

REPORT TITLE: WINCHESTER NIGHT BUS SERVICE UPDATE

21 MARCH 2019

REPORT OF CORPORATE HEAD OF REGULATORY

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WARD(S): TOWN WARDS

PURPOSE

In March 2018 (WTF 261 refers) the Town Forum resolved to extend the funding of the Winchester night bus by an additional year on the original two year contract. This extension is let through Hampshire County Council and the service delivered by Stagecoach.

The current contract will therefore expire in September 2019 and the Town Forum needs to decide whether to continue to support the nightbus financially for another two year contract or other such time period as considered appropriate.

Changes to the timetable of services provided by Stagecoach in September 2018 resulted in a cost saving to the Town Forum of approximately £4900 per annum as services previously supported by the Forum were mirrored by new commercial services.

The Forum has been considering whether to use the remainder of the budget to support other Winchester bus services. Discussions about possible options have been held but no consensus on this has been reached to date. The Forum may therefore wish to give further consideration to this matter which can then be reported back to a future Forum meeting once the costs of continuing the nightbus service are known.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. That the Town Forum decides whether to continue to support the funding of the Winchester nightbus service in principle by asking Hampshire County Council to tender for a new contract for a period of 2 years from September 2019 or other such period as may be agreed.

2. Assuming the Town Forum decides to ask Hampshire County Council to tender the nightbus service the results of the tendering exercise be reported back to the next meeting of the Forum in June when a final decision can be made whether to continue funding the nightbus service.
3. Assuming that the Town Forum agrees to support the continuation of the nightbus beyond September 2019 that Littleton and Harestock Parish Council be approached to request a financial contribution towards the running of the service.
4. That the Town Forum considers deferring committing the funding of bus services in addition to the nightbus until the cost of continuing the nightbus is known, following the tendering by Hampshire County Council, and that options for supporting other bus services have been further considered. Options can be reported back to a future meeting of Forum for a decision.

IMPLICATIONS:

1 COUNCIL STRATEGY OUTCOME

- 1.1 Supporting public transport services is consistent with improving the quality of the district's environment and, in particular, reducing harmful emissions through holistic transport planning.

2 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 2.1 The Town Forum has made provision in the Town Account for the continued funding of the nightbus as a recurring item with a budget of £12.7k for 18/19. Provision of £13.5k has been approved for 19/20.
- 2.2 In the past the parishes of Badger Farm and Littleton and Harestock have agreed to make a contribution of £500 each to support the service. Littleton and Harestock will be approached again to see if they are willing to do the same for a new contract (the night bus no longer serves Badger Farm following changes to the commercial timetable).
- 2.3 Changes to the Stagecoach's commercial contracting arrangements in September 2018 reduced the Forum's obligation to £7,800. Whilst the cost of a new nightbus contract cannot be finalised until a new procurement exercise is undertaken, even allowing for an inflationary up-lift for a new tender the likely costs should be well within the Forum's budget provision for 19/20

3 LEGAL AND PROCUREMENT IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 Hampshire County Council are able to seek tenders for the nightbus service with a decision on whether to enter into a contract being taken at a later date when the cost of the service is known. Hampshire County Council have agreed to this and to procure the contracts using their procurement processes using their passenger transport bus contracts framework. Any contract will be held by the County and funded by the Town Forum.

4 WORKFORCE IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 None

5 PROPERTY AND ASSET IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None

6 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

- 6.1 Should the Forum agree to the recommendations then discussions to be held with Littleton and Harestock parish council as they have agreed to make a financial contribution to the costs of running the night bus service in the past.

7 ENVIRONMENTAL CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 As referred to at 1.1 above, supporting public transport is in line with the aims of the Council Strategy and operating additional bus services will align with this. Providing such services is likely to discourage the use of private modes of transport for journeys between the city centre and the outlying neighbourhoods of Winchester.

8 EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSEMENT

8.1 None

9 DATA PROTECTION IMPACT ASSESSMENT

9.1 None required

10 RISK MANAGEMENT

10.1

Risk	Mitigation	Opportunities
<i>Property – None</i>		
<i>Community Support Parish councils have been supportive of the service so withdrawing its funding could undermine confidence in the Town Forum's commitment to sustainable transport.</i>	Continue to fund the service for a further period of two years or other such period as may be agreed.	Continue to seek financial support from parish councils.
<i>Timescales - None</i>		
<i>Project capacity- None</i>		
<i>Financial / VfM - None</i>		
<i>Legal – None</i>		
<i>Innovation - None</i>		
<i>Reputation See Community support Section above. Furthermore withdrawing the service which has run since 2012 could attract criticism from regular users. It may also be viewed as reducing support for the city centre's night-time economy.</i>	Continue to fund the service for a further period of two years or other such period as may be agreed.	Continued funding for the nightbus would show the Council's commitment to delivering services which benefit the town's residents and businesses.
<i>Other – Ending the nightbus service could adversely impact on the city's night-time economy.</i>	Continue to fund the service for a further period of two year or other such period as may be agreed.	

11 SUPPORTING INFORMATION:

- 11.1 The Town Forum first decided in 2012 to support an evening bus service between the city centre and Badger Farm, Stanmore, Weeke and Harestock on Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays and has subsequently made provision for this in its budgets.
- 11.2 The service is therefore well established. Appendix A shows details of passenger numbers for the period since its inception. It should be noted that these figures do include some buses not funded by the Town Forum in order to provide consistent data so patronage over the period can be more readily assessed. Members may recall that Stagecoach made changes to their own evening bus services in 2015 and these were factored in when the new contract for the nightbus began in September 2016. Further changes to the contracting arrangements which occurred in September 2018 have resulted in a cost saving to the Town Forum in that the current financial obligation is now £7,800 of an allocated budget of £12,700, leaving a saving or surplus of £4,900. Effectively this means that the Forum now just subsidises the late evening services on the No3. Bus route. Previously, it also supported the No.5 but this was no longer necessary when changes were made to the commercial timetable which mirrored the service funded by the Forum. Bus operators regularly review their commercial operations so the current situation could change at relatively short notice.
- 11.3 Appendix A shows that between 2012 and 2016 the average number of passengers carried per year was 5861 (for ease of comparison the number 5 data is included albeit the Forum ceased funding this service in September 2018). In 2017 this increased significantly to 6635. An updated comparison figure for 2018 is not available as some of that data is commercially sensitive. However the average daily passenger figures for 2018 is very similar to previous years. Passenger numbers for most journeys made by the 3 and 5a either remained the same as pre-2017 levels or increased slightly. Consequently, passenger numbers are still modest, and the number 3 service supported by the Forum is unlikely ever to be commercially viable.
- 11.4 The funding of the service has been included in the Town Account as a recurring item and it is anticipated that the provision made for 19/20 (£13,545) will cover the full cost of the Town Forum's commitment. However, final figures will not be available until the service is tendered for. There is also the possibility of external contributions towards the cost of the service from Littleton and Harestock parish council. They have supported the service in the past. In light of the latest passenger information attached at Appendix A the Town Forum needs to decide whether continued investment in the nightbus service for a new 2 year contract from September 2019 (or other period) is appropriate in principle and provides value for money. A final decision can be made at the next Forum meeting in June when the costs of continuing the service will be known following the tendering exercise carried out by Hampshire County Council.

- 11.5 As just funding the number 3 reduced expenditure on the nightbus services , and has resulted in surplus in the budget, the Forum has been considering whether it could support other bus services in the town using the funds previously allocated to the number 5.

This matter was considered by some Forum members at a session arranged in October last year which was aimed at identifying possible options that could be pursued. There was interest at the meeting in relation to providing some additional support to the number 4 service. However, following some further discussions, including with representatives of the Highcliffe community and feedback on how the service could be improved at the Teg Down end of the route, there is no consensus evident as yet relating to how this service, or another bus service, should benefit from Forum support.

In view of the uncertainties of the costs involved in the nightbus tendering process and the potential for the commercial operator to make timetable changes over the next six months the Forum may consider it appropriate to defer making a decision regarding the potential funding of other services at this point, including the number 4 service, which is the route which has been considered to date. A report can be brought back to a future Forum meeting once cost details for the nightbus service are known and the matter has been subject to further consideration.

12 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 12.1 Other than that identified in 11 above no other options have been considered at this point and continued financial support for the nightbus service would be based upon a new 2 year contract of the currently supported services.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:-

Previous Committee Reports:-

WTF261 – Winchester Evening Bus Service Up-date - 28 March 2018

WTF241 – Winchester Evening Bus Service Up-date - 27 June 2016

WTF238 – Winchester Evening Bus Services Up-date 9 March 2016.

WTF216– Winchester Evening Bus Services Update – 11 March 2015.

WTF203 - Winchester Town Evening Bus Service Update - 25 June 2014

WTF201 – Winchester Town Evening Bus Service – 12 March 2014

WTF194 – Winchester Evening Bus Service – 11 September 2013

WTF179 – Winchester Night Bus – 12 September 2012

Other Background Documents:-

None

APPENDICES:

Appendix A – Winchester Night Bus Patronage - Sept 2012 to December 2018

Appendix A - Winchester Night Bus Patronage - Sept 2012 to December 2018

Summary Statistics	2012 to 2016	2017	2018
Maximum passengers carried in one day (all services)	76	112	89
Maximum passengers carried - any one service	26	44	38
Minimum passengers carried in one day (all services)	7	11	7
Average daily passengers carried (all services)	38	43	41
Annual passenger numbers carried	5697	6586	N/A
Average passengers carried per bus	6	7	7
Average passengers carried on No. 3 service	5	6	6
Average passengers carried on No. 5A service	7	8	7

Summary by Service Sept 2012 to Jan 2016	Service No. 3			Service No. 5A		
	2210	2315	15	2135	2240	2340
Ave. Thursday passenger No.	5	4	2	7	5	4
Ave. Friday passenger No.	7	7	4	9	7	10
Ave. Saturday passenger No.	6	4	4	8	7	7
Ave. No. of passengers per week	18	15	9	24	19	21
Ave. No. of passengers per bus	6	5	3	8	6	7

Summary by Service 2017	Service No. 3			Service No. 5A		
	2210	2315	15	2135	2240	2340
Ave. Thursday passenger No.	8	5	3	8	5	5
Ave. Friday passenger No.	10	7	4	9	9	11
Ave. Saturday passenger No.	9	6	3	9	9	10
Ave. No. of passengers per week	27	18	9	25	23	25
Ave. No. of passengers per bus	9	6	3	8	8	8

Summary by Service 2018	Service No. 3			Service No. 5A		
	2210	2315	15	2135	2240	2340
Ave. Thursday passenger No.	9	5	2	8	4	4
Ave. Friday passenger No.	11	7	4	9	7	10
Ave. Saturday passenger No.	9	7	3	8	8	10
Ave. No. of passengers per week	28	19	9	25	19	24
Ave. No. of passengers per bus	9	6	3	8	6	8

Note - Data only available for 5A to September 2018