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## **Meeting of Executive Members for City Strategy and Advisory Panel**

**11 December 2006**

Report of the Director of City Strategy

### **PETITION SEEKING BETTER BUS SERVICE FOR FORDLANDS ROAD, FULFORD**

#### **Summary**

1. To consider a petition presented by Councillor D'Agorne to Council on 5 October 2006, opposing changes made to the Council subsidised bus services in Fordlands Road in September 2006.

#### **Background**

2. Following First York's withdrawal of commercial bus services from Fordlands Road, as part of its overhaul of its bus service network in 2001, bus services have been maintained to Fordlands Road by the provision of Council subsidised bus services. Initially, this took the form of a, broadly, hourly frequency service which ran via Heslington and Heworth into the City Centre and onward to Clifton Moor and Skelton. The indirect route of this service, which was designed to serve a wide range of travel needs, made the service unpopular and unattractive to Fulford residents as a means of travelling to and from the City Centre.
3. In 2004, First York and the Council carried out a joint review of the Company's bus services, with a view to identifying opportunities to make improvements, building on the Company's overall success since 2001 in reversing the decline in bus use, which had previously been in progress for many years. One of several positive outcomes of this review was the creation of bus services 22 and 23 to replace a mixture of Council subsidised and First York marginally commercial bus services, which included the former indirect service from Fordlands Road. The new services combined to provide Fordlands Road with a more direct and, broadly, half hourly frequency bus service into the City Centre (also serving Heslington Lane and Broadway) as well as significantly improving bus service provision in the Rawcliffe and Skelton area. It was expected that the improved services would increase the numbers of people using bus services in the affected areas.
4. From the outset, the service was plagued by peak period traffic delay problems, which led to two subsequent changes to the timetable before reliable operation was successfully established in April 2006.

5. Also from the outset, Arriva Yorkshire – which runs commercial bus services along the Fulford Road corridor – questioned the justification for the Council increasing subsidised bus service provision along a corridor already served by two frequent commercial services. The Company initially accepted Council arguments about seeking to provide attractive services to residential areas off the main route along the corridor. However, when tenders were invited to continue the services unchanged from September 2006, the Company declared its intention to increase the frequency of its main York to Selby bus service from every twenty to every fifteen minutes (a change it actually made at the end of July 2006) and divert alternate journeys via Heslington Lane and Broadway. This would have left only Fordlands Road in the Fulford area, which it is only feasible to serve with a terminating service, without a bus service provided commercially by the private sector.
6. In discussions with Arriva Yorkshire, the Company agreed not to divert its service along Heslington Lane and Broadway provided that the Council reduced the extent of subsidised bus services in the area. A proposal to reduce the frequency of the service running to Fordlands Road from broadly half-hourly to broadly hourly, with an explanation of the reasons, was presented to this panel on 17 July 2006 and approved. The revised timetable was introduced in September 2006 and is attached to this report as Annex A.

## **Consultation**

7. No specific public consultation was carried out, due to the short timescale between receipt of tenders and the expiry date of the previous contract. Subsidised bus services are continually monitored to ensure that they continue to meet the travel needs of passengers and are provided in accordance with a legal framework and with Council transport policies which have been the subject of extensive previous public consultation. Additionally, from time to time, the Council participates in Bus User Surgeries organised by Bus Users UK, to listen to public views about bus services. The appropriateness of the existing subsidised supported services will be reviewed in the context of the Council's Second Local Transport Plan during the timeframe of current and planned contracts. Public consultation and notification will be carried out on any significant changes proposed as an outcome of this process.

## **Options**

8. The following options are available to the Council:
  - To maintain the existing service in its present (or slightly modified) form
  - To restore the service to its former timetable
  - To modify another subsidised bus service, in combination with restoring the former service into Fordlands Road, to satisfy Arriva Yorkshire objections to the volume of subsidised bus services in the Fulford area.

## Analysis

9. The petitioners “oppose the planned cut to the frequency of the No. 22 and 23 bus service between Fulford and the City Centre from half hourly to less than hourly from 4 September 2006. Residents of the Fordlands Road area, who include many elderly people and families with young children, have a right to a decent bus service.” They “call on the Council to urgently review its funding decision that reduces the frequency of this service.” The petition contains 171 signatures from 137 addresses. Of these, 34 signatories do not live in the immediately affected areas, including 18 who live on or adjacent to the main road through Fulford. Some signatories added comments, 6 referring to hardship for the elderly, 2 referring to difficulties with walking distances to bus stops, 2 referring to difficulties crossing the main road, and eleven making comments relating to a desire for a higher frequency service. 4 made comments which suggested they took the petition to be related to development proposals in the area, of which they do not approve.
10. No reduction in subsidy accrued to the Council from reducing the frequency of the bus service to Fordlands Road. This is partly because resources used to provide the service have been redeployed, as far as possible, to augment the Service 22 and 23 timetable at the Rawcliffe end of the route, partly because very little cost saving was achieved by the changes, and partly because there is a risk for the contractor that fares revenue might reduce as a consequence of the changes. The reasons for the changes are outlined in paragraphs 5 and 6 above and in the report to the July 2006 meeting of this panel.
11. It should be feasible, in current circumstances, to restore the timetable to its previous form, without any additional cost being incurred by the Council. This is only likely to be the case, however, as long as there is a need for the Council to provide subsidised services to Rawcliffe as well as Fulford. Members will recall that First York did not submit a tender for continued operation of this group of services. The company is currently continuing to provide the services on a short term negotiated contract until February 2007 and it is expected that the contract will be awarded to a different company from that date. Award of a substantive contract has been delayed to allow time to resolve a number of issues arising from the tendering process reported to this panel in July 2006.
12. First York has indicated, informally, that it is considering introducing a bus service commercially to Rawcliffe and Skelton, along with other changes to its network of bus services in the City. If it decides to go ahead, then the Council will be forced to review its requirements for supplementary subsidised bus services and the outcome could affect the affordability of reinstating the half-hourly frequency subsidised service to Fulford.
13. Reinstatement of the service is likely to displease Arriva Yorkshire. That company may respond by implementing its proposal to serve Heslington Lane and Broadway. It may also, or alternatively, complain that the Council has acted improperly within the legal framework, possibly either to the Audit Commission or the Office of Fair Trading. Either body may investigate the

Council's actions. The Council would need a robust case in order to justify its actions to any investigation.

14. Surveys of passenger journeys carried out on the service before and after the September changes are summarised below (figures represent daily passenger volumes for Mondays to Fridays – lower figures shown in brackets apply on Saturdays).

<b>Date of survey</b>	<b>To/from Fordlands</b>	<b>To Heslington Lane/Broadway</b>	<b>From</b>	<b>Passengers per bus hour (min. good value guideline = 11)</b>
Autumn 2004	52	49		10
2005	80 (53)	90 (85)		17.5 (14)
Autumn 2006	57 (44)	54 (35)		12.5 (9)

This indicates that the improved service introduced in 2004 did succeed in attracting increased use, although it is not clear how much of this may have transferred from other nearby bus services. Use of the service has reduced since the reduced frequency was introduced in September 2006.

15. Separately from the petition, there have been complaints that the service now calls at Clifford Street, instead of Piccadilly, and that the last bus from York City Centre is too early. Waiting time at the Fulford terminus, which arises from the co-ordination of timings with Service 128 between Clifford Street and Broadway, has also generated complaints. A proposal for a revised timetable, which addresses these complaints has been prepared for possible implementation in February 2007. A copy forms Annex B to this report.
16. Service 128, which forms part of the 128/129 Circle Line service is the other Council subsidised bus service which serves part of the Fulford corridor. The primary purpose of these services is to improve access to York University and Monks Cross, and they are part funded by York University. Surveys show only small numbers of passengers using the links between University and Fulford Road and between Fulford and Monks Cross (21 per day). There may be scope therefore to consider using the resources allocated to this service differently and more effectively, in conjunction with York University. It was anticipated that this would form part of the review, during the life of the contracts originally planned to run for five years from September 2006, referred to in paragraph 7 above. It is not feasible to bring this forward and carry it out before February 2007, when the current temporary contract expires.
17. Other possible future developments which might affect the supply and demand of bus services through Fulford are the proposed development along Germany Beck and the possible reintroduction of limited stop operation on the Designer Outlet Park & Ride service. The former, if it materialises, has conditions attached to the Planning Consent, which provide for the developer to fund additional or improved bus services in the Fulford area for several years. The latter is a Council aspiration for development of the Park & Ride service to bring it up to the standard provided from other sites. As demand from Park &

Ride users grows, a move to limited stop operation may be necessary, in any event, to maintain adequate capacity to meet demand for the service effectively. Informal discussions with Arriva suggest they would consider providing further increased capacity on their commercial service, if the Park & Ride service becomes less able to accommodate local business along Fulford Road. Either of these possible changes, however, may offer an opportunity or need for the Council to review the level of subsidised bus service provision in the area.

## **Corporate Priorities**

18. Providing subsidised bus services, which would otherwise not exist, to supplement those services provided commercially by the private sector, contributes towards the following Council's Corporate Aims as set out in the Council Plan for 2006/7. In particular, it contributes towards the "Sustainable City" and "Inclusive City" strategic objectives in the Community Strategy and Improvement Priority IS2 for the 2006 – 2009 period; to increase the use of public and other environmentally friendly modes of transport. It also contributes towards achievement of the objectives embodied in the Council's Second Local Transport Plan; to reduce congestion, improve safety, improve air quality, improve accessibility, and improve other aspects of quality of life.

## **Implications**

### **Financial**

19. Retention of the current service, even with the proposed slight improvements, has no foreseeable financial implications. Reverting to the previous service should have no immediate financial implications but may have future implications, if expected developments in bus service provision in the City occur. These cannot at present be quantified. There may also be potential financial implications if Services 128/129 are changed, due mainly to risks to revenue associated with change. These should, however, be relatively modest.

### **Human Resources (HR)**

20. Implementing a substantive contract for the subsidised Fulford bus service (in either its existing or revised form), responding to any changes to commercial bus service registrations in the City, becoming involved in an investigation by an outside body, or bringing forward a review of other subsidised bus services will necessitate resources within the Transport Planning Unit being re-allocated away from other priorities.

### **Equalities**

21. Changes to bus services, other than a simple frequency increase, would disadvantage some residents, who are dependent on those services for their mobility and access to various facilities in the City. The action proposed seeks to minimise such adverse effects.

## **Legal**

22. The, so far, incomplete tendering process is being conducted in accordance with legal requirements. Any action discussed in this report, which is recommended for implementation, will also be conducted in accordance with legal requirements, although this may be subject to independent scrutiny based on interpretation of whether or not the provision of particular subsidised bus services can be properly justified.

## **Crime and Disorder**

23. There are no crime and disorder implications.

## **Information Technology (IT)**

24. There are no Information Technology implications.

## **Property**

25. There are no property implications.

## **Transport**

26. Discontinuation or reduction of bus services, making the overall bus service offer less attractive, may cause some transfer to car use with a consequent increase in traffic volumes. The scale of likely transfer is, however, not forecast to make a material difference to traffic congestion in and around the City.

## **Risk Management**

27. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy the main risks that have been identified in this report are those which could lead to the inability to meet business objectives (Strategic) and failure to meet stakeholders' expectations (Governance). Measured in terms of impact and likelihood, the risk score all risks has been assessed as less than 16. This means that, at this point, the risks only need to be monitored as they do not provide a real threat to the achievement of Council objectives.

## **Recommendations**

28. That the Advisory Panel advise the Executive Member that:
  - 1) A substantive contract for provision of a bus service to Fulford (Fordlands Road) should be awarded on the basis of the proposed route and timetable included as Annex B to this report.

**Reasons:** To respond to criticism of the current service, without incurring actual or potential additional financial commitment for the Council and without precipitating unwelcome action by any bus company providing nearby commercial bus services. To ensure continuity of service provision in a situation which is expected to be uncertain in the short term.

- 2) Bus service provision along the Fulford Road corridor should be closely monitored, and a review of subsidised bus services in the area should be brought forward as soon as possible after the current situation appears to have stabilised.

**Reason:** To explore any opportunities which might arise to improve the frequency of bus service on the route to Fulford (Fordlands Road).

- 3) The Director of City Strategy should be empowered, in consultation with the Executive Member, to take appropriate action, guided by the aims embodied in this report, to respond to any changes in the situation brought about by commercial bus service registrations, with any such action reported to a subsequent meeting of this Panel.

**Reason:** To facilitate a timely response to any unforeseen changes, which may be made with a minimum of eight week's notice, to the network of bus services provided commercially by the private sector.

### Contact Details

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**Report Approved**  **Date** 29/11/06

### Specialist Implications Officer(s)

There are no specialist implications

**Wards Affected:** Fishergate, Fulford

**All**

**For further information please contact the author of the report**

### Background Papers:

Meeting of Executive Members for City Strategy and the Advisory Panel 17 July 2006; "Tenders for Provision of Subsidised Bus Services".

Letter from Arriva Yorkshire which accompanied bus service tender submission May 2006

Sample survey data collected by Council Officers to monitor usage of existing subsidised bus services.

The Council Plan 2005/6

### Annexes

**Annex A:** Current timetable for bus service between York & Fulford (Fordlands Road)

**Annex B:** Proposed timetable for bus service between York & Fulford (Fordlands Road)