

ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

COMMITTEE	Council
DATE	10 th October 2012
DIRECTOR	Gordon McIntosh
TITLE OF REPORT	Crematorium Bus Service
REPORT NUMBER:	EPI/12/228

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to advise Members on the options for implementing a bus service from Hazlehead bus terminus to the Aberdeen Crematorium.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Council:

(a) Instruct the Housing and Environment Service to identify potential sources of funding for those elements of a Crematorium bus service that cannot be covered by existing resources.

3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 In order to meet our obligations under the Equality Act 2010, any vehicle used to operate the service should be wheelchair accessible. There are no wheelchair accessible vehicles available with current in-house resources; there would therefore be a requirement to hire a vehicle and driver from an external operator. It is estimated that the cost to undertake the service from an external operator would be in excess of £30,000 per annum. A competitive quote exercise would be required.
- 3.2 There could be the option to deliver the service in-house if there was recruitment of one driver to be dedicated to this service. There is currently a post vacant within the Public Transport Unit. The cost for a driver would be £19,732 for one year, including on-costs. This could initially be on a one year fixed term contract and met from existing budgets. An additional wheelchair accessible vehicle would be required to undertake the service. This would require funding to be identified to cover the additional cost

- 3.3 If the service is operated internally there would be additional fuel costs incurred to operate this service which would have implications for existing budgets. As this would operate as a shuttle service, operating back and fore all day, it will consume a substantial amount of fuel. Calculating the distance and the mileage per gallon which can be expected from our vehicles, it is estimated that a round trip would cost in the region of £1 in fuel costs. If the bus undertook 20 round trips per day over one year this would amount to £5200 per annum.
- 3.4 The start up of a new service, where additional funding is required, would normally be subject to the annual budgetary process. To do so would delay the implementation of the service until the 2013/14 financial year.

4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 It has been identified that the service could be funded from the Common Good Fund. There are, however, certain legal restrictions on the use of Common Good Funding which require to be investigated further. The two basic legal rules to be followed in determining the appropriate use of the Common Good are as follows:
- That the Common Good must be applied for the benefit of the community; and
 - That the Council must in each case use reasonable judgement.

The benefit of the community means the benefit of the people of Aberdeen, including those who live, work or study in the city and visitors to the city.

- 4.2 The vehicle used on the service would have to be accessible to all persons, for this reason it should be wheelchair accessible in order that the Council meets our obligations under the Equality Act 2010.
- 4.3 If the service is undertaken internally and the crematorium bus driver is on holiday or absent there is limited availability with existing resources to cover this. It would therefore be necessary to ensure there is a staffing resource available to cover such eventualities, in order that there is no loss of service to the public. A bank of relief drivers could be recruited who could be called upon if absences occur and to cover annual leave. These drivers would not be paid for anything other than actual work undertaken. They would also provide a benefit in terms of covering absence of existing drivers within the Public Transport Unit. The cost of paying these drivers when utilised could be met from existing budgets.

5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

5.1 FORMER SERVICE

5.1.1 The former Crematorium bus service was provided and operated by the Crematorium, Housing and Environment Directorate and the costs were met from the Crematorium's budget.

5.1.2 The Crematorium had a minibus in which a staff member would pick up passengers from Hazlehead bus terminus approximately 10 minutes prior to every funeral service and return passengers following the funeral service. This was provided free of charge.

5.1.3 The cost of providing the service was approximately £20,000 - £30,000 per annum. On average it carried one person for every two crematorium services. From surveys undertaken by the Crematorium in 2008/09 it has been confirmed that there were between 12-20 passengers carried on the service each week.

5.1.4 This service was stopped in 2009 as a budget saving at a time when services across the Council had to be prioritised.

5.2 ACTIONS SINCE 2009

5.2.1 Officers have raised the potential of a bus service between the Hazlehead terminus and the Crematorium with the commercial bus operators on a number of occasions and requested that they investigate whether any services could connect to the Crematorium. To date no operator has indicated any interest.

5.2.2 Officers also wrote to a number of charitable and voluntary organisations in November 2009 to enquire whether they would be able to provide assistance to people wanting to access the Crematorium. Officers received one response from a charitable organisation who felt that the need was not high enough to warrant implementation of a service and use of their resources. It is understood that this situation may now have changed and further approaches will be made to voluntary organisations to determine if they are able to provide any support.

5.2.3 The Council's Demand Responsive Transport service, Community Transport, has transported people to the Crematorium and bookings can be made by passengers wishing to use the service to access the Crematorium. However this can be limited in its availability and timings.

5.3 OPTIONS FOR A SERVICE

- 5.3.1 The Crematorium has indicated that they would not be able to run a service as they did before. They do not have the financial or personnel resources to undertake this again. They have also noted that, even with additional funding for a staff member to undertake this role, it would require them to be occupied all day undertaking the bus service. This is not something which they have the ability to manage.
- 5.3.2 There was an option presented to the Crematorium for the potential of the public to phone a day in advance to advise that they would require transport from the bus terminus at Hazlehead to the Crematorium. This was not deemed to be a workable solution as it would require additional staff resources and a phone call management system to be implemented, which was not suitable for the Crematorium's resources.
- 5.3.3 At present the Public Transport Unit (PTU) does not have the personnel resource to provide a bus service during peak or off-peak times solely for the Crematorium.
- 5.3.4 If the PTU were to employ an additional driver there would be potential for the Unit to provide a service. There is currently one vacant driver post remaining in the budget. This would be at a cost of £19,732 per annum (including on-costs) and this cost can be met from existing budgets.
- 5.3.5 There are no wheelchair accessible vehicles available within existing internal resources and to provide such a service would require the Council to hire an additional wheelchair accessible vehicle. The service should be operated on a wheelchair accessible vehicle in order that we are meeting our obligations under the Equality Act 2010. Under that Act, the Council has a duty to, in the exercise of its functions, have due regard to the need to advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it. Disability is a protected characteristic. In discharging that duty, the Council must remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are connected to that characteristic and take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of persons who do not share it.
- 5.3.6 Additional budget would be required to cover fuel costs as the existing budget is at capacity for the services already provided. Calculating the distance and the mileage per gallon which can be expected from PTU vehicles it is thought that a round trip would cost in the region of £1. If the bus undertook 20 round trips per day over one year, of five day operation per week, this would amount to £5200 per annum in fuel costs.

- 5.3.7 Fuel costs could be covered and no increase to budget required if the service was charged for, however this is complicated by the permits to be operated under (see paragraph 5.3.8 below). It is unlikely, based upon past data, that charging for the service could cover all of the costs of running the service i.e. bus, driver and fuel. However, if the service is to be free of charge then this would require additional funding to cover the cost of fuel.
- 5.3.8 A charge of 70p single / £1 return would be suggested as sufficient to cover fuel costs. Charging could be implemented on the service under a section 22 permit; this would allow the service to be available to the general public. The PTU does not currently operate any service under section 22 permits at the present time. A section 22 permit allows services to be operated for members of the public, on scheduled routes and operated on a largely fixed timetable. Concessionary fares are also eligible on these services. For this reason the service would have to be registered with the Traffic Commissioner and ticket machines and a back office system would be necessary to meet the requirements for the Transport Scotland Concessionary fare scheme. Aberdeen City Council could likely call upon partners to assist with the ticketing and back office set up. There would therefore be additional start up costs to operate the service under section 22 permit.
- 5.3.9 There would be potential problems with holiday/sickness cover for the dedicated driver and the service may not be able to run fully when these occur as there is insufficient existing staff resource to cover this. The most pragmatic approach would be to undertake a recruitment exercise to hire a pool of relief drivers who could be called upon to cover any absence or annual leave. This has operated in the past within the PTU successfully. There are no relief drivers at present. Hiring relief drivers would also provide an overall benefit to the PTU in covering absence and holidays of other drivers within the service, for this reason it is not anticipated that additional cost will be incurred to the PTU. Holidays will in general be covered by existing personnel resources and reliefs would only be called upon as a last resort. Relief drivers would only be paid for actual hours worked; this is not anticipated to be considerable and the use of relief drivers would be as a last resort, therefore this cost can be met from existing budgets.
- 5.3.10 As the former Crematorium bus service was not used to capacity, it is important to ensure maximum benefit from the service. This would include substantial promotion of the service. Promotional material could be met from existing budgets. It has also been identified that Woodend Hospital, adjacent to the Hazlehead Terminus, is relatively inaccessible by public transport. There could be the potential, if effectively scheduled, to run the service into Woodend Hospital to provide a bus link for those travelling by bus and in turn this could increase the patronage and value of the Crematorium bus service.

- 5.3.11 Another option could be to undertake a school transport run with the Crematorium bus and driver in the morning and afternoon and to undertake the Crematorium service in the off-peak only. This would be a more cost effective solution, maximizing the use of both the vehicle and driver. However this would result in the last few funeral services not being covered by the bus service.
- 5.3.12 The service could be undertaken by an external operator. Not all operators would be able to operate the service under section 22 permit and this may limit the pool of operators. Currently the PTU hires a minibus and driver for a full day to provide transport for Social Work services. This would be on a similar basis to the Crematorium bus service. The cost of this hire is £95.33 per day. Over one year, of a five day per week operation, this would be £26,692. In addition, this vehicle and driver would undertake a school transport run in the morning and afternoon which reduces the cost of the vehicle in the off-peak. We would expect a higher cost than £26,692 if we were to hire externally, unless the vehicle could undertake alternative peak time work. There is also a limited pool of wheelchair accessible minibuses in the peak periods and predominantly these are utilised to deliver school and social work transport and external operator's resources are limited. If an external operator was to undertake the crematorium run they would likely need to purchase another vehicle. It is estimated that undertaking the service externally would cost in excess of £30k per annum.
- 5.3.13 Another option in providing a service to the Crematorium could be through community groups or individual volunteers. Further investigation could be undertaken by officers into the potential for community groups or volunteers to provide transport options, either using minibuses or private vehicles. Advertisement would be required to look for interested parties and some Council funding may be required to support these groups/individuals in covering their costs.
- 5.3.14 Consultation with the Disability Advisory Group has been on the whole positive. They have indicated that the service would benefit many elderly and visual impaired bus users.

5.4 CONCLUSION

- 5.4.1 A Crematorium bus service could be provided in-house by the PTU following the recruitment of a driver and relief drivers with the cost of the driver post being met by existing budgets. Vehicle and fuel costs would require additional budget to be identified. Alternatively the service could be purchased by the Council and operated by an external operator. It is recommended that the Housing and Environment Service explores options for funding those elements of the service which cannot be covered by existing resources.

6. IMPACT

- 6.1 A key aim of the Community Plan is to ensure that all citizens have access to a range of transport options that reflect differing needs of age, gender, disability and income. The Single Outcome Agreement also sets a priority of improving sustainable transport options for the City. Outcome 7 requires the delivery of Demand Responsive Transport schemes, to address social inequalities. Outcomes 10, 12 and 14 sets out actions for improving sustainable travel options through Demand Responsive Transport.
- 6.2 The Smarter City document sets out that we will provide and promote a sustainable transport system, including cycling, which reduces our carbon emissions.
- 6.3 The Planning and Sustainable Development Service Plan sets out that we will have an effective and efficient Public Transport Unit. It is a priority of the Council's Five Year Business Plan that Aberdeen has a fully integrated transport network.
- 6.4 The proposals contained within the report are intended to bring about a substantial change in the operation of transport services for the groups discussed above. This report may be of interest to the public as the citizens of Aberdeen have a vested interest in the public transport network and accessibility to services.

7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None

8. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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