

From: Mike Whiting, Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste

Phil Lightowler, Head of Public Transport

To: Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 17 January 2019

Subject: **Thanet and Sevenoaks Bus Service changes - Report into Public Consultation and Recommended Action**

Key decision: 18/00072

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Past Pathway of Paper: Environment and Transport Cabinet Committee – 20 March 2018

Future Pathway of Paper: For Decision by Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport & Waste

Electoral Division: Thanet and Sevenoaks Districts

Summary:

This paper confirms the result of the public consultation on proposed changes to Thanet and Sevenoaks.

Within the MTFP, there is a proposed reduction to the budget for Socially Necessary Bus Services (SNBS) of £455k.

Whilst there is a statutory requirement on Local Authorities to consider the provision of funding for SNBS, there is no statutory requirement to provide the funding. KCC has historically and continues to provide funding for SNBS.

This support amounts to 3% of the total bus mileage in Kent; the remaining 97% is commercially operated.

Following constructive dialogue with bus operators, proposals were received for changes to services in Thanet and Sevenoaks which will deliver savings with minimal impact to service users through changes to commercial bus provision already in place or a revised service offer.

A public consultation on the proposals was carried out between 22 November to 19 December. The proposed changes will deliver approximately £410k savings per year (£360k from the Thanet proposals and £50k from the Sevenoaks proposals).

145 responses have been received across both consultations; (108 relating to the Thanet changes and 37 for those in Sevenoaks). The responses have been analysed and form the basis of the more detailed reports attached as an appendix to this report.

Recommendation:

The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste to agree to the implementation of changes to selected bus services in Thanet and Sevenoaks effective from April 2019 as shown at Appendix A.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The support by local authorities of bus services that cannot be provided by the commercial market, but which are deemed to be socially necessary was included in the 1985 Transport Act, when bus services were de-regulated.
- 1.2 A local authority is required by law to give due consideration to provision of funding for such services, however having given consideration does not have to provide such funding. Therefore, the provision of funding for supported bus services is discretionary.
- 1.3 Within the MTFP, there is a proposed saving of £455k in the SNBS budget. The budget reduction was planned to be delivered through focused service changes/reductions and operational efficiency. This would limit the impact on users and ensure that isolated communities did not lose their only service.
- 1.4 In order to deliver the approved savings and following engagement with bus operators, proposals have been developed amending services in Thanet and Sevenoaks which deliver circa £410k discretionary funding savings.
- 1.5 This report sets out the detail of the proposed changes, the consultation outcomes and recommendations for changes that are provisionally planned for implementation from 1 April 2019.

2. Summary of proposals

2.1 On 11 March 2016, a paper was presented to the E&T Cabinet Committee outlining the need to go to public consultation on changes to three KCC funded bus services in Thanet and two in Sevenoaks. The changes are designed to save KCC approximately £410k through the commercialisation of those in Thanet (with some associated changes) and some reductions to service 404 / 5 in Sevenoaks.

2.2 A summary of the proposed changes and of their respective impacts is provided below.

Summary of Sevenoaks changes

Go-coach have proposed revisions to service 404 from Edenbridge to Sevenoaks/Plaxtol to Borough Green. The proposal refocuses the current service 404 on Edenbridge to Sevenoaks, dropping Plaxtol to Borough Green, which is already covered by another service and withdrawing the 'Wednesdays only' 405, which also has other service provision and will benefit from a Big Conversation pilot scheme that will serve East Hill and West Kingsdown.

Service No.	Operator	Route	Summary of proposed changes	Estimated saving
404/405	Go-coach	404 Edenbridge – Ide hill – Sevenoaks – Shipbourne – Plaxtol Monday to Friday (full week day and peak service between Edenbridge and Sevenoaks) 405 Sevenoaks – Otford – West Kingsdown Wednesday	Reduction in the overall number of journeys, removal of the Plaxtol to Borough Green section and the withdrawal of the Wednesday only 405 service. The introduction of a new commercial bus service for the school day only journeys together with off peak Edenbridge to Igtham Mote service via Sevenoaks. Service 222 will continue to offer a link to Borough Green and Tonbridge whilst service 429 provides West Kingsdown with a link to Dartford and Swanley.	£50,237

			In addition, a new Taxi Bus service is being introduced as a Big Conversation pilot scheme and this will provide new journeys linking West Kingsdown, Fairseat, Otford, Stansted and East Hill with Sevenoaks.	
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Summary of impacts if proposed changes went ahead

Service 404	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Villagers in Shipbourne, Dunk's Green and Plaxtol will lose their off-peak service to and from Sevenoaks. Residents will continue to have the option of using the 222 service which provides a good link to Borough Green, Tonbridge and Tunbridge Wells. • Reduction in the number of off-peak journeys (from five to three) to and from Sevenoaks for all villages served by the 404 service. • Loss of all journeys operating after the afternoon school peak (the service will finish from 16:30).
Service 405	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Route 405 (Wednesday only) would be withdrawn completely resulting in the loss of a Sevenoaks link for residents of West Kingsdown and Otford but from June, KCC is introducing a new 'Taxi Bus' service as a pilot scheme resulting from the 'Big Conversation' consultation. This will provide more regular off-peak journeys from these areas to Sevenoaks.

Summary of Thanet changes

Stagecoach has agreed to amend its current commercial network in the area to provide similar journey opportunities to the services identified below. Although they may operate less frequently, at different times and in some instances require passengers to walk to mainline bus routes. Route maps and timetables showing proposed changes are available in the Appendices from page 10.

Service No.	Operator	Route	Summary of proposed changes	Estimated saving
39/39A	Stagecoach	Dumpton – St Peters Monday to Saturdays (day time and peak)	Withdrawal of existing service 39/39A. There are alternative commercial services along most sections of route including the Stagecoach LOOP and service 34. A new service 48 would be introduced serving Sherwood Gardens and Dumpton.	£70,551
42/42A	Stagecoach	Monkton – Minster – Ramsgate – Westwood Cross – Margate Monday to Saturday	Withdrawal of existing service 42/42A. Service 9 would be diverted via Monkton and Minster providing hourly services to Ramsgate and Broadstairs as well as services to Canterbury in the opposite direction. Stagecoach service 11 will continue to provide a service from Monkton and Minister to Westwood Cross. Cliffsend would have access to service 34 on the Sandwich Road and service 34 would also serve the Nethercourt Estate.	£102,186
56	Stagecoach	St. Peters- Ramsgate - Dumpton Monday to Saturdays (off peak)	Withdrawal of existing service 56. Minor adjustments to the commercial network and other subsidised services to mitigate. In addition, a new service 37 would replace most of the route from Broadstairs via St Peters, Westwood Cross and Queen Elizabeth The Queen Mother Hospital (QEQM) to Margate.	£139,767

Summary of impacts if proposed changes went ahead

Service 39	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nixon Avenue will no longer be served. Passengers can access LOOP services on Margate Road or service 34 on Allenby Road. In most instances this would mean no more than a 5-minute walk.• Newington Road (between Margate Road and Bush Avenue) will no longer be served. Passengers can access service 34 in Bush Avenue/Stirling Way or the LOOP on Margate Road. In most instances this would mean no more than a 5-minute walk.• Northwood Road (between The Silvers and A256) will no longer be served. Passengers can access service 9 from The Silvers or service 34 on A256. In most instances this would mean no more than a 2-minute walk.• Dumpton Sherwood Gardens direct links to Westwood Cross are lost however LOOP services are available along Ramsgate Road and there are connections service 48 connects to the LOOP on Ramsgate Road and at Ramsgate Station.• 39A school journey will not be provided. Students will be required to make use of alternative service 933
Service 42	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cliffsend will no longer receive a direct service through the centre of the village.• Service 9 can be accessed on Canterbury Road West (10-minute walk) and service 43 on Sandwich Road (5-minute walk).• 42A school journey will no longer operate and students will be required to make use of services 38A, 43, 942, 943.
Service 56	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• East Kent Retail Park will no longer be served directly but can be accessed from Westwood Cross Bus Hub. This would mean no more than a 5-10 minutes' walk.• College Road between the College Road roundabout and Milmead Road will not be served. Passengers can access service 34 and new service 37 on the A255 St Peters Road or service 32 on Milmead Road. This would mean no more than a 5 minutes' walk.• Devonshire Gardens will no longer be served. Passengers can access service 8 and LOOP on Northdown Road or revised service 38 on Eastern Esplanade. This would mean no more than a 5 minute's walk.

3. Summary of consultation

3.1 Both consultations ran separately for four-weeks from 22 November until 19 December 2018. The consultation outlined the detail of the proposals and invited comments on the proposals and any equalities or other impacts on service users and residents.

3.2 A range of promotional activities supported both consultations including;

- direct communications to KCC Members, Parish Councils, associated stakeholders and others registered on the KCC consultation directory;
- social media promotion;
- posters on buses;
- public events and
- the use of bus inspectors travelling on affected services and engaging with users.

3.3 108 responses were received for in respect of the proposed changes to services in Thanet and 37 were received in respect of changes proposed in Sevenoaks.

3.4 The following themes were identified in both proposals :

- The majority of responses were submitted by individuals, but a small number responded as an organisation including four from Parish Councils.
- Around 65% of responders were from individuals aged 65 and over.
- The majority of responses; approximately 60% across both consultations, were submitted by women.
- Around 65% of responses did not agree with the proposed approach to making the savings although
 - 17% of responses to the Sevenoaks changes agreed with the approach
 - In Thanet 28% of responders agreed with the proposed approach reflecting the fact that for this scheme, some areas are better served as a result of the proposals.

3.5 The consultation reports are attached. A summary of the findings is provided below.

3.6 Sevenoaks

- 3 responses were received from; Seal, Plaxtol and Ightham & Shipbourne Parish Councils objecting to the impact of the changes.
- The 5 most highlighted themes from the open responses were:
 - Impact on the elderly

- The lack of alternative services for the areas served
- New development and Social Housing in the area
- Social isolation
- Access to work

No other significant equalities impacts were noted.

3.7 Thanet

- Thanet has one of the most comprehensive commercial bus networks in Kent, linking most parts of the district and includes the Loop service, which operates on a frequency of every 8 minutes.
- The changes proposed in the Thanet are on the basis that the current commercial network is revised to provide similar journey opportunities.
- Objections were received from Cliffsend Parish Council and the Bethesda Medical Centre raising particular concern about the impact on their communities.
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- The concerns of residents in Cliffsend have been recognised by Stagecoach/KCC and a route amendment option is being developed to address these concerns.
- In respect of Bethesda Medical Centre, there remains a 'dial-a-ride' scheme operated by Thanet Community Transport which provides access to medical services.
- For a number of current users of services 39,42 and 56 there is no change in service provision. Alternative services remain available.
- Users of service 42 and 56 make up around 71% of responses.
- The 5 most prominent themes of the open responses were:
 - Access to healthcare
 - Negative impact on the elderly
 - The loss of service 56
 - Comments on particular journey times and loss of frequencies
 - Support for the changes
- 27% of responders reported having some form of disability.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The £410k savings provided by these service changes will support a balanced budget.

5. Legal implications

- 5.1 The Transport Act 1985 requires that Local Transport Authorities consider socially necessary bus services. Expenditure in this area remains discretionary activity with LTAs having no obligation to subsidise these services.
- 5.2 Services carrying children with a statutory entitlement to free transport to school under the education act are unaffected by these proposals.
- 5.3 Failure to take due consideration of the implications carries a possible risk of decisions being subject to judicial review. This consultation and provided EqIA mitigates this risk.
- 5.4 Public Transport Team has sought advice from other authorities and is satisfied that the proposed consultation and related EqIA is consistent.

6. Equalities implications

- 6.1 Both public consultation were supported by an EqIA.
- 6.2 Following the public consultation the EqIA have been updated based on the consultation responses.
- 6.3 The EqIA process identified that there would be a greater impact on the elderly, disabled persons and disabled carers. The planned service changes have sought to mitigate this impact.

7. Implementation

- 7.1 The proposed timetable for the implementation of service changes is;
 - 17/01/19 Key Decision Report to E&T Cabinet Committee
 - 28/01/19 Registration of service changes by Bus Operators
 - 01/04/19 Service changes introduced (this may be revised due to Brexit)

Detailed timetables will be produced.

- 7.2 Implementation of the service changes will be managed by the Public Transport Team in conjunction with the operators, to ensure that appropriate service communication is undertaken.
- 8.3 Communication to users would be through the KCC website, the operator websites, liaison with local Parishes, posters and flyers on service buses. In addition, Traveline South East will be updated accordingly.

8. Conclusions

- 8.1 The responses for the changes proposed in Thanet have attracted a high level of support as for a number of locations/users the proposals represent an improvement on current service levels.

- 8.2 The changes proposed for Sevenoaks removes an underused service. The response rate recognises the low number of affected passengers.
- 8.3 Whilst there is a negative impact for some areas/users the services that remain will satisfy the basic social need.
- 8.4 work remains ongoing with the operators to mitigate the most acute impacts and themes identified particularly those with Equalities implications.

9. Recommendation(s):

- 9.1 The Cabinet Committee is asked to consider and endorse or make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Planning, Highways, Transport and Waste to agree to the implementation of changes to selected bus services in Thanet and Sevenoaks effective from April 2019 as shown at Appendix A.

10. Background Documents and appendices

- Appendix A Proposed Record of Decision
- Consultation reports - 'Thanet Bus Changes' and 'Sevenoaks Bus Changes'
- EqIA Screening Assessment
- EqIA detailed Assessment

11. Contact details

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