

MONDAY, 20 MARCH 2023

## **FUTURE BUS NETWORK REVIEW AND LOCAL BUS SERVICE INVESTMENT**

**Purpose of report:** To provide the Select Committee with an opportunity to scrutinise the Future Bus Network and Local Bus Service Investment report being presented to Cabinet on 28 March 2023.

### **Introduction:**

1. Cabinet is set to receive a report that considers the need to adapt and change certain local bus services, alongside planned investment to grow patronage and proposals to expand Digital Demand Responsive Transport (DDRT) services.
2. The Cabinet report provides Members with a copy of the full Future Bus Network and Local Bus Service Investment report, inclusive of all annexes, to be considered by Cabinet on 28 March 2023. The Cabinet report has been drafted following a comprehensive consultation exercise with residents and stakeholders.
3. The Select Committee is invited to scrutinise and comment on the Cabinet report so that their views may be shared with Cabinet helping to shape their decision making.

### **Background**

4. Local bus services are vital in supporting residents access essential services, such as employment, education & training, health care and essential food shopping, whilst also helping the economy of Surrey to thrive. Buses are key to achieving our Greener Futures work in encouraging residents to travel more sustainably and helping to reduce carbon emissions.
5. However, in common with many economic sectors, bus services have been impacted by the Covid pandemic with lower levels of patronage and changed travel patterns. The Council has therefore been working hard with the bus industry to build back bus patronage, including developing plans for investment in the network and associated infrastructure.

6. Moreover, a Government requirement of the extension of Covid bus recovery funding that is being used to support depressed patronage and revenues is that all Local Transport Authorities (LTAs) review bus services in their area to ensure they are financially sustainable once the recovery funding ends. A financial review of all bus services was therefore undertaken in collaboration with our bus operators, completed against a backdrop of rising costs (fuel, wages, maintenance, etc) that are pushing up operating costs and contract prices. This underlines the need to assess all local bus routes and plan for change across the whole bus network.
7. The Council is also investing circa £50 million to improve bus services and supporting infrastructure, focusing on places that offer the best opportunity to grow bus patronage. This is part of our Greener Future work and our Bus Service Improvement Plan; the Council's response to the national bus strategy, Bus Back Better. The aim is to grow bus patronage and improve our environment by:
  - Increasing the number of zero emission buses;
  - Helping buses to arrive on time through more bus priority measures, bus friendly traffic management and bus stop clearways so the bus can get close to the kerb; and
  - More Real Time Passenger Information displays and better information online.
8. A further strand of our improvement work is to introduce more DDRT services, offering a more flexible and innovative transport service to residents in certain areas. Here, the Council aims to build on the success of the Mole Valley Connect service operating in the north of Mole Valley.
9. In considering the need to adapt and change certain services, our planned investment to grow patronage and our plans to expand DDRT, officers have completed a comprehensive consultation exercise to enable residents and stakeholders to have their say on:
  - Investment in infrastructure to support bus services;
  - Maintaining or changing bus services to better reflect use; and
  - More Digital Demand Responsive Transport services.
10. The consultation ran from 3 November 2022 and closed on 6 January 2023, with over 2,600 responses received.

<b>Conclusions:</b>
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11. The Cabinet report provided sets out the process and outcome of the consultation, which has been used to shape the recommendations and way forward detailed in the Cabinet report, including the proposed refresh of our Bus

Service Improvement Plan in May this year. The implementation of the recommendations is core to the Council's Greener Futures work.

**Recommendations:**

12. That the views of the Select Committee in scrutinising the Future Bus Network and Local Bus Service Investment report to Cabinet be recorded and made available to the meeting of Cabinet scheduled for 28 March, helping to shape and inform the decisions to be taken.

**Next steps:**

To formally record the views of the Select Committee and provide these to Cabinet for consideration at their meeting scheduled for 28 March 2023.

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**Sources/background papers**

Cabinet 28 March 2023 - Future Bus Network and Local Bus Service Investment report.

Annex A – Future Bus Network Review Consultation Feedback Analysis

Annex B – Changes to Bus Services Summary

Annex C – Expansion of Digital Demand Transport Summary

Annex D – Equality Impact Assessment

Annex E – Bus Service Improvement Programme Route Analysis

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