

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 26 bus service (Saturday and journeys at 1504, 1534 and 1604 Monday to Friday)

WARDS: Riverside, Farnworth, Halton View, Appleton and Kingsway

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To inform the Board of a petition that has been received from the residents of West Bank following notice of consultation on the potential withdrawal of bus service No 26 which operates on a Monday to Saturday.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) the petition be noted;**
- (2) the Board give consideration to the objections to the proposed withdrawal of the 26 bus service;**
- (3) the Board note that officers will continue to discuss the potential for the 26 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 1st March 2012, signed by 329 residents primarily from the West Bank area, concerning the potential withdrawal of the No 26 bus service. A copy of the petition will be available at the meeting. The bus service operates on a Monday to Friday from 08.45 to 17.04 and Saturday from 09.34 to 17.04 between Cronton and West Bank. It operates via Lunts Heath, Crow Wood, Halton View, Widnes Town Centre and West Bank. It operates on an hourly frequency Monday to Saturday.

- 3.2 If the 26 were withdrawn, passengers in the West Bank area could access alternative services at the Irwell Street bus stops on the A533 SJB. The petition suggests that those objecting to the potential withdrawal of the service are residents who feel the walk through the subway to access the alternative services is unacceptable.
- 3.3 The majority of the No 26 service Monday to Friday is operated on a commercial basis by Halton Transport. However, the schedule operated on a Saturday and the journeys at 15.04, 15.34 and 16.04 are supported under a Deminimis agreement at a cost of £21,391 per annum to Halton Borough Council. A deminimis 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 Deminimis subsidy may only be paid for a maximum of five years per service. In the case of the service 26, 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, Halton Transport, 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 Halton Transport 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 deminimis 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, Alternative bus services may be accessed at the Irwell St bus stops on the A533 SJB.

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 26 service are mitigated by the availability of alternative services at the Irwell St bus stops on the A533 SJB.

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	