

CABINET

8 JUNE 2010

ADDENDUM REPORT

GATEWAY 3 CONTRACT AWARD: RENEWAL OF BUS SERVICE CONTRACTS SEPTEMBER 2010

Portfolio Holder: Councillor Filmer, Front Line Services

Report from/Author: Caroline Salisbury, Overview and Scrutiny
Co-ordinator

Summary

This addendum report advises Members of the discussions and recommendations following a petition referral at the Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting held on 1 June 2010.

1. Budget and Policy Framework

1.1 These are contained within the main report on the agenda.

2. Background

2.1 The Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a petition referral on 1 June 2010.

2.2 The petition requested the council to establish a bespoke bus service for children travelling between St Mary's Island and secondary schools in Chatham and Rochester with immediate effect.

2.3 An extract of the report considered at the overview and scrutiny meeting is attached as an Appendix.

3. Overview and Scrutiny discussion and recommendations

3.1 The committee heard from the lead petitioner about the daily three hour round trip her 12 year old daughter took from St Mary's Island to attend Rochester Grammar School for Girls.

- 3.2 Members were informed that there are 58 children living on St Mary's Island who could make use of a direct bus service to the secondary schools and as there are further developments being built on the island, there will be more people needing a bus service.
- 3.3 The lead petitioner spoke about the environmental, economic and educational benefits a direct bus service would bring to all the residents of Medway, as it would cut down on the number of parental 'taxis' driving to and from the schools, a lack of bus service was a disincentive for people to move into new housing provision and it was also a barrier to full time work for many mothers because of the need to drive their children to and from school.
- 3.4 Councillor Esterson, as ward councillor, also addressed the committee and spoke about a question that had been raised at Council on 15 April 2010 on the same subject. He reminded Members that there had been an underspend on the half price travel subsidy for young people last year. At the Council meeting, the Portfolio Holder had advised that the budget spent on subsidising other bus routes was up by £1 million and therefore a large proportion of the underspent budget had been used to ensure people were able to get to work. However, Councillor Esterson pointed out that here was a route specifically being asked for children to use which was what the budget was meant to be spent on.
- 3.5 The committee asked various questions about the cost effectiveness of running a service along this route all day or whether a twice a day trip specifically for school children, similar to the yellow bus scheme, was more viable.
- 3.6 Officers responded that where the council subsidised a route it tried to meet a variety of needs but there were a few examples of subsidy being used specifically for a school route.
- 3.7 Members asked whether the route from St Mary's Island to the secondary schools would qualify as a yellow bus route, in comparison to the number of children using the buses already running. Officers were also asked whether there was a rationale of priorities considered when the current yellow bus routes were chosen.
- 3.8 Officers advised that the yellow bus scheme had been developed primarily to get people out of cars and it had been recognised that it would not be achievable throughout the whole of Medway. The number of routes had slowly increased and there should be a few more added in this current tender process, if finance allows.
- 3.9 Officers added that the route requested in the petition had been added to the list of tenders which were due to be received by 3 June 2010. A route had been put together to get the children to their schools ten to fifteen minutes before school started but because of the different

school closing times, it would mean the bus would have to wait around for ten minutes in one case. A service that ran once in the morning and once in the afternoon would not allow children to stay behind for any extra-curricular activities.

- 3.10 The committee was advised that it might be possible to review and adjust the current early morning journeys to lessen the journey time by improving the connections in Chatham but with six schools and commuters also using the service to access Chatham railway station, it is difficult to time the service to meet everybody's needs efficiently. The current afternoon service (from Chatham to St Mary's Island) runs without a subsidy from the council so there was no direct control by the council but officers would be happy to talk this through with the bus company.
- 3.11 The committee agreed to strongly recommend its support to this request and ask Cabinet to achieve the funds to make a school bus service available from St Mary's Island to the six secondary schools in Chatham and Rochester.
- 3.12 The committee also requested that a report back on the outcome of the tender process and award of the contracts is submitted for consideration to the next meeting on 6 July 2010.

4 Director's Comments

- 4.1 No bus company has shown an interest in providing this service at their own financial risk and it would appear that a subsidy is needed if this service is to be provided.
- 4.2 As promised to the petitioners, this service has been included, without commitment, in the batch of tenders for services whose contracts expire in September. The award process for these is being considered by the main report to Cabinet. This will allow a decision to be taken on this service with a full understanding of the costs and opportunities for providing this link.
- 4.3 The St Mary's Island petition contained 242 signatures. A further petition with 476 signatures was presented at the same Council meeting requesting an evening and Sunday bus service to the White Road Estate area of Chatham. Potential services to meet this requirement have also been included in this batch of tenders.

5 Financial and legal implications

- 5.1 The main report on the Cabinet agenda identifies at 2.1 (c) that the requested tender should identify the costs of the requested service. Those tenders are due to be received on 3 June 2010 pending the

outcome of these tender submissions the financial viability of the service will be assessed as part of consideration by Procurement Board and the Assistant Director Housing and Corporate Services.

6 Recommendation

- 6.1 The Regeneration, Community and Culture Overview and Scrutiny Committee recommend that Cabinet:
- (a) note its strong support to the petitioners request to establish a bespoke bus service for children travelling between St Mary's Island and secondary schools in Chatham and Rochester;
 - (b) requests that Cabinet considers subsidising this route (even by way of yellow bus scheme) if no bus company has shown an interest in providing this service.

Lead officer contact

Geoff Walters, Public Transport Manager

Telephone No: 01634 331058 email: geoff.walters@medway.gov.uk

**Extract of Petitions report to Regeneration, Community and Culture
Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 1 June 2010**

4 Petitions referred to this committee

4.1 The following petition has been referred to the Committee for consideration as the lead petitioners have indicated that they are dissatisfied with the responses received.

4.2 Bus service from St Mary's Island to Chatham/Rochester schools

This petition was presented to Council on 4 March by Councillor Esterson. The petition stated:

"Request the council to establish a bespoke bus service for children travelling between St Mary's Island and secondary schools in Chatham and Rochester with immediate effect."

4.3 The Director of Regeneration, Community and Culture responded to the petition and the letter is attached at Appendix A.

4.4 The letter requesting referral to the Committee is attached at Appendix B.

4.5 This matter was also considered by council on 15 April 2010 where the Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer, was asked the following question:

"Many secondary school pupils, from the age of 11, are forced to spend three hours of their day (in addition to the school day) commuting via a series of buses from St Mary's Island. Is the Portfolio Holder aware of this, and if so, does he not agree that better school transport provision from St Mary's Island is required to improve our children's welfare and safety."

4.6 The Portfolio Holder for Front Line Services, Councillor Filmer responded that he was aware of the concerns raised by residents of the existing bus service from St Mary's Island. He stated that although children travelling from St Mary's Island have to change buses at either Chatham bus station or railway station, generally, it should be possible to reach school within an hour with one change of bus. However, the Council was exploring ways in which school bus links from St Mary's Island might be improved and this had been added to the list for tenderers for the next academic year so bus operators can consider providing a direct service from St Mary's Island. Unfortunately, previously, bus operators had not shown any interest in providing a direct link but the Council would continue to work with them on provision.

- 4.7 A supplementary question referred to the under spend on the half price travel subsidy for young people last year and the Portfolio Holder was asked if he could give a commitment to diverting these funds towards supporting a procurement process to solve the problem.
- 4.8 Councillor Filmer responded that although there was an under spend on the half price bus fares for young people, the budget spent on subsidising other bus routes was up to £1 million. This was on buses for work related routes, rather than social evening use. Therefore a large proportion of the money had been used to ensure people were able to get to work. He again undertook to continue exploring possibilities to make improvements to bus routes for the school children on St Mary's Island.
- 4.9 Director's Comments

By changing buses in Chatham it is possible to get from St Mary's Island to the various secondary schools in Chatham and Rochester. It is not uncommon for children to have to change buses where, for whatever reason, it is not possible to offer a direct service between home and school, even if children qualify for free school travel because they live 3 miles or more from their nearest appropriate school.

The residents of St Mary's Island have suggested that there are 57 children who would use this service attending 6 schools – Fort Pitt, Rochester Grammar School for Girls, Sir Joseph Williamson's Mathematical School for Boys, Thomas Aveling, Chatham Grammar School for Boys and St John Fisher. Because of the differing school start and finish times, for some of these schools the journey may be quite lengthy if one journey is provided.

Nevertheless, the opportunity for this service has been discussed with a number of bus companies. So far no operator has shown an interest in providing this service unless a subsidy is paid.

If a Council does offer a subsidy for a bus service it is obliged to invite tenders. This service has, therefore, been added to the planned tender for contract renewals from September 2010. The closing date for these tenders is 3 June 2010.

The inclusion of this service in the planned tender will allow a detailed consideration of the opportunity to provide this service. However, this does not guarantee that a contract will be awarded. The outcome of the tenders will be considered by Cabinet in due course. At this stage, the budget for the support of bus services is fully committed and therefore this new service – if it does require a subsidy – can only be considered if the tenders for other services yield savings, bus services elsewhere are curtailed or funding is made available from other sources.

If a new service is introduced as a scheduled bus service, users will be able to travel at half-fare if they have the appropriate pass. Half-fare travel with these passes is funded by the Council from a separate budget. In past years, the cost of this concession has proved to be less than the budget allocated. The costs of half-fares are expected to rise this year because of the full year impact of the extension to age 18 and the increasing number of passes in circulation.

5 Financial and Legal Implications

- 5.1 Any financial and/or legal implications arising from the issues raised by the petitions are set out in the comments on the petitions.

6 Recommendation

- 6.1 Members are requested to:
- (a) note the petition responses and appropriate officer action in paragraph 3 of the report;
 - (b) consider the petition referral and Director's comments in paragraph 4 of the report.

Please contact: Lynn Utchanah

Your ref:

Our ref: RC/ME67

Date: 16 March 2010

Ms P Matthewman
12 Little Victory Mount
St Mary's Island
Chatham
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Dear Ms Matthewman

Petition – Bus Services from St Mary's Island to Chatham/Rochester Schools

Thank you for your petition that was presented at Council on 4 March 2010, requesting the provision of a bespoke bus service between St Mary's Island and the secondary schools in Chatham and Rochester.

Since the deregulation of bus services in 1986, bus operators may run where and when they choose if they feel that there are sufficient passengers for them to do so without a subsidy. Where no operator is prepared to do this, but there is felt to be a need for a service, a Council can offer a subsidy, but is obliged to invite tenders from all interested bus companies to run the service.

There have already been a number of discussions with Arriva about the possibility of providing a direct service from St Mary's Island to various schools. However, the company has said that they are unable to offer this link without financial support. The Council has also approached a number of other bus companies to see if they are interested in providing this link. So far, nobody has responded with a firm proposal.

From the Council's point of view, the budget for the support of bus services is currently fully committed and I am unable to offer any additional services in the immediate future. As I have explained above, if the Council is to fund a service, I am obliged to issue tenders to all operators to give them the opportunity to bid. I shall shortly be inviting tenders to continue a number of contracts that are due to expire in September. I shall add the service that you have requested to these tenders so that we know the costs and opportunities to run this route. Adding this service to the tenders will also let all the

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operators know that there is felt to be a need for this service to be provided and they may also put forward suggestions of how this can be done.

A possible timetable for this service has been devised which is shown below. This takes account of the various different start and finish times of the schools which have been included in the previous discussions and also the time allowed at the moment for buses to travel over the various sections of road involved. You will see that it is difficult for one bus to achieve the ideal time at each school. In addition, the afternoon journey would need to wait 6 minutes at Chatham Boys Grammar School (or leave the previous schools 6 minutes later) because of the different finishing times.

Mornings

	School start	Bus time	Bus arrival - Minutes before school start
St Marys Island		0758	
Fort Pitt	0820	0810	10
Maths/Roch Girls Gr	0825	0818	7
Thomas Aveling	0840	0823	17
Chatham Boys Gr	0840	0827	13
St John Fisher (M Rd)	0845	0829	16
St John Fisher (Rly Stn)	0845	0833	12

Afternoons

	School finish		Bus time	Bus departure - Minutes after school finish
Fort Pitt	1500		1515	15
Maths/Roch Girls Gr	1510		1525	15
Thomas Aveling	1500		1530	30
Chatham Boys Gr	1535	arrive	1539	
		depart	1545	10
St John Fisher (M Rd)	1530		1547	17
St John Fisher (Rly Stn)	1530		1551	21
St Marys Island			1600	

I cannot promise, at this stage, that the service you have requested will be provided but including this service in the next round of tenders will allow the opportunity for this service to be considered in detail with the responses which are received to the tenders.

I am sorry that I cannot be more positive at this stage. However, it is still possible to make this journey by changing bus at either Chatham Bus Station or Chatham Railway Station. However, we will look, in detail, at the possibility of providing a service to your area from September and will let you know the outcome of this review in due course.

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facility please ring 01634 333111.**

I hope the information is helpful. If you do not consider that the issues raised in your petition have been addressed, please refer to the procedure sent with the acknowledgment letter for a possible further course of action.

Yours sincerely

Robin Cooper
Director - Regeneration, Community & Culture

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12 Little Victory Mount
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22nd March 2010

Dear Sir/Madam

Re Petition; Bus Service from St Marys Island to Chatham/Rochester Schools

We have received a response to this petition from Robin Cooper (Your Ref RC/ME67, 16th March 2010).

We are not satisfied with the directorate's response and request that the matter is referred to the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

We would like an immediate commitment from Medway Council for a direct bus service and question the assumption that the budget for support of bus services is currently fully committed.

Yours Sincerely



Patricia Matthewman
On behalf of St Marys Island Residents

CC - Robin Cooper.