

16. LOCAL BUS REVIEW - UPDATE

The Council Executive considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Operational Services advising of ongoing changes to the local bus network and to seek approval for extensions to a number of subsidised bus services until the review of the entire network had been completed.

The Head of Operational Services explained that the local bus network was provided through a combination of commercial services (80% of the network) and council subsidised services (20% of the network).

The commercial network underwent significant and largely positive changes in 2018 as First Bus revised its services and Lothian Country extended theirs. As a result, commercial services were now serving West Lothian communities differently which had resulted in a number of route and timetable overlaps between the commercial and subsidised network.

The overlap was such that the council was now legally required to adjust its subsidised services so work was underway to identify the required changes and a revised subsidised local bus service. This work could not be started earlier as the commercial market was changing frequently and any modelling work undertaken would have been negated as the next phases of changes were made.

The Head of Operational Services continued to advise that a report would be submitted to a future meeting of the Development and Transport Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel (PDSP) to discuss the changes required to remove overlaps and to maintain a sustainable subsidised service which would contribute to the councils overarching public transport strategy. The outcomes of those discussions would be reported to the Council Executive.

To maintain the current level of subsidised services until the review was complete would require the extension of a number of time limited additional services as agreed by Council Executive on 6 February 2018; these contracts were summarised in Appendix 1 attached to the report. It was proposed that these contracts be extended for a further 4 months until 31 July 2019 at a cost of approximately £100,000.

In terms of the budget it was noted that since the month 9 General Fund Revenue Budget was reported the largely mild weather had continued and it was now anticipated that the winter maintenance budget would underspend by £100,000 in 2018/19. Therefore it was proposed that this underspend was preserved for the cost of extending the time limited additional services for four months in 2019/20.

It was recommended that Council Executive :-

1. Notes the changes to the local bus network;
2. Notes the requirement to review the council subsidised local bus services to remove duplication with commercial services;

3. Agrees that a report was submitted to the Development and Transport PDSP to discuss changes to the subsidised network;
4. Agrees a four month extension to council subsidised additional bus services outlined in Appendix 1 attached to the report; and
5. Agrees the cost of the contract extensions (£100,000) would be funded from a projected underspend in the 2018/19 winter maintenance budget.

Decision

To approve the terms of the report