

# North Yorkshire Council

## Richmond (Yorks) Area Constituency Committee

17 June 2024

### Update on Local Bus Services in the Stokesley Area

#### Report of the Corporate Director Environment

#### **1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 To provide an update on local bus services in Stokesley and the surrounding villages.

#### **2.0 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Local Bus services have been under significant pressure both locally and nationally since the Covid-19 pandemic. Passenger numbers have recovered to around 90% of pre-covid levels, although this figure is much lower for concessionary pass users at around 70%. This has particularly affected rural routes where older passengers represented a greater proportion of users.
- 2.2 There has been a significant increase in operating costs (vehicle procurement, maintenance, insurance, staffing, property rental and fuel) along with national difficulties with recruiting bus drivers, engineering staff and sourcing spare parts. As a result of these added pressures, providers are reviewing their services more than ever before, resulting in commercial service level reductions and higher prices for routes operating under contract to the council.
- 2.3 North Yorkshire Council has maintained its support for local bus routes over recent years, spending over £1.6m each year on bus services. We are also accessing grant funding from central government which is helping to keep the current bus network running. The council is now financially supporting many previously commercial bus routes that would otherwise have been withdrawn entirely in the last two years.

#### **3.0 Stokesley local bus service update**

- 3.1 We have seen several service reductions and contract price increases recently as the industry struggles with higher costs. Our recent focus has been on maintaining the existing network and supporting the recovery in passenger numbers. Inevitably this has meant some routes are now operating less frequently but it is hoped that keeping a core level of service running will mean that these can be built back up again as passenger numbers improve.
- 3.2 We received notice late in 2022 that the previously commercial Service 18 between Stokesley, Great Ayton, Guisborough and Saltburn was to be withdrawn as the bus company could no longer cover the operating costs from the revenue taken. At that point North Yorkshire County Council was able to tender for replacement service to retain the link from Stokesley & Great Ayton to Guisborough and this route has been financially supported since then. Similar situations occurred across the county with the council stepping in to save bus services that would otherwise have been withdrawn. Since then, the local network has remained stable, with some revisions to Service 28/28A in July 2023.

3.3 Stokesley has regular bus links to Middlesborough & James Cook Hospital via Arriva Services 28A, to Northallerton and Friarage Hospital via Services 80/89 and to Guisborough on Service 18. There is also a demand responsive Friday market day bus from nearby villages into Stokesley. All routes except the 28/28A are subsidised by North Yorkshire Council.

#### **4.0 National £2 fare cap scheme**

4.1 In January 2023, a national scheme was introduced to lower bus fares and encourage more people to travel by bus. Funded by the Government, the scheme means that a single bus journey on all eligible bus routes run by participating operators will cost no more than £2 (or £4 return). The majority of the local bus operators in North Yorkshire are taking part in the scheme.

4.2 The fare scheme was originally due to run for 3 months but was then extended until 30 June 2023 and more recently further extended to December 2024. Feedback from bus companies is positive, with the scheme generating more passenger journeys.

#### **5.0 Community Transport**

5.1 Community Transport passenger usage has recovered to around 70% of pre-covid usage. Some volunteer drivers did not return after the pandemic and it is an ongoing challenge for all schemes to recruit and retain volunteer drivers. North Yorkshire Council has maintained its support for community transport with journey reimbursement and grants to extend services and recruit volunteer drivers. The Stokesley Community Care Association provides a volunteer car service for shopping, leisure and health trips.

#### **6.0 Funding from central government**

6.1 NYCC and now NYC have received grants since the pandemic which help to offset the loss in fare revenue and recent cost increases. These are currently in place until late 2025 and have allowed us to keep the current bus network in place. However, there have been different funding streams, often provided for short periods of time and at very short notice, which has made longer term planning of the bus network very difficult.

6.2 In October 2023, the Government announced a further £150 million of funding for buses called 'Network North: Phase 3 Bus Service Improvement Plan funding' (BSIP3). This is to be allocated to local authorities in the Midlands and the North for 2024/25, following the decision not to proceed with the High Speed 2 rail project. North Yorkshire received a BSIP3 allocation of £3.5m for 2024/25.

6.3 BSIP3 is revenue funding and is currently for one year only (2024/25). The DfT expects us to use the funding to maintain existing service levels and also on improvements that can be delivered in this short timescale. Given the priority residents have placed on bus services in the recent Local Transport Plan engagement, this additional funding gives an opportunity to address some of the issues that were raised. With this in mind, we are focussing on some key areas of delivery:

- Strengthening bus routes through higher frequency and improvements to evening and weekend services
- Making bus travel more affordable for young people by introducing a £1.00 fare cap for a single journey for those under 19 years old.
- Improving information and customer experience through improved marketing and promotion as well as providing additional customer service support at very busy bus stations
- Providing additional journeys for rural communities

- Delivery of general maintenance improvements to bus service infrastructure such as bus stops and signage. One of the schemes planned is the introduction of a Saturday timetable for Service 18.

6.4 BSIP3 grant proposals were approved by the Executive on 19 March 2024 and will be delivered from this summer onwards. The Department for Transport have indicated that there should be future years of BSIP funding but this is now unlikely to be confirmed until after the general election on 4 July 2024.

## **7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 None this is an update.

## **8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

8.1 None this is an update.

## **9.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

9.1 None this is an update.

## **10.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

10.1 None this is an update.

## **11.0 RECOMMENDATION**

11.1 That members note the contents of this report.

**APPENDICES:** None

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26 May 2024

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