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## **LOCAL TRANSPORT - SOUTH ESSEX AREA REVIEW**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This report outlines the findings of a review carried out by Essex County Highways to identify ways to improve the co-ordination of home to school, social care and local bus transport.

### **2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 Following a Best Value Review, the County Council created the Transport Co-ordination Centre (TCC). The TCC has been examining improvements in local transport, aimed at making best use of resources, better meeting user needs and contributing to the County Council's policy objectives.
- 2.2 Working with consultants, County Council has been undertaking a series of "Area Review" studies and the key conclusions for the South Essex Area are now available. (Basildon, Rochford and Castle Point.)

### **3 ISSUES**

#### **Quality Networks**

- 3.1 The majority of bus routes run to and from Southend and most significant settlements have a daytime frequency of at least every 30 minutes, the exception being services to small villages in the east.
- 3.2 The majority of entitled children are carried on school contracts and, despite the fact that more than two-thirds attend mainstream schools, half the contracts are carrying only one or two students.
- 3.3 The cost of school transport is high and it is proposed there should be a review of each contract to enable economies of scale through both transfer to local bus and combining contracts on a smaller number of larger vehicles. It is noted there seems little scope for staggering of school start and finish times.
- 3.4 There is overall little scope for the Council to influence the bus network, since over 92% is operated commercially, although there may be some savings through better use of resources in delivering the tendered evening and Sunday services.

#### **Pilot Schemes**

- 3.5 New software is being introduced to analyse the optimum arrangements for utilising school and social care transport.
- 3.6 However, whilst options for improvements have been identified in Castle Point and Basildon, the report concludes that, with a peak vehicle requirement of

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three in Rochford, there is limited scope for improving utilisation.

**Routing Software for School Transport**

- 3.7 The report proposes the introduction of new software to assist route planning and to optimise vehicle utilisation.

**Supported Services Appraisal Tool**

- 3.8 The Area Review process has highlighted the importance of ongoing monitoring of local bus contracts and their relationship with commercial services. A new software tool is proposed for initial trial in the West Area Review to enable the Council to identify the relative merits of each service.

**Stakeholder Discussions**

- 3.9 Discussions with stakeholders have identified issues of concern including:
- the importance of linking the reviews with the Local Transport Plan;
  - the limitations in the bus network;
  - the problems with health trips;
  - problems of access to isolated villages;
  - the importance of the taxi service to plug gaps.
- 3.10 The report identifies the need to improve co-ordination of health related journeys, including improved vehicle utilisation across separate fleets.

**4 DISCUSSION**

- 4.1 The key messages from this report focus on school transport contracts and the need to review the current arrangements to achieve economies of scale in provision.
- 4.2 In order to do so, new software packages will be introduced to assist analysis, although these will also be used to look at other contracts, particularly those related to social care centres.
- 4.3 There is little doubt that a key part of this review is to save money on the delivery of transport services, but any improvements that can be found to ensure the optimum use of school and social transport is worthy of support.
- 4.4 Overall though, given the limited opportunity to influence the bus network in the South Area due to the high percentage of commercial services, it seems unlikely there will be any major changes apparent from the review,.

**5 RECOMMENDATION**

- 5.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

That, subject to comments from Members, this report forms the basis of the Council's response on this consultation paper.

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**Background Papers:-**

South Essex Area Review, Essex County Council - September 2004

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