

## ABERDEEN CITY COUNCIL

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COMMITTEE	Communities, Housing and Infrastructure
DATE	24 <sup>th</sup> January 2017
DIRECTOR	Pete Leonard
TITLE OF REPORT	Supported Bus Services
REPORT NUMBER	CHI/16/278
CHECKLIST COMPLETED	Yes

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### 1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to advise Members on the operation, level of use and performance of the two supported bus services implemented in June 2016 and the recommendations for their future continuation, the cost of continuing the supported bus services and advising on the request for options of reallocating future savings towards other potential routes with an identified social need.

### 2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

It is recommended that the Committee:

- (a) Approve the retention of the service 15a, evening supported bus service between Craigiebuckler/Airyhall and City, for a further 12 months, subject to the budget process.
- (b) Approve the termination of the service 95, three times daily supported bus services between Peterculter and Garthdee at the end of financial year 2016/17 and instruct officers to allocate additional Community Transport resources in the area to meet the service demand.
- (c) Request Officers to further report on options of reallocating the savings from termination of the service 95, towards other potential routes with an identified social need.

### 3. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Funding for supported bus services was identified as part of the 2016/17 budget setting process for service 15a and 95 and a budget of £83,000 was allocated to Communities, Housing and Infrastructures' revenue budget for one financial year to be reviewed as part of the 2017/18 budget setting process.
- 3.2 A total budget of £38,610 would be required to continue the service 15a, Airyhall/Craigiebuckler bus service for a full financial year. This would leave £44,390 which could be reinvested elsewhere as deemed required and any monies not required would be returned as a saving.

### 4. OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Any supported bus service must adhere to guidelines set by the Traffic Commissioner and appropriate legislation. The vehicle used on the service is required to be accessible to all persons, for this reason it should be wheelchair accessible in order that the Council meets its obligations under the Equality Act 2010.
- 4.2 Uncertainty remains at this time over the future of bus services in Kingswells and Aberdeen City Council may need to consider, what, if any, support for bus provision is required. As no final decision has been made regarding bus services in Kingswells, then a further report will be required to a future appropriate committee.
- 4.3 There are no contractual implications with regards to termination of service 95 or the continuation of service 15a.

### 5. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES

#### 5.1 **Background**

- 5.1.1 The Communities, Housing and Infrastructure Committee, on the 17<sup>th</sup> May 2016 approved the implementation of an evening supported bus services between Craigiebuckler/Airyhall and City Centre and the implementation of a three times daily supported bus services between Peterculter and Garthdee via Airyhall. The Committee requested that officers report back to the Committee on the level of use and performance of both services, the cost of continuing both services and options for reallocating future savings towards other potential routes with an identified social need.
- 5.1.2 The local bus service network in Aberdeen City is primarily operated on a fully commercial basis. Under the conditions of the Transport Act 1985 and the Transport (Scotland) Act 2001 operators have the freedom to set their own routes, timetables and fares. Local Transport Authorities have a duty under sections 63-64 of the Transport Act 1985 to secure the provision of public transport in its area that it deems required.

5.1.3 In considering the transport for an area the Council will give consideration to provide a minimum level of service taking into account the financial resources at its disposal and value for money as indicated by cost/demand relationships. In determining priorities for subsidised service provision, the Council will have regard to:

- Minimum level of service defined by population (e.g. an area of population more than 4000, we would aim to ensure there is at least an hourly service).
- Application of maximum walking distances i.e. that in urban areas, all properties are within 400m walk to a bus service.
- Access is available to appropriate facilities, i.e. shopping facilities, GP practice etc. (this does not need to be local, alternative facilities would meet the required need).
- Priority Trip purpose – i.e. Work, Education, Shopping, Health etc.
- Consideration may also be given to specific social needs within particular communities.

5.1.4 When tendering supported bus services the Council usually quote on two options:

- Lowest Cost - under this option the Council would pay the service provider a fixed fee and the fare income would be retained by the service provider.
- Revenue Shortfall (Quoted price less fare revenue collected on service and Concession tickets at reimbursement value) - under this option any fare revenue taken on the service would come back to the Council to off-set the cost of supporting the service. Under this option, there is risk to the Council if patronage is low that fares do not sufficiently off-set spend.

5.1.5 All passenger data detailed in this report is from the period of 13<sup>th</sup> June 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> October 2016.

## 5.2 **Service 15a - Airyhall / Craigiebuckler Evening Bus Service**

5.2.1 The service 15a, operated by First Aberdeen, commenced operation on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2016. The service follows the route of the First Aberdeen service 15 from Craigiebuckler to Union Street via Airyhall and operates hourly in both directions commencing after the final First Aberdeen service 15, departing Guild Street at 20:00 and the final journey from the City Centre to Craigiebuckler and Airyhall departs Guild Street at 23:00. There are a total of 4 outbound journeys and 3

inbound journeys, Monday to Saturday and 3 outbound journeys and 2 inbound journeys on a Sunday.

5.2.2 First Aberdeen operates the service, charging their commercial fare structure on the service and they retain all fares. The council currently pays £105 per day Monday to Friday and £115 per day Saturday and Sunday, to First for operation of the service. The contract was awarded from 13<sup>th</sup> June 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 with the possibility for a one year extension.

5.2.3 The service has not been heavily used, but it was not expected to carry vast volumes of passengers as the previous commercial services didn't. Patronage has increased since implementation although the trend is variable with weeks of considerably high use against weeks of very low use.

5.2.4 The average number of passengers per day is 16.5, which equates to 2.4 passengers per journey at an average cost to the Council of £7.43 per passenger. The majority of travel is between the City Centre and Seafield, Craigiebuckler and Airyhall with a higher proportion of outbound journeys. The numbers are lower than estimated, with an estimate of around 6 passengers per journey, but there are certain days and weeks when the use exceeds this, however this is balanced against lower performing weeks.

5.2.5 The service has considerably higher use on a Thursday, Friday and Saturday and the table below shows how the service is being used and the cost per passenger depending on the day of the week, which can be as low as £3.99:

<b>Day</b>	<b>Average daily patronage</b>	<b>Average patronage per journey</b>	<b>Average cost per passenger</b>
<b>Sunday</b>	9.3	1.9	£12.38
<b>Monday</b>	11.9	1.7	£8.86
<b>Tuesday</b>	15.4	2.2	£6.82
<b>Wednesday</b>	12.2	1.8	£8.58
<b>Thursday</b>	16.0	2.3	£6.58
<b>Friday</b>	21.9	3.1	£4.80
<b>Saturday</b>	28.9	4.1	£3.99

5.2.6 If this service was to cease operation, residents would be required to walk up to 1.5km to the nearest evening bus services on Queen's Road and St John's Terrace. Airyhall and Craigiebuckler are large residential areas feedback from residents noted that the topography of the residential estates and the distance make access to alternative services difficult by foot for elderly and people with mobility problems and for those who do not feel safe walking this distance in the dark evenings. Feedback received at public meetings highlighted the demand for an evening bus service and that many experienced social isolation during the period that there was no evening bus service.

- 5.2.7 There would be little alternative workable solution to providing a transport service to the area in the evening other than a supported bus service. As any demand responsive transport service such as Dial-a-Bus or the Council's Community Transport service would require either the contracting of the service externally or the recruitment of a driver both of which would require a spend relatively similar to that of the supported bus service and would likely not meet the needs of those utilising the bus service i.e. the need to pre-book, etc. which would in turn further reduce use and increase cost per passenger.
- 5.2.8 The cost of continuing the service as operating at present would be £38,610 per annum. The average cost per passenger is not overly high for a supported service and on the whole represents good value. This is based on benchmarking against cost per passenger on supported bus services across other Local Authorities. In addition it should be noted that it is still anticipated that patronage will grow on the service which should reduce the cost per passenger.
- 5.2.9 It is recommended that the service continues for a further 12 months, as at present, to meet the required social need as there is limited alternative transport available and Officers continue to promote the service and encourage further growth.

### **5.3 Service 95, Lower Deeside, Airyhall and Mannofield Bus Service**

- 5.3.1 The service 95, operated by Stagecoach North Scotland, commenced operation on Monday 13<sup>th</sup> June 2016. The service operates between Johnston Gardens North in Peterculter and Asda Garthdee. The route takes in the residential streets in Peterculter, Milltimber, Bielside and Cults before travelling along Craigton Road to Airyhall, where the service then operates to Great Western Road before terminating at Asda Garthdee. The service operates 3 times per day, departing from Peterculter at 9am and the final journey departing Asda Garthdee at 14:50 with the final journey terminating at Airyhall. As a result there are 3 inbound journeys and 2.5 outbound journeys per day.
- 5.2.2 Stagecoach North Scotland operates the service, charging fares set by the Council (which broadly reflect commercial fares in Aberdeen). The council currently pays £220 per day Monday to Friday. The contract was awarded from 13<sup>th</sup> June 2016 to 31<sup>st</sup> March 2017 with the possibility for a one year extension.
- 5.2.3 The service has had very low use. The service was not expected to carry vast volumes of passengers, but the estimation of passenger volume was higher. Significant promotion of the service has been undertaken, including 2 full leaflet drops in the Lower Deeside area. The only likelihood to increase patronage is to have more direct and frequent services which would come at high cost.

- 5.2.4 The average number of passengers per day is 6.8, which equates to 1.2 passengers per journey at an average cost to the Council of £32.34 per passenger. The majority of travel is between Peterculter and Asda Garthdee and Airyhall and Asda Garthdee. Although Officers have raised queries over this and suspect concession card holders have been recorded by drivers to the terminus rather than exact location.
- 5.2.5 There is little variance in travel volume during the week, although there tends to be slightly more use on a Wednesday and Friday. The majority of passengers are based in Peterculter and Airyhall.
- 5.2.6 If the service ceased to operate there would be a loss of a direct link to Mannofield from Airyhall and residents have advised that this would have a negative impact on residents in Airyhall who utilise the community facilities at Mannofield. Although the First Aberdeen service 15 which also operates in the area does provide connections to alternative facilities. The Lower Deeside area of Aberdeen presents a number of difficulties for bus users. There are a high number of bus services which operate along North Deeside Road. However the topography of the area presents a number of challenges for many residents trying to access these bus services as they are required to negotiate steep footpaths to reach bus routes that people with limited mobility and elderly people have advised they find difficult, this difficulty would remain for residents.
- 5.2.7 Feedback from users and residents has been that the service does not meet their needs well. Feedback has been received from Public Meetings in the area, from the Community Council, Local Members and via letters from the public. The majority of feedback has noted that most users want to travel to their local amenities and as there is only one bus operating there is a long wait for this to come back, which has restricted use. To provide a 2 bus operation to alleviate this would be at high cost to the Council and would not represent value in terms of cost per passenger.
- 5.2.8 The cost of continuing the service as operating at present would be £56,100 per annum. The average cost per passenger is extremely high for a supported service. There are a high volume of bus services in the area and those without mobility problems utilise these services, which limits the use of any supported service. There is clearly a social need in the area, but the above data and feedback suggests that a supported bus service is not the most appropriate transport service.
- 5.2.9 The Council currently operates the Community Transport, Dial-a-Bus service; this operates in Airyhall, Monday to Friday between 10:00 – 14:30 and in Lower Deeside, Monday and Thursday between 10:15 – 14:15. This is a door to door bus service for those unable to use conventional bus services to access their destination. The services in both areas will travel to the service users chosen destination and as such the vehicle will travel outwith the local area. Officers have identified capacity within the in-house passenger fleet to operate an additional vehicle in the Lower Deeside and Airyhall area on a

Tuesday, Wednesday and Friday which would complement the existing services and these could be set-up so that they are restricted to delivering local journeys only.

5.2.10 The majority of users of the existing supported service are elderly and given the low numbers travelling a demand responsive dial-a-bus option would be more appropriate to meet the needs of residents as the bus can take them from door to door at times which will suit the user. The users would be required to book and pay for the service in line with the rest of the Community Transport service.

5.2.11 The additional Community Transport service would utilise resource within the in-house passenger fleet and as such there would be no additional cost to the Council and the management of the additional bookings could be accommodated within the existing staff resource.

5.2.12 It is recommended that given the low passenger use, the feedback from residents and the high cost of running a service that the service 95 ceases operation and a demand responsive transport option is implemented. This will ensure a transport provision remains in place to meet the social needs of the areas affected.

### **5.3 Reallocating future savings towards other potential routes with an identified social need.**

5.3.1 There are no particular savings from the time of operation of the two supported services. Given the volumes travelling it would not be recommended to implement revenue shortfall as the income from fares would not off-set costs or release extra funding.

5.3.2 If approval is given to cease the operation of the service 95 then there would be £44,390 budgetary resource remaining. However it should be advised that this is a relatively small budget to implement supported services unless there is to be high levels of patronage.

5.3.3 At present, there are very few areas in Aberdeen not covered by an adequate bus service. While all passenger needs may not be met the social needs criteria is met as connections can be made and joint ticketing used to alternative services to allow passengers to reach their destination.

5.3.4 As part of the Bus Lane Enforcement monies bidding process, Officers presented to Committee a number of areas where there was a deemed social need for a bus service, as follows:

- Dubford / Denmore (Sunday Service)

The Dubford and Denmore areas currently have no Sunday bus service. The nearest services are up to 1.5km walk. Supporting a Sunday bus service would fill this void and improve accessibility for those in the area, it is estimated the Sunday bus service would cost approximately £25-35k per annum to operate an hourly service

operating from 08:30 – 22:30. However, at this time there is ongoing discussion with regards the X40 bus service which operates Monday to Saturday between Dubford and Kingswells, via both Park and Choose sites and there may be the potential to lobby for a Sunday service to be operated commercially in the area as discussions are ongoing, which it is recommended should be undertaken in the first instance.

- Leggart

The Leggart area only has a small number of services operating through it each day and these are services supported by Aberdeenshire Council which kindly stop and provide a service in Aberdeen. These only operate a couple of times a day leaving many residents with no service as they are unable to walk to stops on Stonehaven Road / Riverside Drive. This is a very difficult area to serve by bus as there is no suitable turning area and for residents unable to access existing services may be best to utilise the Community Transport service.

- Cove/Kincorth

There is currently one bus service directly linking to two communities who have shared community facilities such as Academy, GP Surgery and community leisure facilities. This service operates every 30 minutes off-peak only between approximately 9am and 3pm. Residents have noted the importance of a service between the two communities at all times, particularly for those who cannot walk any distance or without connecting to bus services elsewhere.

Introduction of service would be difficult given the volume of commercial services operating in the area and the best option would be a shuttle type service operating from Charleston to Faulds Gate. We are also aware of concerns of lack of link between the communities of Kincorth and Torry and there may be the potential to provide a circular link.

However this would come at high cost, estimated at in excess of £100k per annum and this would be difficult to implement given the existing daytime commercial service. Efforts should be made to encourage better commercial bus links between the communities, particularly given the ongoing developments in the Charleston area and this would be the most appropriate approach at this time, until First Aberdeen have considered the operation of the service 18 between Charleston and Kincorth.

- 5.3.5 There is a further emerging issue with the intimation from First Aberdeen to withdraw the services X40 and 11 from Kingswells which would leave the area with only bus services operating from the Park and Choose site which for some residents would be up to a 2km walk.

Officers are currently working to find a solution, but once a final decision has been made and other avenues explored, there may be a requirement on the Council to consider what transport may need to be provided. As such, the existence of a budget may assist with this; however the costs of any service would be unknown until final decisions have been taken.

- 5.3.6 It is therefore recommended at this time, not to assign the remaining budgetary resource pending the outcome of bus services in Kingswells and officers report back to an appropriate committee at that time.

#### **5.4 Feedback from Consultation**

- 5.4.1 Officers have consulted on the recommendations of this report with local members and Community Councils and some feedback was received.
- 5.4.2 Braeside and Mannofield Community Council welcomed the recommendation to retain the service 15a evening bus service and agreed with the recommendation to withdraw service 95 as the service did not meet the needs of the community. The Community Council did however note that a need exists for residents to travel between Braeside and Mannofield and Airyhall by public transport and requested that the council re-consider the options to establish a service that meets the need of the community for affordable public transport between Airyhall, Braeside and Mannofield.
- 5.4.3 Cults, Bielside and Milltimber Community Council requested that rather than looking average usage that the trend over the period was considered i.e. is the service growing in popularity following advertisement drives. Officers have reviewed the trend and the patronage levels have been fairly static.

The Community Council also has also noted that should the 95 be removed and replaced by a daily demand responsive service that it should operate daily and with a reasonable response rate. A daily service has been recommended by Officers. The Community Council has also requested that the savings from the service 95 are put in place to ensure operation of a demand responsive service rather than be reassigned elsewhere in the City. Finally the Community Council questioned whether it would be cheaper to order taxi's for the users. This option could be further reviewed but the management of this and creating eligibility would be difficult and would need to be considered City wide.

## 5.5 Conclusion

- 5.5.1 To maintain both services as operating at present would come in at £94,710 per annum in the next financial year which is £11,710 in excess of the current budgetary provision. Additional budget would not be readily available should both services be retained.
- 5.5.2 Given the acceptable cost per passenger and level of use on the service 15a Airyhall/Craigiebuckler bus service, it is recommended to retain this service as it is currently operating and continue to promote the service and monitor use.
- 5.5.3 Given the low use and high cost per passenger on the service 95 Lower Deeside/Airyhall bus service and the fact the service is not meeting the needs of users well it is recommended that the service ceases operation and a demand responsive transport solution is implemented in the area.
- 5.5.4 Given the limited social needs currently existing and the emerging situation at Kingswells it is recommended that no decision is taking at this time to the reallocation of budget to implement further supported bus services.

## 6. IMPACT

### **Improving Customer Experience –**

Transport affects every individual in Aberdeen and by providing supported bus services where there is a deemed social need, assists in meeting customer expectations and ensuring services meet the needs of customers.

### **Improving Staff Experience –**

These services will allow staff to deliver on their duty to provide socially necessary bus services.

### **Improving our use of Resources –**

A consistent approach to delivery of public transport in the City will ensure that local environmental factors, changing priorities and customer needs are considered as well as available budgets are taken into account on a reviewed basis

### **Corporate -**

The development of supported bus services links to the Community Plan vision of creating a *sustainable City with an integrated transport system that is accessible to all*.

The Smarter City document sets out that we will provide and promote a sustainable transport system, which reduces our carbon emissions and that we will work with our partners to seek to reduce the levels of inequality in the city.

The actions in the Action and Delivery Plan assist in the delivery of actions identified in the Single Outcome Agreement (SOA) 2013, in particular the Thematic Priority – Older People (*Older people in Aberdeen have increased independence*) and the Multi-lateral Priority – Integrated Transport (Aberdeen is easy to access and move around in) and the Underlying Principle – (A presumption for community based access to services (Services are accessible to all citizens in the ways which meet their needs)

The provision of supported bus services will assist delivery of the 5 year Corporate Business Plan, in particular the Community, Housing & Infrastructure Directorate's aims to *Support the delivery of a fully integrated transport network*.

#### **Public –**

The proposals contained within the report are intended to ensure there is operation of appropriate transport services for the communities detailed. This report will be of interest to the public as the citizens of Aberdeen have a vested interest in the public transport network and accessibility to services.

An Equality and Human Rights Impact Assessment (EHRIA) has not been completed, as all aspects were considered when reporting for the introduction of these services.

## 7. MANAGEMENT OF RISK

- 7.1 The implementation of supported bus services has been developed as a result of feedback from members of the public and stakeholders. The services will be monitored on an ongoing basis with annual reporting to demonstrate where Council funding, priorities and resources are being invested.
- 7.2 Risk of raised expectations of running service for one year and withdrawing should funding not be available next year remains. Officers and Members will work in collaboration to establish budgetary resources/alternative transport for continuation of services following any review.
- 7.3 There is a low risk of not being able to operate Community Transport in the Lower Deeside area at all times, due to staff or vehicle resources. In such occasions all steps would be undertaken to ensure service operates. I.e. engagement with relief staff, reworking schedules etc. Should the service not be able to operate, service users would be advised accordingly and offered transport on an alternative day.
- 7.4 There is a medium risk of adverse publicity regarding the removal of any bus service and this resulting in negative articles in the press. We will ensure any withdrawal is managed through our communications team and details are fully set out with regards to the reasoning for removal, in that it isn't representing best value and that we are introducing an alternative service to meet the needs of the community.

8. BACKGROUND PAPERS

N/A

9. REPORT AUTHOR DETAILS

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