

BUS REFORM CONSULTATION

Report of the Corporate Director for Place Management & Regeneration, Deputy Chief Executive

1. INTRODUCTION AND PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Buses accounted for 75% of all public transport journeys in Greater Manchester both before and during the Covid-19 pandemic. As set out in the Stockport Local Implementation Plan (as adopted in December 2020), buses are a vital element of the transport mix in Stockport and they continue to be a critical link to jobs and essential services, including for the one third of households in Stockport without a car.
- 1.2 Between October 2019 and January 2020, Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) held a consultation on a proposed franchising scheme for the city-region's buses. Over 8,500 people gave their views.
- 1.3 In June 2020, GMCA received the results of the consultation but decided, before a final decision could be made, that the impact of Covid-19 on the bus market and the proposed franchising scheme should be considered.
- 1.4 Now, GMCA is asking for people's views on the proposed franchising scheme in light of the findings of the Covid-19 impact report as part of a public consultation. The consultation runs from Wednesday 2 December 2020 to Friday 29 January 2021 and is being delivered by TfGM on behalf of GMCA.
- 1.5 A draft response to the consultation on behalf of Stockport Council has been produced and is appended to this report. The Committee are recommended to review and comment on the draft response.
- 1.6 Subject to the feedback received, a final version of the response will be submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Regeneration for agreement prior to submission by Friday 29th January 2021.

2. FINANCIAL AND RISK ASSESSMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 2.1 As set out in previous consultation responses, Stockport Council has expressed a position of general support for the proposed franchising scheme and has identified a number of areas where there is opportunity to work with TfGM to ensure early delivery of benefits and management of risk. In many ways these opportunities have been made more important as a result of Covid-19 and are, therefore, reiterated in the Council's draft response to the current consultation:

1. Phasing - Stockport is currently proposed as being in the last phase of the franchising process and the draft response states that the Council would like to actively work with TfGM to understand the phasing profile and how this correlates with the realisation of benefits from this approach. The draft consultation response requests that consideration is given to a greater speed of roll out or the potential to ensure that some benefits are realised in the borough sooner. As Stockport is in the later phases of the roll out of franchising the draft response states that the Council would like to actively work with TfGM to identify opportunities to deliver benefits sooner and manage any potential risks.
2. Funding – The Council notes that the latest consultation report identifies the challenges of future funding of the bus industry because of Covid but this is not considered a reason for pausing franchising. The draft consultation response highlights that the Council would expect that approval of any scheme by government will be supported by additional funding support and investment. The draft response highlights that the Council would like to work with TfGM to put in place monitoring of those areas without the franchise in the early phases to ensure that benefits are realised early and any risks minimised.
3. Council and local community involvement – Franchising provides a positive opportunity for communities to be more closely involved in decision making around bus services, and for local accountability to increased. The draft response states that the Council is fully supportive of this and would like to work closely with TfGM to identify mechanisms through which this can be achieved.
4. Cross boundary services – Travel to and from Stockport to neighbouring authority areas beyond the GM boundary is a key feature of the transport system in Stockport. The draft response states that the Council would like to work with TfGM to look at the impact of the proposed franchising scheme and any transitional period on cross boundary services coming in and out of Greater Manchester. This is an especially pertinent issue for residents who rely on buses for both commuting and leisure trips.
5. Air quality and electric buses - There is a clear opportunity for any franchising activity to coincide and support wider efforts to electrify the bus fleet and contribute to air quality improvements. The draft response states that Stockport Council would like to work with TfGM to understand how the proposed timescales for bus franchising fit in with the desire to electrify the bus fleet and replace or retrofit non-compliant buses.

3. LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 Stockport Council is a consultee in its own right to the consultation and therefore a response to the consultation is being submitted as per this report.
- 3.2 Stockport Council's Constitution provides that responding to a Consultation on behalf of the Council is an executive function that can be undertaken by either the Cabinet or Individual Cabinet Member (Part 3, Scheme of Delegation, Section 2, para 8 and Section 3, para 9 (pages 54 and 56 respectively)).

4. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPACT

4.1 There are no identified human resources impacts.

5. EQUALITIES IMPACT

5.1 An Equalities Impact Assessment was undertaken and shared publicly as part of the previous consultation on bus reform. While the EqlA identifies no adverse impacts there is a need to ensure the changes and the interim stages of the process are clearly communicated to the public and that all bus providers are supportive of the needs of the vulnerable members of society who will be most affected by the changes and most likely to struggle with the different systems in place.

6. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

6.1 Improvement and greater integration of the bus network in Stockport to both meet existing demand and encourage future uptake will contribute to achieving the Council's objectives as set out in the Climate Action Now Strategy by helping to reduce emissions relating to transport and improving air quality.

7. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 In light of the findings of the Covid-19 impact report, TfGM are currently running a consultation on behalf of the GMCA until Friday 29th January 2021.

7.2 A draft response to the consultation on behalf of Stockport Council has been produced and is appended to this report. The Committee are recommended to review and comment on the draft response.

7.3 Subject to the feedback received, a final version of the response will be submitted to the Portfolio Holder for Economy and Regeneration for agreement prior to submission by Friday 29th January 2021.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are none

Anyone wishing to inspect the above background papers or requiring further information should contact Mark Glynn or Sue Stevenson on Tel: 0161-474-3700 or by email on mark.glynn@stockport.gov.uk or sue.stevenson@stockport.gov.uk