

QUALITY OF LOCAL BUS SERVICES

REPORT OF THE CITY SOLICITOR

**Strategic Priorities: Attractive and Inclusive City and Prosperous City
Corporate Performance Objectives CI01**

1 Why has the report come to the Committee

- 1.1 To set out the remit and objectives of the Review Committee's study into the adequacy of bus services within the city and consider the various methods of gathering evidence.
- 1.2 To receive further information on the infrastructure works currently being undertaken to improve bus services in the city.
- 1.3 To receive a summary of the issues raised at a recent seminar held on the improvement of bus services which was attended by Councillor Graeme Miller and Councillor Ian Cuthbert.

2 Background

- 2.1 On 14 July 2008, the Review Committee considered a number of potential topic areas suitable for an in-depth study. Following a discussion of the issues involved, the Committee agreed to undertake a study into the adequacy of bus services within the city.
- 2.2 In choosing this theme, members stressed the importance of examining an issue of direct concern to the local community.
- 2.3 This work will also support the Council in achieving its strategic priorities of an Attractive and Accessible City by examining the factors constraining the growth of bus use.
- 2.4 The Sunderland Strategy sets as a priority the need to increase the personal mobility of people in the city by promoting all modes of transport thus increasing travel choice.

3 Reasons for Study

- 3.1 The bus is the most widely used form of public transport. Buses can carry large numbers of people thereby reducing congestion and pollution. Buses are an essential transport service for people without access to a car. For many people, buses provide a vital link between home and work, healthcare, education and leisure activities.

- 3.2 The Government is committed to reversing the long term decline in bus use and ensuring that local authorities and bus companies work together in partnership to achieve improved bus services.
- 3.3 However in many areas of the country, including Sunderland, concerns have been expressed at issues such as the cost, frequency and coordination of services.

4 Proposed Remit and Objectives of the Study

- 4.1 The following remit for the study is suggested:-

”To consider the adequacy of bus services within the city and make suggestions for their future improvement”.

- 4.2 In meeting the remit, the Review Committee will need to fulfil a number of key objectives. These include the following:-

- the existing arrangements for the operation of bus services within the City of Sunderland and their adequacy;
- the potential measures for improving partnership working;
- the level of subsidy to bus operators
- measures for people who are suffering social exclusion;
- the operation of the concessionary fare scheme

5 Approach of the Study

- 5.1 In order to ensure that the study remains structured and focussed, the following four stage approach is suggested: -

- Agree the remit and scope of the study;
- Provide background information on the current position and the issues involved;
- Obtain evidence and gather information;
- Formulate views and recommendations and approve the final report.

- 5.2 A proposed remit and scope for the study is set out in Paragraph 4.1 of the report. The remit is designed to ensure that a structured approach is taken to the study and to be sufficiently flexible to ensure that the Committee can investigate and respond to any issues that arise as a result of evidence generated.

- 5.3 The initial stages of the study will involve gathering information on the national and local policies on bus services.

- 5.4 The Committee has already received initial evidence from Nexus and two local bus operators on the adequacy of bus services in the city.

- 5.5 As the next stage in the study, Burney Johnson (Head of Transport and Engineering) has been invited to the meeting to set out the current position and progress being made on infrastructure work designed to improve bus services in the city.
- 5.6 Also attached to the report is a summary of the issues raised during seminar on “Transport Policy: Taking the Next Steps to improve Bus Services Locally” organised by Westminster Briefing. The event was held on 15 July 2008 and attended by Councillor Graeme Miller and Councillor Ian Cuthbert who will provide feedback to the Committee on the issues raised.
- 5.7 Potential sources of evidence include council officers with responsibility for issues such as transport and planning, NEXUS, partner organisations on the LSP, local businesses, and bus operators. The Committee may also wish to enquire as to best practice in other local authorities within and outside the region.
- 5.8 The views of members of the bus users and local residents will play a central role in shaping the work and recommendations of the Committee. Evidence can be gathered by a variety of means including presentations at Committee, Member visits, forums and conferences, written evidence and surveys, consultation exercises and externally commissioned research.
- 5.9 Following the submission of evidence, the Committee will have an opportunity to consider and discuss any issues raised during the study and formulate views and recommendations. This will be followed by the presentation of the final report to Committee.

6 Recommendation and Conclusion

- 6.1 The Review Committee is asked to consider the proposals in this report, finalise the remit and objectives of the study into bus services within the city.

7 Background Papers

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