

Bus Funding Review

Summary

Councillor Roger Loukes attended the KCC Bus Funding Review and Decision meeting on July 6th 2022 via the Internet; and subsequently produced the following report:

The decision was eventually taken after lots of mildly irrelevant discussion and banter that they would uphold the decision to withdraw funding support for 39 supported bus services which includes Sandwich Connect and the 541/542/544 which are the only buses serving Staple.

It is proposed that the 8 Kent Karrier Services will be retained. This is a bookable service run by Britannia coaches and is available, but not used, from Staple village on a Thursday running to Deal through Sandwich.

Proposed timetable End July 2022 ~ Contractual notice given to bus operators
End October 2022 ~ Services stop

Comments on decision

KCC has to reduce the cost of supported services from £6m to £3.8m to balance the 2022/23 budget.

Smaller buses ~ not economical ~ still have to pay driver who would need a PCV licence and only small reduction in running costs. See Note 1

As part of the on-going commitment to Community Transport KCC will work with community stakeholders to identify potential for alternative solutions. See Note 2 & Note 5

Some children have been identified as meeting school transport to school and an alternative solution to a bus will be provided, but those not entitled to free home to school transport there will be no alternative public transport. See note 3

Kent Karrier services will be retained and paid from external sources. See note 4

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Notes are copied from the KCC Review Document

Note 1

3.10 Use of smaller vehicles. For supported bus services, operating between school times, it is not cost realistic to provide a large conventional bus, for school times and then a smaller one for non-school times; it is in fact doubling cost. For supported bus services, not linked with school journeys, smaller vehicles have a lower cost, but this is not a substantially lower cost, as many would still be required to be low floor fully DDA compliant and the driver would need to be PCV licensed.

Note 2

3.16 Significant response from district / borough / parish council representatives, councillors, and MPs; emphasising service users concerns for specific population groups and requests for engagement at a local level to discuss possible solutions / alternatives to the proposed service withdrawals. As part of the on-going commitment to Community Transport, KCC will work with community stakeholders to identify potential for alternative solutions.

Note 3

4.2 17 contracts included for consideration are identified as meeting a school transport need. 50 children using these services have a legal entitlement to free transport to school and will need to be provided with an alternative solution. This alternative transport will be funded from the CYPE budget, as are season tickets now on supported bus services, therefore the additional cost to the CYPE budget is anticipated in the £150k range. However, for those children, not entitled to free home to school transport, there will be no alternative public transport.

Note 4

5.3 Taking account of need to achieve the Council's budget for supported buses, but at the same time having regard to the consultation responses and the identified equalities impacts and therefore ensuring that there is still some form of public transport provision in selected areas, it is proposed that the 8 Kent Karrier services will be retained. They will continue to provide a bookable bus service for those most in need and particularly in areas where conventional bus services are not available. In retaining the Kent Karriers, they will be removed from the supported bus budget and sit as a defined line within the Public Transport budget. These will be funded, in future years, from a number of external sources including BSOG surplus, DfT funding already held, DfT LTF, and increased passenger revenue.

Note 5

5.8 KCC Public Transport will continue to provide grants for Community Transport groups, focusing on those areas where conventional bus services have been withdrawn. Grants will be for the establishment of new schemes or expansion to current schemes.