

**By:** Bryan Sweetland, Cabinet Member – Environment,  
Highways & Waste  
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**To:** Environment, Highways & Waste Policy Overview &  
Scrutiny Committee

**Subject:** Bus Services to Pembury Hospital

**Classification:** Unrestricted

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**Summary:** KCC is currently administering significant enhancements to bus services to the new Tunbridge Wells hospital in Pembury on behalf of the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust. This is a short term provision awaiting the resolution of planning issues (Tunbridge Wells Borough Council) related to the site. Members are asked to consider KCCs long term involvement in the provision of bus services for the hospital. This report presents a number of options for Members to consider.

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## **1. Introduction**

- 1.1 The new Tunbridge Wells hospital opened on 21<sup>st</sup> September 2011 in Pembury. The hospital, which was delivered by the Maidstone and Tunbridge Wells NHS Trust (the NHS Trust), has replaced the Kent and Sussex hospital in Tunbridge Wells town centre and services have been transferred from Maidstone Hospital to the new site. The new Tunbridge Wells hospital is in an out of town location and has limited access by modes other than the private car. When planning consent for the hospital was given Tunbridge Wells Borough Council (TWBC) and KCC ensured that the NHS Trust were obligated to provide significant enhancements to the local public transport network. However, after consent was granted, and the cost of the bus services became clear, the NHS Trust did not consider the specified improvements to be affordable. They therefore approached TWBC and KCC to investigate the feasibility of altering their obligations with regards to bus services.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 The planning consent for the hospital contains a condition which commits the NHS Trust to provide four specified bus services for five years. The gross cost of these services is estimated to be around

£11m, which the NHS Trust considers to be unaffordable and not in line with the scale of the development. The NHS Trust originally intended to sign a Section 106 agreement contributing £1.6m towards bus services. Whilst this was not progressed in favour of making bus service provision a condition of the planning consent, the NHS Trust point to this as a demonstration of a reasonable contribution in line with the scale of the development.

- 2.2 KCC officers consider that some of the services specified in the Planning Condition are very unlikely to become commercially sustainable at the end of the funding period and therefore do not represent good value for money. It is considered that the money could be better used to provide improvements to the bus network in the Tunbridge Wells area that provide for mass staff, patient and visitor movements and can deliver modal shift away from the private car. KCC therefore explored a new suggested network of high frequency services linking the hospital to Tunbridge Wells and Tonbridge with additional services to Maidstone.
- 2.3 The NHS Trust formally applied to TWBC to change the existing planning condition in June 2011. The application proposed that a Section 106 agreement be signed between the NHS Trust, TWBC and KCC which would commit the NHS Trust to provide £2.1m over five years to KCC to provide bus services. The gross cost of the services would exceed £2.1m, but it was anticipated that revenue (passenger fees) would increase year on year and therefore cover costs. The application proposed that the services would be managed throughout the funding period by a management board made up of the three interested parties, who would make changes to the services if there were likely to be any revenue shortfall.
- 2.3 Tonbridge and Malling Borough Council (TMBC) formally objected to the planning application (S106) because of the proposed loss of a direct service to West Malling. Following discussions between TWBC, TMBC and Sevenoaks DC and the NHS Trust, it was agreed to review the current proposals and try to address the lack of direct services from the rural hinterlands through use of the voluntary transport sector. TWBC has confirmed to the NHS Trust that they will not enforce Condition 29 until the current planning application has been determined, and that they will not determine the application until all of the issues have been resolved.

### **3. Current Situation**

- 3.1 When it became apparent that the situation would not be resolved until early in 2012, the NHS approached KCC to seek help in providing an interim solution, to provide a local network of bus services to provide sustainable access to the hospital. Despite the concerns raised by the local authorities, KCC's view is that the high frequency services to the local centres are the most appropriate solution. Ideally, direct services

would be provided between all rural villages and the hospital, but this is not feasible and any such services are very unlikely to become commercially sustainable after the funding has expired, meaning that they would cease to operate. Following the completion of a contractual agreement between KCC and the NHS Trust, KCC secured the provision of the high frequency services, acting as agents on behalf of the Trust. All costs are being met by the NHS Trust and the services commenced operation on 13<sup>th</sup> November 2011 for a fixed six month period.

- 3.2 The new services, combined with existing, provide, on average, a ten minute frequency between Tunbridge Wells and the hospital and fifteen minute frequency between Tonbridge and the hospital, with a £2.50 return fare available from both town centres. A half hourly frequency is also provided between the hospital and Maidstone in the off peak. The six buses per hour between Tunbridge Wells and the hospital are operated by three different bus operators (Arriva, Countryliner and occasionally Nu Venture) and KCC have ensured that return tickets are accepted on all services. Furthermore, the £2.50 fare is significantly cheaper than the commercial fare that would be charged. The services will operate until 13th May 2012. Before this date arrangements need to be made to provide sufficient sustainable access to the new Tunbridge Wells hospital in the long term. This is legally an issue for the NHS Trust and TWBC to resolve, although KCC as the Local Transport Authority are a key stakeholder.

#### **4. Long Term Solution**

- 4.1 There are various models which could be employed to resolve the long term service provision, with varying levels of involvement for KCC, these are :-
- KCC become party to a Section 106 agreement, whereby NHS Trust provide fixed amount of funding and KCC provide services. NB. Service level partly reliant on revenue generation.
  - KCC become party to a Section 106 agreement, whereby KCC provide services but the NHS Trust underwrites risk of services not meeting required levels of revenue generation. NB. Service level guaranteed
  - KCC act as agents/contractors in providing services on behalf of the NHS.
  - KCC have no direct involvement

It should be noted that the ultimate resolution will require agreement from both the NHS Trust and TWBC and that any position that KCC decide to adopt may not be acceptable to other parties, and vice versa.

- 4.2 We clearly wish to avoid exposure to open ended financial commitments. Especially when the responsibility is not essentially KCC's.

4.3 Transparency of responsibility and ownership is important in this matter, to ensure that good quality and appropriate services are provided and maintained.

## **5. Recommendations**

5.1 It is recommended that:

- Members note the background to the provision of bus services to the new Tunbridge Wells hospital and consider the approach KCC should take to assist in provision of services in the long term.

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