

MEETING: Council Executive

DATE: 6 October 2020

Note the action taken in terms of Standing  
Order 31 (Urgent Business)

DATA LABEL: PUBLIC



## **COUNCIL EXECUTIVE**

### **LOCAL BUS PROVISION – BREICH VALLEY**

#### **REPORT BY HEAD OF OPERATIONAL SERVICES**

##### **A. PURPOSE OF REPORT**

The purpose of this report is to advise Council Executive of the outcome of a tender process completed by Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) which has options for bus services within Breich and agree the council's response to a cross boundary contract request.

##### **B. RECOMMENDATION**

It is recommended that Council Executive;

1. Note the results of the tender exercise completed by SPT
2. Note the financial contribution required by the council;
3. Instruct officers to accept the cross-boundary contribution contract with SPT.

##### **C. SUMMARY OF IMPLICATIONS**

<b>I Council Values</b>	Focusing on our customers' needs; being honest, open and accountable; providing equality of opportunities; developing employees; making best use of our resources; working in partnership.
<b>II Policy and Legal (including Strategic Environmental Assessment, Equality Issues, Health or Risk Assessment)</b>	The council has a policy of supporting public transport services where resources permit. The Transport (Scotland) Act 1985 states that it is the duty of the council, in exercising their power, to conduct themselves as not to inhibit competition in the commercial market.
<b>III Implications for Scheme of Delegations to Officers</b>	None
<b>IV Impact on performance and performance Indicators</b>	The council has a target PI for Public Transport of having 90% of residents with access to an hourly or better daytime service Monday to Saturday. It is possible that changes in the commercial and subsidised network could impact this PI.
<b>V Relevance to Single Outcome Agreement</b>	The local bus network contributes to a number of outcomes by connecting communities with services and employment.

<b>VI</b>	<b>Resources - (Financial, Staffing and Property)</b>	The approved Public Transport budget for 2020/21 is £9.72 million. The budgeted cost for the previous LBS 71 is £86,452. The annual cost for the tendered LBS 34A service is £65,000.
<b>VII</b>	<b>Consideration at PDSP</b>	None
<b>VIII</b>	<b>Other consultations</b>	Financial Management Unit

## **D. TERMS OF REPORT**

### **D.1 Background**

Blue Bus Ltd, the operator for the LBS 71 Breich – Livingston bus service, has submitted a notice of termination on the LBS 71 contract. The contract had been temporarily suspended since the beginning of lockdown in March 2020 as the operator stated they were unable to fulfil the contract due to resource implications.

Officers continued to engage with Blue Bus throughout the various stages of lockdown to discuss options in accessing government grants which may help support them in returning to normal service levels. The most recent discussion however revealed that a loss of drivers following the lockdown restrictions has resulted in their inability to re-instate service 71 which has resulted in the formal termination.

The council is therefore required to consider public transport options, in particular relating to the Breich area, in order to tender and contract a replacement service.

### **D.2 Passenger Engagement Exercise**

In order to ensure that Breich residents were not left without a local bus connection during the suspension of the LBS 71 service, the council extended the existing Demand-Responsive Taxibus service for Breich to mirror journeys provided by service 71. The taxibus journeys provided a connection between Breich and West Calder or Fauldhouse.

As part of the passenger engagement exercise, an online survey was published for Breich residents to provide feedback on both the LBS 71 service prior to lockdown as well as the DRT service which has been operating.

The survey closed on 7 September 2020 and responses have been analysed. The main theme from survey responses is that a bus service is the preferred option for travel within the area and that transport to Livingston is most utilised destination.

### **D.3 West Calder to Livingston Corridor**

The council is only permitted to subsidise local bus services where it is not in competition with the commercial market.

Up until December 2019 the West Calder to Livingston section of the LBS 71 was operated on a commercial basis. In December 2019, there was a requirement to retender the service, and the council liaised with the commercial operators on this corridor to discuss the service provision within the area. There was no objection raised by the operators and a tender process progressed with a Livingston destination tender option. This then resulted in the council subsidising the entirety of the route from January 2020 including the previously commercial section.

Similarly, following the most recent cancellation the council has consulted with the commercial operators regarding the commercial elements of the route and any concern regarding commercial competition. Given the recent effect of COVID 19 on the local bus network and patronage both operators have expressed the view that the West Calder to Livingston corridor is well served commercially and any subsidy by the council would be in competition with the commercial market.

Therefore, the West Calder to Livingston section of the route cannot be included in any option tendering process however the council would continue to encourage commercial activity within the area.

### **D.4 Cross Boundary Tender with Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT)**

Separate to the LBS 71 cancellation the council has been notified by SPT that they are retendering the 34A service which currently is subsidised by SPT up to Forth and then runs commercially to Livingston via Whitburn.

SPT included an option in their tender welcoming additional bids which would connect to West Lothian and confirmed that a successful bid has been received providing a cross boundary service from Lanark to Livingston via Fauldhouse and Breich.

SPT have therefore offered a cross boundary contract agreement where SPT would provide subsidy for the Lanark to Shotts via Forth section of the route and West Lothian Council would subsidise the section from Fauldhouse to West Calder via Breich. The latter section of the route to Livingston would therefore be provided on a commercial basis ensuring that the council is not directly competing with the commercial market.

This contract option would provide the council with a public transport link for the Breich maintaining the service through to Livingston whilst also creating a new cross boundary link for Breich residents to South Lanarkshire which was not previously in place.

## **D.5 Resource and Financial Implications**

The approved Public Transport budget for 2020/21 is £9.72 million. The budgeted cost for the previous LBS 71 is £86,452.

The cross-boundary contribution contract with SPT would be an annual cost of £65,000 which is approximately a £20,000 annual saving.

## **D.6 Next Steps**

Should the council wish to accept the cross-boundary contribution contract formal confirmation to SPT is required by 16 September 2020.

SPT will then submit a short notice application to the Office of the Traffic Commissioner requesting a service start date of Monday 28 September 2020.

## **E. CONCLUSION**

Blue Bus Ltd has submitted formal cancellation of the subsidised LBS 71 contract and therefore the council is required to seek an alternative service for the Breich area. SPT have completed a tender exercise which has resulted in an offer to West Lothian Council for a cross boundary contribution contract which would provide a service from Lanark to Livingston via Fauldhouse and Breich starting on Monday 28<sup>th</sup> September. This service provides an enhanced service within available budget.

## **F. BACKGROUND REFERENCES**

None

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**15 September 2020**