a total of 349 comments made on the proposals.

The majority of respondents so far (252,86%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the proposal to change eligibility for free school bus passes to only parents in receipt of the maximum level of Working Tax Credits. A small proportion of respondents either agreed or agreed strongly with the proposal (32, 11%) and 10 (3.4%) of the respondents chose neither agree nor disagree.

In relation to the proposal to change the criteria for the allocation of free school bus passes we asked respondents to indicate their preference on the following two options:

- Option 1: To remove all faith schools, including those within the borough, from the eligibility criteria. This would mean, pupils would only be eligible for a school bus pass for the nearest school to their home (with places available) based on distance or other benefits criteria.
- Option 2: Only remove faith schools located outside the borough from the qualifying criteria for free school bus passes.

The highest number of respondents (126; 43%) chose neither option 1 or 2. However, a significant proportion of respondents chose Option 2 (121; 41.2%). There was a much lower level of support for Option 1 (37; 12.6%) and 10 respondents didn't have a preference.

On the question of whether people agreed with the timing of the introduction of the new criteria from September 2019, the majority of respondents either disagreed or disagreed strongly (228, 77.6%). Only 28 respondents (9.5%) either agreed or agreed strongly with the proposal. There were 207 responses to the question about what the impact the reduction in eligibility would have. The vast majority of comments received were against the proposals (95%), whereas 3.4% were neutral and only one answer was in support.

The most frequent issue that was raised was the potential negative financial impact this proposal would have, straining household budgets and increasing child poverty. The perception this was tantamount to religious discrimination was the next most populous issue raised.

The remaining major issues were:

- Attendance – schools would see a drop in attendance
- Danger – children would be forced to travel in an unsafe manner
- Traffic – increased congestion on the roads as a result of less taking the bus

Based on feedback from the results of the consultation exercise, included below are details on how the issues would be mitigated against if the proposals were to be implemented.

Issue identified in the consultation	Mitigating Action
Financial Impact on families	Free travel will continue for those pupils whose nearest qualifying school is outside statutory walking distance. Free travel will continue to be provided to pupils from low income families
Impact on families who have already made choices regarding their child's school.	Consideration to be given to a phased implementation
Religious discrimination	The proposed changes to the Home to School Transport Policy are intended to ensure that all pupils are treated equitably regardless of whether they attend a denominational or non-denominational school
Faith schools may not have sufficient numbers of pupils	Alternative funding models could be considered to support the retention of the existing free travel or a reduction to part-funded free travel. This could be a combination of funding from the denominational schools or Diocesan authorities

Further details of the consultation results are available in Appendix Two

4.0 Financial Summary

4.1 The Stockport Local Transport project needs reduce the budget by £0.530m by 2020/2021. The proposals in this report would achieve £0.220m of the £0.530m budget saving required by April 2019. A further £0.275m of savings is proposed for 2019/20 bringing the total savings to £0.495m. This saving is £0.035m below the target savings of £0.530m, however, further options for savings will be explored as part of Phase 2.

4.2 The table below shows the proposed savings and changes to them following Cabinet decisions in relation to the free school bus passes proposals.

Saving Name	Original Full Year Saving 2019/20 £000	Original phased saving 2019/20 £000	Original TOTAL saving £000	New Full Year Savings £000	New Phased Saving £000	New Total Saving 2019/20 £000
Removal of funding for the Stockport Town Centre Metroshuttle	(220)		(220)	(220)		(220)
School Bus Passes: changes to Working Tax Credit eligibility	(35)		(35)	(0)		(0)
School Bus Passes: removal of discretionary faith element	(17)		(17)		(17)	(17)
Transport Project Phase 2		(258)	(258)		(258)	(258)
TOTAL	(272)	(258)	(530)	(220)	(275)	(495)

5.0 Key timescales

Proposal	Milestone description	Date Expected	Output milestone at
Metroshuttle Bus Service	Consultation completed	18 th January 2019	Final report produced
Free School Bus Passes		25 th January 2019	
All proposals	Cabinet Decision	5 th February 2019	Cabinet decision on the proposal
All proposals	Subject to Cabinet Decision – implementation of the approved proposals	27 th April 2019	Implementation of approved proposal

6.0 Interdependencies, Constraints, and Risks

Proposal	Interdependencies	Constraints	Risks
Town Centre Metroshuttle Bus	Changes need to be agreed with TfGM who manage the contract on behalf of the Council	Contract in place until 27 th April 19	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negative impact on trade and tourism on the town centre Is contrary to the Council's Town Centre investment strategy and Transport Strategy
School Bus Passes: changes to Working Tax Credit eligibility	Year 6 cohort currently applying for secondary school places will be entering the process under a different set of Free School Transport criteria	Changes cannot be made until the start of the 19/20 academic year in September 2019.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Rise in statutory eligible applicants Increased number of unreasonable offers Implementation of Universal Credit causing more students to be eligible Reduced pupil attendance in priority 1 areas Financial impact to families in priority 1 areas
School Bus Passes: removal of discretionary faith element	Uncertainty regarding the number of children who will be eligible year to year	Changes cannot be made until the start of the 19/20 academic year in September 2019.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Flux within the in-year transfer system creates uncertainty as to whether a pupil will be deemed eligible. Redefining 'Suitable School' will affect non-faith applications as well as faith applications Changes in pupil numbers each year affects the eligibility of students Savings may not be realised if pupil numbers increase,

Proposal	Interdependencies	Constraints	Risks
			causing school capacity issues

7.0 Recommendations

7.1 Members of Scrutiny Committees are asked to:

- a) Note the recent decisions made by Cabinet
- b) Provide comments on the consultation results received to date
- c) Provide comments on the proposals for Phase 2 of this review
- d) Provide comments for Cabinet Members.

8.0 Appendices

Appendix 1: Town Centre Metroshuttle Bus Interim Consultation responses

Appendix 2: School Bus Passes: Removal of discretionary faith element and changes to Working Tax Credit eligibility Interim Consultation responses

Appendix 3: Town Centre Metroshuttle Bus proposal Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 4: School Bus Passes (Faith proposal Equality Impact Assessment)