

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL
CABINET – 6 DECEMBER 2022
REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR (RESIDENT AND NEIGHBOURHOOD)

COMMUNITY BUS SERVICE

1 Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Community Bus service is currently under review due to the need to make significant capital investment in new buses as the existing fleet come to the end of their life and changes in use of the service post COVID.
- 1.2 In July 2022, Cabinet agreed to consult with service users and the wider community to review current use of the service and to get feedback on options for a future service delivery model.
- 1.3 This report sets out the outcomes of the consultation and a new proposed option for the future delivery of the Community Bus Service.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 It is recommended that Cabinet:
 - a) Note the outcome of the consultation;
 - b) Agree in principle to the Council working in partnership with Communities 1st (Charity number: 1187164) to deliver the Council's Community Bus Service, subject to due diligence being completed;
 - c) Agree to waiver Contract Procedure Rules as set out in Section 8 of this report; and
 - d) Delegate authority to the Service Director (Resident and Neighbourhood), in consultation with the Executive Member (Housing), to enter into an agreement with Communities 1st.

3 Explanation

- 3.1 The Community Bus service is currently under review due to the need to make significant capital investment in new buses as the existing fleet come to the end of their life and changes in use of the service post COVID.
- 3.2 In July 2022, Cabinet agreed to consult with service users and the wider community to review current use of the service and to get feedback on options for a future service delivery model.

Current Service

- 3.3 The Council provides a subsidised door to door bus service for the local community. The buses are equipped for residents who find it difficult to use public transport and are suitable for wheelchair users.
- 3.4 The buses are used for the following journey types:
 - Shopper Hopper; door to door round trip to local supermarkets.
 - Lunch Club; door to door round trip to The Hive Community Centre for residents to attend lunch club provided by Jimmy Macs Charity.

Drive for Service Change

- 3.5 The current bus fleet is coming to its end of life and significant investment in a new fleet of at least three buses is required if the Council continues to directly deliver the service. Therefore, the capital investment, which could be between £240k-£360k prompted the decision to explore options for the future delivery model, before such a large capital investment was made.
- 3.6 The 2022/23 budgeted cost to operate the service is £245k. Whilst this cost is offset by some income, the net cost is £188k for 2022/23. This equates up to £61 per passenger per trip, which does not deliver good value for money.
- 3.7 There has been a reduction in use in the service, although it is acknowledged that the service hasn't been overly promoted. It is also recognised that this service supports users' independence and is valued by those and the families of those that use it.

Options Explored

- 3.8 The July Cabinet report identified three options to be explored as part of the review of the service:
- Cease the bus service and sign-post service users to similar transport services within the borough.
 - Retain the bus service (i.e., the Council continues to directly deliver the service); and
 - Work in partnership with Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) and deliver the bus service through their 'Dial A Ride Scheme'.

'Dial A Ride'

- 3.9 HCC deliver a door to door on-demand travel service across the county known as 'Dial A Ride.' Persons over 75 or who have a permanent disability are eligible to use this service.
- 3.10 If the Council were to work in partnership with HCC, the bus service would be delivered through Dial A Ride on the basis that:
- The Council would pay HCC £42k per annum to guarantee the delivery of lunch club transport at set-times. HCC would use suitable school buses when not in use between school runs.
 - Any existing Lunch Club users who may not meet HCC's eligibility requirements would still be able to use the service and any new Lunch Club service users would need to meet HCC's criteria.
 - Shopper Hopper service users would be signposted to HCC's existing Dial A Ride service.
 - All Shopper Hopper users would need to meet HCC's eligibility criteria.
 - Dial A Ride fees would apply to both Lunch Club and Shopper Hopper journeys; £2.10 for a single trip for the 1st mile, plus 50p per mile thereafter.
 - Users would need to pay this increase in fee.

Consultation Outcome

- 3.11 Throughout summer 2022, the Council consulted with service users and the wider community to understand how the services can continue in a way that offers better value for money, for the council and service users.

- 3.12 The consultation was open for six weeks to allow for additional time for responses in the summer period.
- 3.13 All service users registered for Shopper Hopper/Lunch club transport were posted a consultation pack. Council officers also attended the bus trips to advise service users of the consultation and encourage feedback on the options proposed. A total of 196 survey packs were sent out to service users.
- 3.14 The consultation was promoted online through the Council's website and social media to make the wider community aware.
- 3.15 The council also worked with Jimmy Macs charity who assisted in promoting the consultation by providing spare consultation packs to share with their lunch club attendees.
- 3.16 A total of 163 surveys were returned.
- 91 surveys were returned by registered service users, representing a response rate of 46%.
 - 72 surveys were returned from the wider community.
 - 69% (110) of respondents indicated that they are currently using or have previously used, one or more of the services.
 - 91% (147) of respondents are either fully aware or have some awareness of the transport services provided by the Council.
 - 57% (91) of respondents use/have used the Shopper Hopper service.
 - 30% (47) of respondents use/have used the service for Lunch Club transport.

Lunch Club Users

- 3.17 Overall, 58% (52) of respondents said they would continue to use the transport service for Lunch Club if it was provided by HCC Dial a ride.
- 3.18 33% (29) of overall respondents said they would stop using the service, citing concerns due to the immediate increased cost of HCC dial-a-ride.

Shopper Hopper transport Users

- 3.19 49% (58) of overall respondents said they would continue to do their own shopping using other providers, such as HCC dial-a-ride.
- 3.20 42% (50) of overall respondents said they would have no choice but to stop using the service, citing concerns about not being able to do their own shopping, reducing independence to socialise, increasing isolation and loneliness and higher costs of dial a ride.
- 3.21 A full summary of the consultation analysis is provided in Appendix A.

Summary and Further Options

- 3.22 Based on the feedback received, it indicates that some service users would stop using the service if the Council were to enter into a partnership with HCC and deliver the service through HCC Dial A Ride, in particular the Shopper Hopper service.
- 3.23 In total, 79 (37% of lunch club users and 63% of Shopper Hopper users) users indicated that they would stop using the Community Bus Service altogether.

- 3.24 During the consultation period, Officers also continued to explore other potential options that could address these concerns whilst alleviating the financial pressure on the Council.
- 3.25 Officers also undertook a further review of the current similar services other authorities provide across Hertfordshire and a full summary is provided in Appendix B.
- 3.26 The updated analysis shows that four other Hertfordshire Authorities deliver community bus services through a third party, including the charity, Communities 1st (Charity number: 1187164).
- 3.27 Communities 1st is a charity that connects and supports local voluntary and community organisations, helping to improve the quality of peoples' lives across the districts of St. Albans, Hertsmere, Broxbourne and East Hertfordshire. The charity offers multiple support services for residents in these areas, including community transport services.

Partnership with Communities 1st

- 3.28 Officers made enquiries with Communities 1st about the community transport services they provide for other the councils and have worked with them to develop a proposal that could continue to deliver the community bus service in partnership with the Council, with no immediate changes for service users, other than some positive enhancements, which are set out below.
- 3.29 If the Council were to deliver the community bus service through this partnership, it would be delivered on the basis that:
- The Council would continue to subsidise the cost of this service.
 - Three buses from the Council's existing fleet would be transferred to Communities 1st to support the delivery of the service initially, with replacement buses to be provided by Communities 1st as soon as practicable, once the service is established.
 - The service would operate Tuesday-Friday as per the Council's current service to deliver both Lunch Club and Shopper Hopper.
 - A number of added value initiatives would also be included to support the service and users. This includes:
 - a) Use of established volunteer pool of 'bus buddies' to support shopping in store, fetching items, carrying bags and additional support for users with boarding on/off bus.
 - b) Additional access to volunteer support services e.g., additional volunteer support for local community car scheme and volunteers within this district to support 'bring shopping to you' service which is funded by HCC.
 - c) Offer of organised coach trips and day trips, including private hire of transport for local community groups and charities.
- 3.30 In addition, Communities 1st will be able to support with the marketing and promotion of the scheme to encourage more service users.
- 3.31 There would be no change in fees for the service users in 2023/24; however, fees would increase by £1 per return journey each year up to 2026/27, making the maximum fee £6 per return journey.

Retained Delivery the Council

3.32 Arising from the outcome of the consultation, the Council has further considered in more detail if the service could be retained and delivered directly. A retained service could be redesigned so that:

- Three buses would be required to operate the service Tuesday-Friday as per the current service. The service could be run using two buses, with a third bus required for service back-up as there would be no contingency with such a small fleet.
- Fees and charges would need to be reviewed in line with inflation each year as part of the Council's budget setting process.
- However, it is forecast that the service would continue to cost the Council in the region of £120k per annum to operate, based on the current level of demand. The cost to replace three buses is estimated to be £240k-£360k depending on bus type

3.33 The Council would also not be able to deliver the additional benefits and access to additional support that Communities 1st have to offer Service Users.

Table 1. Final Summary of Options

| | Option 1: Partnership with HCC Dial-A-Ride | Option 2: Partnership with Communities 1st | Option 3: Deliver directly through the Council |
|----------------------|--|---|--|
| Summary | <p>Proposal includes:</p> <p>An agreement to provide Mon-Fri drop off/pick up to Lunch Club</p> <p>Signposting to existing dial-a-ride services for on demand shopping transport¹</p> <p>Any existing Lunch Club users who may not meet HCC's eligibility requirements would still be able to use the service. New service users would need to meet HCC's eligibility criteria.</p> <p>All Shopper Hopper users will need to meet HCC's eligibility requirements.</p> | <p>Proposal includes:</p> <p>Tue-Fri drop off/pick up to Lunch Club</p> <p>Tue-Fri scheduled location shopping bus service</p> <p>No change in the eligibility criteria</p> | <p>Proposal includes:</p> <p>Tues-Fri drop off/pick up to Lunch Club</p> <p>Tues-Fri scheduled location Shopper Hopper</p> <p>No change in the eligibility criteria</p> |
| Cost to Users | <p>£2.10 for the 1st mile, plus 50p per mile thereafter.</p> <p>Example costs for a return trip:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Living within one mile: £4.20 • Living three miles away: £6.20 • Living five miles away: £8.20 <p>Modelled costs based on service users' locations show return journeys would cost between £4.20 and £9.20.</p> | <p>Initially no change in current fee for Service Users in 23/24.</p> <p>Fees would increase by £1 per return journey each year up to 2026/27, making the maximum fee £6 per journey. Any increase in fees will be agreed as part of the annual budget setting process.</p> | <p>Fees would be increased as part of the annual budget setting process. It is likely that fees will need to increase above inflation to cover the costs of the service.</p> |

| | Option 1: Partnership with HCC Dial-A-Ride | Option 2: Partnership with Communities 1st | Option 3: Deliver directly through the Council |
|-------------------------------|--|---|--|
| Benefits | Guaranteed transport for lunch club. | Use of Volunteer 'bus buddies' to assist with shopping in store, fetching items, carrying bags and help with boarding on/off bus Additional access to volunteer support e.g., volunteer car scheme and volunteers to assist with 'bringing shopping to you' service for the most vulnerable. The Council would not need to replace the fleet and any replacement buses would be provided by Communities 1st. Option to deliver day trips on Monday Support with promotion and marketing of the service Capacity to offer private hire opportunities. | No change for service users. |
| Disbenefits | No guaranteed requests to book for a shopping trip can be met as dial-a-ride is a demand-led service, not a scheduled location bus service. No added value opportunities. | | No added value opportunities. |
| Risks | Reduction in users due to immediate increase in costs. 50% of service users to attend lunch club would need to pay more than £6 return trip. Reduction in new users due to eligibility criteria | Reduction in users due to phased increase in costs from 2024/25; however, it is expected this is unlikely due to the proposed small increases in fee. | Reduction in users due to immediate increase in costs. |
| Financial Implications | The Council would pay £42k to HCC per a year to guarantee the delivery of the lunch club service only, with protected rights for service users transferring. There will be no guarantee that dial-a-ride could meet the demand of shopping trip requests. | The Council would enter into a contract with Communities 1 st for up to 5 years, depending on the final negotiated cost. No capital cost to the Council for the replacement of buses. | It is anticipated that the Council would need to continue to subsidise the service at a cost of £120k per annum, without significantly increasing service user fees. A one-off capital cost of £240k for replacing three buses. |

- 3.34 It is considered that option 1 is dismissed as, based on the feedback received, it is not in the interests of the service users.
- 3.35 Based on the summary above, it is recommended that Cabinet agree to Option 2 on the basis that:
- There would be no immediate service change for the users and only small financial changes from 2024/25 onwards.
 - Communities 1st would be able to enhance the services as highlighted above; and
 - Capital investment from the Council would not be required as Communities 1st will be responsible for the bus fleet.

Implications

4 Finance Implications

- 4.1 A full breakdown of the actual service costs between 2018/19 and 2021/22, with the budget costs for 2022/23 are summarised in the table below.

| Community Buses | 2018/19 (pre-covid) | 2019/20 (pre-covid) | 2020/21 (covid) | 2021/22 (covid) | Budget 2022/23 |
|---|--------------------------------|--------------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------|---------------------------|
| Expenditure | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ |
| Staff Related Costs | 153,492 | 143,400 | 151,704 | 114,984 | 181,380 |
| Vehicle Costs (Repair and operating) | 76,947 | 86,946 | 42,025 | 35,294 | 57,630 |
| Sundries (Stationery, memberships, etc.) | 2,594 | 4,156 | 2,509 | 1,498 | 5,500 |
| Total Expenditure | 233,034 | 234,502 | 196,238 | 151,776 | 244,510 |
| Income | £ | £ | £ | £ | £ |
| Govt grant income (furlough) | n/a | n/a | -41,563 | -9,566 | n/a |
| Income from charges | -42,430 | -50,493 | -3,703 | -16,571 | -57,000 |
| Total Income | -42,430 | -50,493 | -45,266 | -26,137 | -57,000 |
| | | | | | |
| Net Costs to the Council | £191,604 | £184,009 | £150,972 | £125,639 | £187,510 |

- 4.2 It is expected that the ongoing operational costs to deliver the service in partnership with Communities 1st will be similar to the expected retained service costs.
- 4.3 The partnership will also mean that the Council does not need to make a significant capital investment, estimated to be between £240k-£360k.

5 Legal Implication(s)

- 5.1 The explanation clarifies that there is no statutory duty for the council to provide or enable a community transport service for its residents and the council has provided this service under its general discretionary power.

- 5.2 As the council has provided these services over the past 10 years, it has formally consulted with any service users that may be impacted with any proposed change. As highlighted in 3.11-3.20, consultation responses indicated that service users were most concerned about an increase in fee and an increase in social isolation if they could no longer access this service. The partnership with Communities 1st will ensure that there is no significant service change that would negatively impact service users so further consultation is not required.

6 Risk Management Implications

- 6.1 Please Refer to Part 2 report.

7 Security and Terrorism Implication(s)

- 7.1 There are no security or terrorism implications associated with the report.

8 Procurement Implication(s)

- 8.1 The Cabinet has the authority to waive with Contract Procedure Rules (section 31.2(f)) where they consider that there is an advantage to the Council (subject to compliance with the Public Contract Regulations 2015).
- 8.2 The services being provided are considered to be 'certain social and other specific services', known as the Light Touch Regime. The threshold for Light Touch services is £663,540.00 and below this threshold, there is no requirement to advertise.

9 Climate Change Implication(s)

- 9.1 There are no significant climate change implications associated with the report. The Council will work in partnership with Communities 1st to promote the service, reducing the reliance on single car journeys.

10 Health and Wellbeing Implication(s)

- 10.1 It is acknowledged that this service benefits vulnerable members of the community, providing the opportunity for users to maintain independence, whilst reducing social isolation.
- 10.2 The Council will work in partnership with Communities 1st to promote the service and service users will be able to benefit from additional support and services Communities 1st can offer.

11 Communication and Engagement Implication(s)

- 11.1 A communications plan will be developed to ensure service users are aware of the new arrangement.

12 Link to Corporate Priorities

- 12.1 The subject of this report is linked to the Council's Corporate Priority 'a sense of community where people feel safe', and specifically to the achievement of creating 'welcoming neighbourhoods and community spaces where people feel safe' and 'a well-run Council which puts our customers first' and specifically to the achievement of 'putting customers at the centre of what we do and how we design our services'.

13 Equality and Diversity

- 13.1 The Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) identified that there is the potential for positive impacts on age and disability.
- 13.2 98% of service users who responded to the consultation identified themselves as 60 years or older. There is a positive impact on age because Communities 1st will be able to provide additional support through the use of volunteer 'bus buddies' and access to additional support and services Communities 1st can offer.
- 13.3 67% of service users who responded to the consultation identified themselves as having a disability. There is a positive impact on disability because Communities 1st will be able to provide additional support through the use of volunteer 'bus buddies' and access to additional support and services Communities 1st can offer.

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Date 26 October 2022

Background papers

Previous Cabinet Paper: [Agenda for Cabinet on Thursday 14th July 2022, 7.00 pm – Welwyn Hatfield Borough Council \(welhat.gov.uk\)](#)

Appendices

Consultation summary (App A)
Community Transport – comparison table between local councils in Hertfordshire (App B)
Equality Impact Assessment (App C)