

Transport and Environment Committee

10.00am, Thursday, 17 August 2023

Response to motion by Councillor Cowdy – Better Buses for Ratho

Executive
Wards

Routine
All, particularly Wards 1 – Almond and 14 –
Craigentinny/Duddingston

1. Recommendations

- 1.1 It is recommended that Committee notes this update on current arrangements and plans to review the Council's supported bus service network, including service provision to/from Ratho. The review will also explore whether accessibility and connectivity issues elsewhere in the city can be enhanced (e.g. for service provision in the Willowbrae area).

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Report

Response to motion by Councillor Cowdy – Better Buses for Ratho

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 This report responds to a motion by Councillor Cowdy on 18 May 2023 to outline plans to improve bus service provision in Ratho and follows up on previous motions to outline plans to improve bus service provision in Ratho and Willowbrae.

3. Background

- 3.1 The Council are aware of ongoing local dissatisfaction with some supported bus service provision in the city, most notably the Ratho community with regards to the Service 20 (Chesser to Ratho) service.
- 3.2 On 18 May 2023, Committee approved an adjusted motion by Councillor Cowdy which requested a report that identifies and provides a suitable public transport solution for the residents of Ratho.
- 3.3 This report provides an update on the actions agreed and outlines the planned steps to address this within the context of the overall supported service network.
- 3.4 The report also includes proposals to include a review of bus service provision in Willowbrae in light of the withdrawal of the former commercially operated Service 69.

4. Main report

Bus Services for Ratho

- 4.1 Following the threat of contract cancellation and service disruption due to industry wide driver shortages, (the operator) McGill's continues to provide three services serving the west of the city. However, the service is running at a reduced frequency (with an associated reduction in the amount they are paid as part of their contract agreement).
- 4.2 Reliability issues remains an issue with McGill's services as a result of challenges with on-going driver recruitment and retention. This presents a problem for many

residents without access to alternative transport and dissuades mode shift to public transport.

- 4.3 McGill's are aware that the Council intends to re-tender the contracts for these services and they have agreed to continue to operate their contracted services until the tender process is complete and new contracts are awarded.
- 4.4 To facilitate this, the current contract extension option with McGill's will be implemented in order to ensure service continuity.

Supported Bus Service Provision

- 4.5 Supported bus service provision for Ratho cannot be considered in isolation as changes to this will impact on other subsidised routes and also on the potential for new services (where there are currently none).
- 4.6 Within this overall context, the Council intends to carry out a wider supported service review and to re-tender a number of supported service contracts to both help resolve reliability issues and explore whether accessibility and connectivity issues elsewhere in the city can be enhanced (e.g. for service provision in the Willowbrae area to replace the former commercially operated Service 69 that was withdrawn in 2019).
- 4.7 To assist with this review, Jacobs consultancy have been appointed. The activities that they will progress will include:
 - 4.7.1 Reviewing the current supported services contracted by the Council, identifying challenges and opportunities and assessing current levels of performance;
 - 4.7.2 Developing recommendations for tender based on the challenges and opportunities identified;
 - 4.7.3 Developing alternative route / service options; and
 - 4.7.4 Making recommendations on route options that perform best in addressing transport planning objectives while working within available funding. This will include consideration of retention of existing routes, amendments to currently supported routes, and exploring new route opportunities (either wholly new or combinations of previous services).
- 4.8 Dialogue with operators on all supported service requirements for the city has been ongoing and this will help tender specification documents to be produced.
- 4.9 All of the information received from the Ratho Bus Working Group will also be considered as part of the review of existing and planning for future services.
- 4.10 In addition, an all stakeholder meeting will be arranged to discuss on the review. Further discussions will also take place when the tender options are identified.

5. Next Steps

- 5.1 The review will commence shortly. It is anticipated that this, and the retendering process, will be completed by the end of this calendar year, with a report seeking approval for the award of contracts to Finance and Resources Committee in January 2024. Following this, a period of registration will be required before the services become fully operational.
- 5.2 A meeting with local stakeholders and McGill's is currently being set up.

6. Financial impact

- 6.1 The Council's annual supported bus service budget of £1.5million is fully allocated and future contract provision will have to be considered within this context. In addition, it is anticipated that future tender submissions will be higher than previously received.
- 6.2 The Council will look to utilise any Section 75 Agreement funds permissible for use in the impacted area to complement existing revenue funding.

7. Equality and Poverty Impact

- 7.1 Supported bus service provision helps increase equality and reduce poverty by increasing access to employment, health, educational, retail, and cultural destinations in areas not served by the commercial bus network. Increased social inclusion as a result of enhanced connectivity and accessibility are at its heart.

8. Climate and Nature Emergency Implications

- 8.1 Supported bus service provision encourages sustainable public transport use and seeks to encourage modal shift away from individual car use to help reduce harmful emissions, improve air quality, and reduce congestion.

9. Environmental Impact

- 9.1 As noted above, supported bus service provision helps encourage sustainable public transport use and seeks to encourage modal shift away from individual car use to help reduce harmful emissions, improve air quality, and reduce congestion.

10. Risk, policy, compliance, governance and community impact

- 10.1 The Council have received considerable feedback from the Ratho community and its representatives regarding bus service provision via a combination of direct correspondence, site meetings and consultation events and this will be fed into the review process alongside input from other local stakeholders.

11. Background reading/external references

- 11.1 Finance and Resources Committee 5 March 2020 – [Award of Contracts for Supported Bus Services](#)
- 11.2 [Minute](#) of the meeting of Transport and Environment Committee on 18 May 2023 – Motion by Councillor Cowdy - Better Buses for Ratho.
- 11.3 [Minute](#) of the meeting of the Council on 30 June 2022 – Motions by Councillors Whyte and Mowat – Restoring a Bus Service for Willowbrae, Lady Nairne and Bus for Dumbiedykes

12. Appendices

- 11.1 None