

REPORT TO: Environment & Urban Renewal Policy and Performance Board

DATE: 14th March 2012

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Policy & Resources

PORTFOLIO: Transportation

SUBJECT: Receipt of Petition - Potential Withdrawal of 3A bus service (Saturday Only)

WARDS: Halton Lea, Grange, Halton Brook, Mersey, Heath

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To inform the Board of a petition that has been received from the residents of Halton Brook following notice of consultation on the potential withdrawal of bus service No 3A which operates on a Saturday only.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) the petition be noted;**
- (2) the Board give consideration to the objections to the proposed withdrawal of the 3A bus service;**
- (3) the Board note that officers will continue to discuss the potential for the 3A service to be operated on a commercial basis, without subsidy, by the current operator; and**
- (4) the local ward members be informed of the outcome of the Board's consideration of the petition.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Halton Borough Council received a petition on the 10th February 2012, signed by 83 residents, concerning the potential withdrawal of the No 3A bus service. A copy of the petition will be available at the meeting. The bus service is a circular running on a Saturday only from 08.55 to 17.51 between Halton Hospital and Weston Point. It stops at a number of locations including Halton Lea, Runcorn Town Hall, Runcorn High Street, Runcorn rail station and Russell Road. It operates on an hourly basis in conjunction with the 3C to provide a combined 30 minute service. It follows that if the 3A were withdrawn, the 3C would still be available albeit on an hourly frequency.

- 3.2 The petition suggests that those objecting to the potential withdrawal of the service are pensioners who, although they understand about Government cutbacks and the Council's need to respond to them, have suffered a reduction in their disposable income. They feel that having to pay for taxis to go about their daily lives on a Saturday will reduce this income even further.
- 3.3 The majority of the No 3A service Monday to Friday is operated on a commercial basis by Arriva Northwest. However, the schedule operated on a Saturday is supported under a Deminimis agreement at a cost of £3518 per annum to Halton Borough Council. A deminimus payment is one that the Council can make to an operator to divert or extend an existing service.
- 3.4 It should be noted that under the Service Subsidy (Agreements) (Tendering) (England) Regulations 2004, the maximum length of a Deminimus subsidy may only be paid for a maximum of five years per service. In the case of the service 3A, this period has now been reached.
- 3.5 The funding for this particular service has been identified as a cost saving contribution for next financial year 2012/13.
- 3.6 It should be noted that the operator, Arriva North West, may operate the service on a fully commercial basis, although Halton Borough Council have not yet received confirmation that this will be the case. It is proposed that officers continue in their attempts to encourage Arriva North West to operate this service on a fully commercial basis.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The proposed withdrawal of this service will impact on the Primary Transport Strategy No2 (Bus) held within the current Local Transport Plan (LTP). This strategic document identifies the Council's vision for continued development of the local bus network and to provide an improved, accessible, integrated bus network that ensures all residents have good access to key facilities not only within the Borough but also within neighbouring authorities.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Resource Implications

As the deminimus payment will need to be withdrawn, because of the expiry of the maximum subsidy period allowed, the Council will need to tender for a replacement service should a decision be taken to continue a subsidised service. Carrying out this exercise would be in conflict with part of the Council's savings target proposed for 2012/13.

5.2 Social Inclusion Implications

The withdrawal of the service will potentially have a negative effect on residents. However, the 3C service would continue to operate on an hourly frequency on a Saturday. Withdrawal of the 3A service will reduce the availability of services in the area from a 30 minute frequency. It is possible however, that Arriva North West will start to operate the 3A service on a commercial basis.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

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 the residents of Halton 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 accessing these facilities not only within the Borough but also further afield in neighbouring Boroughs.

6.4 A Safer Halton

No direct implications.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

Improving access to key regeneration areas or providing access to a range of facilities 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.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 The risks associated with the withdrawal of the 3A service on a Saturday are mitigated by the availability of the 3C service although the frequency of the service in the area will be reduced from 30 minutes to hourly.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

A Community Impact Review & Assessment has been carried out for the proposed withdrawal of this Service. The findings of this report have

found the risk to be 'medium' given that passenger figures indicate the service could be operated on a fully commercial basis.

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

Document	Place of Inspection	Contact Officer
The Service Subsidy Agreements Tendering) (England) (Amendments) Regulations 2004	Transport Co-ordination, 4th Floor, Municipal Buildings, Widnes	Ian Boyd, Principal Officer Transport Co-ordination
Copy of petition	Appendix A	