

REGENERATION, COMMUNITY AND CULTURE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

29 SEPTEMBER 2015

CHANGES TO ARRIVA BUS SERVICES

Report from: Richard Hicks, Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture

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Summary

This item outlines concerns raised as to changes made by Arriva to a number of bus services in Medway and sets out the Council's position in response to petitions from residents.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

- 1.1 The provision of local bus services in Great Britain is governed by the 1985 Transport Act, which became law in October 1986. This resulted in the privatisation of the National Bus Company and the deregulation of bus services as a way of reducing the level of subsidies paid by Local Authorities (LAs) and to encourage competition. This also resulted in a greatly reduced role for LAs in the provision of local bus services.
- 1.2 Under current legislation, bus operators declare what their commercial bus network is and the LA then has the power to tender for loss making services through a competitive process and will normally award a contract to those companies that offer the best combination of price and quality. LAs outside London have no responsibility for the commercial bus network and operators do not need the consent of any LA outside London to operate or even withdraw a service.
- 1.3 The services that Arriva have changed are commercially operated routes which the Council has no influence over. The Council has the power to fund loss making services, i.e., not those that are not commercially viable.

2. Background

- 2.1. At the meeting of the Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6 August 2015, Members of the Committee expressed concern as to the changes made to the timetabling of certain bus routes and it was agreed to invite Arriva to attend this meeting to discuss these changes and the lack of adequate consultation.

- 2.2 Although officers had been made aware of Arriva's intentions to make a number of changes previously, it was not until officers met with Arriva on 12 May this year, a week before the service changes had to be registered, that officers saw the detail of the changes. This inevitably gave very little time for this to be considered and the implications to be fully understood. Officers arranged for all Ward Councillors to be made aware of those changes, although it is accepted that the timescales were insufficient if further changes were then necessary in the light of Councillors' concerns.
- 2.2 Arriva have accepted the Council's invitation to attend this meeting and Glen Shuttleworth, Head of Operations and Robert Patterson, Commercial Development Manager will be in attendance.
- 2.3 The Committee is also reminded that at the Regeneration Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 6 August 2015, the Committee was advised that a petition had been received objecting to the withdrawal of buses 181 and 701 affecting the Walderslade Road area and that the lead petitioner had requested that this matter be referred to this Committee. The lead petitioner, Mrs Jeeves has therefore been invited to attend this meeting.
- 2.4 At the Council meeting on 12 August 2015, a further petition was submitted by the Portfolio Holder for Adult Services, Councillor Brake relating to the reinstatement of the 181 bus service due to many older members of the community feeling isolated and unable to go out. The lead petitioner, Mrs Lovell has requested that this matter be referred to this Committee and, in doing so has stated that such changes involved routes 181 which had been reduced from a 20 minute service to 3 – 4 buses a day and the changes to the 176 and the newly introduced 177 which has left areas of Walderslade without an accessible service. Mrs Lovell has been invited to attend this meeting.
- 2.5 Following representations from Councillors and members of the public, on 7 September changes were made to the 176 and 179 timetables. The 176 service has been rerouted via a section of Walderslade Road close to Sussex Drive and Weeds Wood Road and will run every 30 minutes Monday to Friday, and Sundays.
- 2.6. An additional commercial 179 journey was introduced from Walderslade at 09.05 Monday to Saturday, with effect from 7 September. Therefore there will be a 179 running past King George Road and Sindal Shaw House at 09.08, 10.48 and 12.48 with return journeys from Chatham at 12.07, 14.07 and 15.27 on Saturdays and Non School days.

3. Financial implications

There are no financial implications arising from this report.

4. Legal implications

- 4.1 The legal implications of the bus service changes are set out in the body of this report

5. Recommendations

- 5.1 That Members note the petitioners' concerns and that all changes that have been made by Arriva have been made for commercial reasons and are therefore not within the remit of the Council.

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Appendices

None

Background papers

Petitions