

LEICESTERSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL
NORTH WEST HIGHWAYS FORUM

16TH FEBRUARY 2016

RESPONSE TO PETITION: REQUEST FOR THE REINSTATEMENT
OF THE PREVIOUS NO.7 BUS SERVICE FROM NUNEATON TO
ASHBY

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF ENVIRONMENT & TRANSPORT

Purpose of Report

1. To report on the outcome of investigations following the receipt of a petition requesting the reinstatement of the previous No 7 bus service from Nuneaton to Ashby.

Background

2. Lead petitioner Mrs Starr presented a petition containing 40 signatures on 24th November 2015. The petition read as follows:

'The timetable for the bus service has been changed from a two-hourly service from Nuneaton to Ashby to a two-hourly service from Atherstone to Measham.

The bus still calls at Appleby, but does not take passengers to Ashby, which is their main shopping destination. The only possible connection from Measham to Ashby, the No.19, leaves four minutes before the No.7 arrives in Measham, meaning that passengers then have an hour's wait in Measham before they can continue their journey to Ashby.

The people who use the bus service are those who do not have any other means of transport and who rely on the bus to take them to Ashby. The inconvenience of the present bus timetable means that the bus is now very little used, although the need is great.

A petition has been signed by many villagers calling for the reinstatement of the old bus service. Please can I ask you to reconsider this highly inconvenient bus service or, at the very least, to take steps to alleviate the problems that we are now experiencing as a result of it.'

3. Changes to this service were agreed by the County Council's Cabinet in May 2014 as part of Leicestershire County Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy to save £500,000 from Leicestershire's supported bus network revenue support budget. These savings, required as a result of a reduction in funding from Central Government, meant that the level of subsidy paid for the former service was no longer sustainable and therefore removed. The reductions in service were consulted on twice and a recommendation to remove the service and replace it with Demand Responsive Transport was suggested. The Scrutiny Panel reviewing that consultation, which included several other services, recommended

that service 7 be provided as a Community Bus Partnership service to engage with local communities to increase its passenger usage.

4. As a result, the service 7 was reduced from a two bus contract between Nuneaton and Ashby to a one bus contract between Atherstone and Measham operated under a Community Bus Partnership (CBP) approach.
5. A CBP is a partnership between the County Council, a bus company/operator and the local communities along the route, which can include Parish Councils, current and potential bus users, local businesses, schools and attractions. This partnership will manage and monitor the service, look for ways to enhance it and take the lead on how to raise the profile and encourage increased usage by the local community.
6. Regular partnership meetings are held to discuss the performance of the service and any issues.

Outcome of Investigations

7. Appleby Magna is not currently represented on the service 7 CBP. To request representation interested parties should contact the County Council via email at publictraninfo@leics.gov.uk or phone on 0116 305 0002. The County Council have contacted Appleby Magna Parish Council to advise them of the service 7 CBP, how they can make representation and when and where the partnership meetings are held. Representation on the CBP will enable these concerns to be emphasised and continue to be highlighted.
8. The County Council's current bus support policy is to provide essential links to the nearest destination. It is recognised that Ashby is the preferred destination of some Appleby Magna residents but the link to Measham meets the policy requirements.
9. The County Council made the CBP aware of the petition at its last meeting on 3rd December 2015. The partnership fully understood the concerns raised but are of the view that good rail and bus connections at the Atherstone end of the route should be the priority and therefore intend to continue to promote the route and run the timetable on this basis; the timetable is specifically timed to link with rail arrivals to allow connection to Twycross Zoo and workers journeys towards Atherstone which the partnership believes will generate usage on the service . The partnership have decided that the service 7 timetable will therefore remain the same, however, the partnership will regularly monitor monthly revenue and loading data and will review the timetable if necessary.
10. The County Council has also raised the matter with 'Midland Classic' the bus operator of the commercial service 19 and asked that they consider revising the timetable to provide a better linked connection with the service 7 in Measham. However, they felt unable to accommodate this request at the current time.
11. It should be noted that the County Council continues to have a very challenging budget position as part of the Government's plans to end the public sector deficit. Over the last five-year Parliament, the council saved £103 million. The council

estimates that it will have to save £110 million over this Parliament – £32 million will be saved in 2015/16 and it now needs to save a further £78 million over the next four years.

12. The council is currently consulting on its savings for the next 4 years which include a further reduction of £2.0m in subsidised bus services in 2018/19.
13. A review of public transport provision in Leicestershire will be undertaken over the next 12-18 months with a view to consulting on a revised Policy in the summer/autumn of 2017 with service changes likely to take effect from April 2018. Service 7 will be part of this review.

Conclusion

14. Unfortunately, with the reduced funding resource for public transport subsidy as part of the delivery of the MTFs requirement, it is very difficult to design a timetable which aligns well with connections at both ends of the route. The CBP understand the concerns raised but are of the view the focus should be on aligning the timetable with the rail and bus connections available at the southern end of the service as this end of the route currently carries more passengers and has the greatest potential for growth. The partnership will continue to monitor performance of the service.
15. There is currently no intention by Midland Classic to change their service 19 timetable to provide a more suitable connection with service 7.
16. Appleby Magna is currently not represented on the CBP. Representation would help to emphasise and highlight issues such as this to the partnership.
17. A reduction of £2.0m in subsidised bus services in 2018/19 forms part of the council's 4 year saving plan currently being consulted upon. Service 7 will be part of a wider review of public transport provision over the next 12-18 months. Any policy revisions proposed following the review will be consulted on with a view to bringing in changes from April 2018.

Recommendation

18. It is recognised, given the varied travel needs of passengers along the route, that the new CBP service will not meet everyone's needs. The CBP will monitor the performance of the new route and will review the route and timetable as necessary.
19. Representation on the CBP by Appleby Magna either through the parish council or other local interested parties is encouraged, which would enable issues such as this to be directly emphasised and highlighted to the CBP.
20. Members are asked to note the content of this report.

Officer to Contact

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Background Papers

Petition containing 40 signatures is held on the Chief Executive's Department petition file.