



EXECUTIVE MEMBER DECISION

REPORT OF:	Executive Member for Growth and Development
LEAD OFFICERS:	Director of Growth and Development
DATE:	17 th August 2020

PORTFOLIO/S AFFECTED:	Growth and Development
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WARD/S AFFECTED:	All
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SUBJECT:	Supported Bus Services 2020/21
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Council has been successful in receiving £56,788 of funding from the Department for Transport (DfT) to restore lost bus services and to support extensions to current supported and commercial services in financial year 2020/21.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Member:

1. Approves the procurement of local bus services in line with DfT funding and guidance commencing 2020/21
2. Accepts the tender from Moving People, as most economically advantageous, to operate the Darwen to Royal Blackburn Hospital to Blackburn service
3. Delegates authority to the Director of Growth and Development, in consultation with the Executive Member for Growth and Development, to amend and conclude contractual arrangements subject to adequate budget provision.

3. BACKGROUND

The Council has been successful in receiving £56,788 of Supported Bus Service Funding from the Department for Transport (DfT) out of £30m nationally to restore lost bus services and to support extensions to current supported and commercial services in financial year 2020/21.

The funding is aimed at restoring and improving key bus links, and to bring back services which can't be provided on a commercial basis by local bus operators, but which are essential in connecting people with key Town Centre, Health, Shopping, Employment and Community destinations.

4. KEY ISSUES & RISKS

The Council's transport team has identified a number of gaps in the local bus market following in depth consultation with elected members, local residents and service users.

The majority of the Council's 2020/21 funding allocation will be directed at "*restoring lost services*" and the direct link from Darwen to Royal Blackburn hospital, a former commercially operated service which was withdrawn in June 2018.

The following areas will be served by a restored local bus service linking:

- Darwen Town Centre (Markets, employment and healthcare)
- Chapels, Lower Darwen and Guide (housing and employment)
- Royal Blackburn Hospital (sub regional hospital for East Lancashire)
- North Road and Audley Range (housing and community shopping)
- Blackburn Town Centre (Education, shopping, healthcare and employment)

10 additional trips will be provided (Monday to Friday each day) between Darwen and Blackburn each day. This will ensure that additional sections of the Borough's population have access to public transport services.

The remainder of the Council's 2020/21 funding allocation will be directed at "*supporting new services or extensions to current services*" in the following two areas:

The establishment of a peak time Blackburn Town Centre – Whitebirk Industrial Estate "workers" service operating Monday to Friday, linking employment opportunities with housing and other local transport services. The service will be operated in partnership with local businesses following further consultation on demands and timings. The "return" journeys will be operated as a Service 3 Sunnybower, bolstering this commercially operated service by Blackburn Private Hire.

- 2 additional trips will be provided (Monday to Friday each day) between Blackburn Town Centre and Whitebirk / Sunnybower.

Strengthened off-peak rural links between Edgworth and Darwen, building on the successful commercial TA01 and TA02 rural bus services operated by local company Travel Assist, linking housing with shopping and key destinations.

- Additional weekday trips will be provided between Darwen and Edgworth
- Frequency improvements to the Darwen local town network
- Extensions to the Darwen town network to Waterside and Eccleshill

Accessibility will be increased between housing areas, employment opportunities, healthcare and a number of social facilities.

The Council has recently undertaken a procurement exercise for the three contracts in line with normal procedures, with the following two contracts procured on a de-minimis extension basis, based on established and parallel costs for service provision.

The Darwen – Royal Blackburn Hospital – Blackburn service has been advertised on the Chest through an Open Procedure, with quotations invited from capable suppliers. The Council received eight tender returns from the following companies: Blackburn Private Hire Coaches, Coach Hire Solutions, Cranberry Coaches, Holmeswood, Moving People, Preston Bus Ltd, Transdev and Travel Assist.

Contract	Operator
Darwen and rural off-peak links	Travel Assist
Whitebirk Industrial Estate peak time services	Blackburn Private Hire
Darwen to Royal Blackburn Hospital to Blackburn	Moving People

Following a number of checks and clarifications it is therefore recommended that Moving People are awarded the Contract to operate the Darwen – Royal Blackburn Hospital – Blackburn service.

Given uncertainty over ongoing DfT funding, it is proposed that these services be let over a rolling period covering financial years 2020/21, 2021/22 and 2022/23 (up to three years) subject to confirmation of ongoing funding from the Department for Transport.

The Council have stressed the need for the Department for Transport the need to provide ongoing financial support for longer than one year to ensure the longevity of these services, which are unlikely to become fully commercial in the short term.

Following discussions with Operators the services will be registered with the Traffic Commissioner under “early notice” supported by the Council to commence operation on Monday 5th October 2020.

5. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The introduction of the new supported bus services conforms with the Council’s Local Transport Plan 3 2011 – 2021 Strategy, which has the following objectives, to:

- Support the economy
- Tackle climate change
- Increase safety and security
- Promote equality of opportunity
- Promote quality of life, health and the natural environment
- Promote the management of the Council’s transport assets

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

The cost of each of the proposed supported bus routes is shown below, as per the recent tender and procurement process:

Contract	Operator	Full year cost
Darwen and Rural off peak links	Travel Assist	£9000
Whitebirk Industrial Estate peak time services	Blackburn Private Hire	£5200
Darwen to Royal Blackburn Hospital to Blackburn	Moving People	£19,298
Total		£33,498

Funding sources are identified within section 3 of this report. The programme will be closely monitored to ensure full spend and any further variations or amendments will be reported via the Executive Member for Growth and Development.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Section 89 of the Transport Act 1985 requires the Council to seek competitive tenders before entering into agreements to make payments for local bus services.

This legislation was amended by The Service Subsidy (Tendering) (England) (Amendment) Regulations 2004, which allow bus service subsidy payments otherwise than by competitive tender - i.e. payments to be made on a “de minimis” basis without tendering, within specified limits. There is no upper limit by individual operator or individual contract; but there is a maximum period of 5 years for each contract.

The procurement exercise has been conducted in accordance with the Councils Contract and Procurement Procedure Rules and the contractual documentation has been reviewed by the Contracts and Procurement Team.

8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

Staff time to manage and monitor contracts will be met from existing resources.

9. EQUALITY AND HEALTH IMPLICATIONS

Please select one of the options below. Where appropriate please include the hyperlink to the EIA.

Option 1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required – the EIA checklist has been completed.

Option 2 In determining this matter the Executive Member needs to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA link here)*

Option 3 In determining this matter the Executive Board Members need to consider the EIA associated with this item in advance of making the decision. *(insert EIA attachment)*

10. CONSULTATIONS

The Council has issued press releases regarding the intentions regarding the DfT funding and has also published further information via the following weblink:

<https://www.blackburn.gov.uk/index.php/transport-and-travel/transport-and-streets-policies-and-strategies>

The Council has directed the funding in a way that realises the greatest amount of benefits for the greatest number of residents, and has done so by:

- Taking on board comments received from local Residents and Ward Councillors in relation to ongoing gaps in local transport provision
- Reviewing correspondence received from Residents, Ward Councillors and MPs when services were de-registered and subsequently withdrawn
- Discussing options in relation to gaps in the local bus market to local bus operators

The issue of the Darwen to Royal Blackburn Hospital direct link is the number one public transport issue for Darwen. It has been highlighted on a consistent basis by the Darwen and Rossendale MP and local constituents since the summer of 2018 when the previous local service was withdrawn by the operator. A petition was also received by the Council from local residents regarding the reinstatement of the (previous number 33 bus) service in April 2019. Similarly the lack of bus services in Lower Darwen has been a consistent issue raised by Local Ward Councillors and residents.

The lack of local buses serving the areas of Sunnybower, North Road and Audley have been discussed with the Blackburn MP and local constituents at regular intervals. A petition was received by the Council from local residents regarding the reinstatement of bus services in the Audley Range area in October 2016.

The role of transport has played a major part within the Council's Social Integration Programme "Our Community, Our Future", a joint initiative with the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG). The first phase of the Transport Research element of the programme has recently completed, which has given the Council a better understanding of where people want to get to, awareness of available transport options, and the difficulties currently faced by the travelling public.

The following consultations have taken place as part of the project between October 2019 and January 2020:

- 1571 completed questionnaires with public transport and non-public transport users
- A series of face to face events in Community Centres, Childrens Centres, Leisure Centres, Doctors Surgeries, Markets and Places of Worship
- Targeted discussion with businesses in specific areas of the Borough
- A series of workshops with key stakeholders including communities, transport providers and local partner organisations to discuss research findings

The three key transport issues to come from the analysis of the research were:

- Barriers to transport amongst residents in rural areas
- High levels of car use for journeys under one mile
- Perceptions of young people and safety when using public transport

The Department for Transport's Supported Bus Service Funding will address many of the concerns raised within the research, particularly around "the lack of bus route coverage for rural communities". The funding will increase route coverage of bus services linking a number of urban and rural parts of Blackburn with Darwen.

11. STATEMENT OF COMPLIANCE

The recommendations are made further to advice from the Monitoring Officer and the Section 151 Officer has confirmed that they do not incur unlawful expenditure. They are also compliant with equality legislation and an equality analysis and impact assessment has been considered. The recommendations reflect the core principles of good governance set out in the Council's Code of Corporate Governance.

12. DECLARATION OF INTEREST

All Declarations of Interest of any Executive Member consulted and note of any dispensation granted by the Chief Executive will be recorded and published if applicable.

VERSION:	0.01
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DATE:	17 th August 2020
BACKGROUND PAPER:	None