

## **POLICY & FINANCE COMMITTEE – 21<sup>ST</sup> NOVEMBER 2007**

### **BUS SERVICES**

#### **1. BACKGROUND**

- 1.1 In January 2007, following an area review and re-tendering exercise, Hampshire County Council awarded a contract to Wilts & Dorset Bus Company for the provision of subsidised bus services in the New Forest.
- 1.2 Wilts & Dorset has given notice that it wishes to terminate that contract. As a result, the company is proposing to introduce a number of service changes in the Ringwood area, with effect from 6<sup>th</sup> January 2008. These changes include alterations to contracted Service X35 (Southampton – Ringwood – Bournemouth) and the termination of the contract for Services 136/137 (Ringwood – Poulner – Ringwood).
- 1.3 The company has indicated that it would require a considerable increase to the current contract price to continue the service in its existing form. However, there is no scope for this as the County Council's bus subsidy budget is fixed and fully allocated.
- 1.4 County Council officers are therefore investigating what timetables can be operated for contracted services X35 and 136/137 within existing funding levels.

#### **2. LOCAL CONCERNS**

- 2.1 The Town Council has received 6 written objections to the proposal to withdraw Services 136/137, which include the following comments:
  - The withdrawal will bring hardship to many elderly constituents who make good use of the facility.
  - Many people rely on the use of buses – how will they manage?
  - Why cancel the service altogether? Could not a reduced timetable be operated?
  - What is the use of a free bus pass for the over 60s if there are no buses to use them on?
  - Many people who use the route do not have a vehicle. People who do will be forced to use them, adding to congestion and pollution.
  - It is impossible to get a taxi between the hours of 07:45 and 09:15 and 15:00 and 16:15 as they are used for school children. People who live in Poulner and Hightown and use the bus service will be unable to get to work in the town.
  - Elderly residents rely on the bus service for access to shopping, doctor, dentist and catching other buses.
  - Many elderly residents would be unable to walk the distance into town.
  - Ringwood traders may suffer as there would be less people coming into town.
  - The voluntary neighbourhood scheme is very expensive to use.
  - It should be compulsory to provide these services – it cuts out vehicle journeys and shows care for the elderly.
- 2.2 Members have also received communications directly from concerned residents, particularly those living in Poulner, Hightown Road and Forestside Gardens.
- 2.3 The Town Mayor has also received representation from the Blind Club.

#### **3. INFORMATION FROM HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL**

3.1 In order to assist Members in discussions, the following information has been requested from Hampshire County Council:

- Total subsidy provided by HCC now and proposed for future
- Usage/loading figures for each bus journey
- Timetabling now and what they are trying to achieve
- Actual level of subsidy per route and per passenger actually carried

If available, this information will be circulated prior to the Committee meeting.

#### 4. **FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 There are no financial implications for the Town Council.

4.2 If the services are to be retained in their current form, this would have significant financial implications for Hampshire County Council. However, officers have been requested to work within existing budgets and there is unlikely to be any additional funding made available.

#### 5. **RECOMMENDATION**

5.1 It is recommended that Members give consideration to making representations to Hampshire County Council, prior to a decision being taken on the future of local bus services in the town.

For further information please contact:

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