

**REPORT TO:** Environment & Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board

**DATE:** 14<sup>th</sup> September 2011

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Director, Policy & Resources

**SUBJECT:** Receipt of Petition - Withdrawal of Bus Service 17A from Derby Road section of route in Widnes

**WARDS:** Farnworth

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

1.1 To inform the Board of a petition that has been received from the residents of Claremont Avenue, Claremont Drive, Derby Road, Marsh Hall Road, Windermere Avenue and Windermere Street in Widnes. This petition is in connection with the withdrawal of the commercially operated No. 17A bus service from the Derby Road and Lunts Heath Road sections of route in Widnes.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That**

- (1) the issues raised by the petition and the request for the service to be reinstated be noted; and**
- (2) the Board note that if the reinstatement of the service were to be funded by the Council it would cost £40,000 per annum for which there is no currently identified budget and consequently agree that the Council is unable to fund the reinstatement of the service;**
- (3) the Board note the potential alternatives available to bus users; and**
- (4) the lead petitioner be informed of the outcome of the Board's consideration of the matter.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

3.1 Halton Borough Council received a petition on the 2<sup>nd</sup> August 2011 which was signed by 88 residents, concerning the withdrawal of the no. 17A bus service along the above section of route. These include residents from Derby Road whom are mostly affected. The letter fronting the petition is attached as Appendix A. The basis of the petition is that the majority of the people who use the bus service are elderly and that accessing alternative services at the bus stops located on Peelhouse Lane and Lunts Heath Road to facilitate their journeys by public transport will prove extremely difficult. Given the mobility difficulties and health

problems that a number of the residents suffer from, the distance required to walk to the alternative bus services could be totally impractical. The attached plan indicates the services that are now available. The distances previous users of the 17A now have to walk from the Derby Road stop to the nearest stop for alternative services are 428 metres to Derby Road, 489 metres to Lunts Heath Road (Glebe Garage) and 688 metres to the Everglades. However, users would have to walk to the Derby Road bus stop in the first instance and hence they may not necessarily have to travel these distances.

- 3.2 The no. 17A bus service is operated on a commercial basis by Halton Transport. The bus operator recently made a commercial decision to withdraw the service from the above mentioned section of the route to make savings, which the bus company suggest will have a resultant impact on the service as a whole then being viable to continue. The explanation as to the reasons behind the withdrawal can be observed in the letter to the petition organiser (Appendix B).
- 3.3 Halton Transport have provided passenger figures for the bus service along this particular section of the route which, on average, amounts to five passenger journeys on a daily basis.
- 3.4 It should be noted that a cost has been received from Halton Transport to re-instate the service. If the Council were to fund this in order to maintain the previous service, it would cost £40,000.
- 3.5 As an alternative to the 17a service Halton Community Transport operate a Dial-a-Ride service which is open to residents with disabilities or find difficulty in using conventional public transport. To access this service residents, will be required to register with Halton Community Transport. Council Officers are also in discussion with Arriva to identify the possibility of diverting their existing commercially operated 33A service. Arriva have agreed to investigate the possibility of diverting the service along the section of Derby Rd identified in the petition. However this may result in an additional cost to the Council in providing the service.

#### **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

- 4.1 There are no specific policy implications resulting from this report.

#### **5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Resource Implications: Council officers have approached Halton Transport to identify costs to re-instate the service under a De Minimis agreement. Halton Transport have stated that the cost to re-instate the service would be £40,000 per annum. This equates to £26.00 per passenger journey based on current patronage levels. The Council would be liable for meeting the cost of the agreement through existing local bus supported service budget resources. Members should note that

the Council's Supported Bus Services Bus revenue budget (which is used to provide services that are not commercially viable) has been cut by £80,000 as part of the Council's budget savings for this financial year.

- 5.2 Social Inclusion Implications: the withdrawal of the service will potentially have a negative effect on residents, specifically those with mobility and health problems.

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

It is difficult to precisely determine the full implications of the removal of a service that provides for an average 5 passenger journeys per day but the implications of removing public transport services are outlined elsewhere on this agenda and include the following.

### **6.1 Children and Young People in Halton**

It is widely recognised that good quality and affordable public transport services can help to improve access to key facilities for children and young people within the borough. The network also provides children and young people with a degree of independence.

### **6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

The local bus network is fundamental to those residents of Halton who are dependent on public transport for accessing employment and education facilities, not only within the borough but also in neighbouring boroughs.

### **6.3 A Healthy Halton**

Access to health care facilities is acknowledged as a key priority. Public transport, particularly the local bus network, plays a vital part in enabling access to these facilities, not only within the borough but also in neighbouring boroughs.

### **6.4 A Safer Halton**

The need to walk to and from more distant bus stops, especially at night, could cause concerns and fear about personal safety and hence discourage use of public transport and prevent trips from being made .

### **6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

Improving access to key regeneration areas by sustainable forms of transport including public transport, walking and cycling is widely acknowledged as playing a key role in sustainable regeneration and urban renewal. It is a primary objective of the Local Transport Plan and the Mersey Gateway Regeneration Strategy to promote the use of public transport and reduce dependence on the private car.

## **7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

- 7.1 The risk of not re-instating the 17A bus service along the affected routes of Derby Road and Lunts Heath Road are that a number of elderly and disabled residents will be socially excluded. These residents, many of whom will find it extremely difficult to access alternative bus services due to the walk distance to the bus stops, may not be able to affordably access key facilities and amenities.

## **8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

- 8.1 Passengers with mobility or health problems could be affected due to the walk distance to the alternative bus services on Peelhouse Lane or Lunts Heath Road. These will be the closest bus stops for residents in the vicinity of Derby Road to access any bus service.

## **9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

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## APPENDIX A

### Letter Received From Petition Organiser

Halton Borough Transport Limited  
Moor Lane  
Widnes  
WA8 7AP

Dear Sir/Madam,

On behalf of the residents of the Grosvenor Park Estate and Claremont Drive in Widnes, I have been asked to forward the enclosed petition that represents their strong views and opposition to your plans to remove the 17a bus service route.

As you are aware, there are only two buses that currently have a route that cover Lunts Heath Road, the 26 and 17a. The 17a is a valuable service to all residents on the Grosvenor Park Estate and Claremont Drive area, especially for those people who need to go to St Helens Hospital. Both services run at a schedule of one per hour. The intention of removing the 17a service will result in severe hardship and travelling will become extremely time consuming for connecting journeys; a trip to St Helens Hospital will result in a much longer journey time.

Removing this service will cause undue stress and lots of distress as it will mean many individuals having to walk to the Black Horse Roundabout bus stop, or travelling into Widnes which is a considerable journey for the elderly; people with disabilities and young mothers with children.

Please reconsider and stop this action from being taken.

Yours faithfully

on behalf of the residents of Grosvenor Park Estate and Claremont Drive areas

AB

## APPENDIX B

### Letter Received Explaining Reasons for Service Withdrawal

Halton  
Transport

CA/CA

Chris Adams

01 August 2011

Dear Madam,

Thank you for your letter and attached petition dated 8 July which was in regard to the re-routing of Service 17A from 14 August 2011. I apologise for the delay in replying.

It is unfortunate that this service has incurred financial losses for several years now. Up until now we have been able to continue operating the service by subsidizing it with profits made on other services. In recent months though we have been faced with a 9.5% reduction in our concessionary fares reimbursements and a 8% reduction in tendered services revenues; these were both as a consequence of local authority cut backs. In April 2012 our bus operators' service grant, paid to us directly by the government, will be reduced by 20% - another casualty of the country's economic woes.

Meanwhile in financial year 2010 / 11 our fuel costs increasing by 16% compared with the previous year and insurance costs increased by a staggering 53% over the same period.

All of this has caused our profitability to be hit and we simply can no longer continue operating loss making services.

The current service 17A needs 70 minutes to complete its return journey from Widnes (Vicarage Road) to St. Helens and back; this requires two buses and two drivers. For the service to be economically viable we have to reduce the round journey time to 60 minutes or less. By doing so we can operate the service with just one bus and one driver therefore considerably reducing our operating costs. The only way that we could reduce the journey time was by a) curtailing the service to start and finish at Widnes, Green Oaks and b) by shortening the route in the Farnworth area (i.e. direct via Birchfield Road instead of via Birchfield Road, Lockett Road, Peelhouse Lane, Derby Road, Lunts Heath Road).

I appreciate that the route shortening will inconvenience some people but in the current economic climate the only practical alternative was the complete withdrawal of the service.

As Service 26 continues to operate profitably I am pleased to say that this service will continue to connect Lunts Heath Road and Widnes every hour.

Our new timetables are due to be delivered on Wednesday. I will ensure that a copy is sent to you.

Arriva operate a half hourly service between Widnes and St. Helens. These have 8 minutes waiting time at Green Oaks. It may be possible for this service to be diverted via Lunts Heath Road as the service has got time to go that way without incurring any high vehicle or labour costs (just fuel costs). I am forwarding your letter and petition to Halton Council as they may be able to fund the additional costs if Arriva do choose to go via Lunts Heath Road.

Yours faithfully,

Chris Adams,  
Managing Director