

## **Highways and Transport Committee**

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<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	26 January 2023
<b>Report Title:</b>	Notice of Motion 'Safe Night-time travel for workers'
<b>Report of:</b>	Tom Moody, Director of Highways & Infrastructure
<b>Report Reference No:</b>	HT/70/22-23
<b>Ward(s) Affected:</b>	All

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### **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1. This report responds to the Notice to Motion at Council which proposed a number of actions aimed to improve late-night public transport for workers, that would lead to improved personal safety and security, provide enhanced access and opportunity for work in the night-time economy and, in so doing make contributions to the economy and environmental sustainability of Cheshire East.
- 1.2. This report considers those actions relating passenger transport raised by the Notice to Motion to Council in October 2022, where Council resolved that the matter be referred to the relevant Service Committee. It should be noted that the Motion included a number of matters relating to the licensing of both premises and vehicles (taxis). These parts of the Motion are to be considered by the Council's Environment and Communities Committee in February 2023.

### **2. Executive Summary**

- 2.1. The Notice of Motion to Council on Safe Night-time Travel for Workers included the following proposals in relation to passenger transport:
  - 2.1.1. Publicly call for improvement to late night and off-peak transport service provision and use the Government's Safety of Women at Night Fund to provide extra night services, as well as work with employers to use the fund for supplementary taxi travel.

- 2.1.2. Publicly call for the lowering of fares and opposition to any cuts to public transport funding and for our local council to use their powers and political platforms to achieve this.
- 2.1.3. Publicly call for the municipal ownership of buses in order to lower prices and improve service provision, especially for night-time and off-peak services and endeavour to work with Greater Manchester Combined Authority as they move forward with bus franchising using powers under the Bus Services Act 2017
- 2.2. This paper summarises the main responses to the issues of night-time public transport provision in the borough and the opportunities available to the Council to further enhance the local public transport network.
- 2.3. The recommendations in this report align with the Council's Corporate Plan. They support the objective of being an open and transparent council as well as supporting sustainable transport initiatives which contribute to a local response to the climate challenge whilst supporting those residents that rely on local public transport provision for travel-to-work.

### **3. Recommendations**

- 3.1. Highways and Transport Committee is recommended to endorse the proposed response to the Notice of Motion, which will be made available on the Council's Highways & Transport webpages.
- 3.2. Committee is recommended to agree that:
  - 3.2.1. the Council continues to engage with local bus operators through its Enhanced Partnership arrangements acknowledging that any consideration of improved evening and late-night services on the local bus network would be dependent on central government funding, such as the Government's Safety of Women at Night Fund, being made available to provide financial support.
  - 3.2.2. the Council continues to engage with the Greater Manchester Combined Authority to ensure their plans for bus franchising protect cross boundary bus services.
  - 3.2.3. there is no compelling case for a move to municipal ownership of buses in Cheshire East at this time.

### **4. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 4.1. The recommendations relate to the key parts of the Motion at Council on 'Safe Night-time travel for workers', in October 2022.

- 4.2. The recommendations take into account the structure and legal mechanisms relating to local buses and passenger transport affecting the Council's role as Passenger Transport Authority.
- 4.3. The recommendations take into account national and regional policy initiatives that are expected to influence local bus provision in Cheshire East.

## **5. Other Options Considered**

- 5.1. No other options were considered. In the interests of being open and transparent, the response to this Notice of Motion to Council will be considered by the relevant service Committee in accordance with the Council's Constitution.

## **6. Background**

- 6.1. Shift work is widespread in many industries, particularly hospitality, as well as health and care workers, retail, cleaning, security and porter staff and can often entail late-night working. Many of these job roles are essential to maintaining key services relied upon by communities, including health care, schools as well as commercial and leisure facilities in the night-time economy.
- 6.2. Many workers, especially women, state that they are increasingly worried about their safety travelling to and from work at night. These concerns may inhibit participation on work within the night-time economy in ways that contribute to loss of household incomes. At the same time, employers with night-time businesses may find it difficult to attract workers, constraining economic activity in the sector.
- 6.3. The public transport network throughout Cheshire East currently provides only limited levels of service to support the night-time economy. This is largely in response to the low level of demand for late night travel, which makes commercial operation of services unviable. As examples, the latest scheduled bus service from Crewe bus station leaves at 23.35 hours. The last service departs Macclesfield bus station at 23.35 hours also. There are no all-night services – night buses - operating in Cheshire East
- 6.4. Presently, 15 local bus routes are operated on a commercial basis in Cheshire East. The Council provides revenue support (subsidy) to 14 local bus contracts, deploying circa £2.2million annually. This financial support provides services that would not be provided commercially. The Council's revenue support for local buses secures the following:
  - 6.4.1. Whole routes serving parts of the Borough without any other bus services, especially the more rural areas.

- 6.4.2.** Specific journeys on routes that are otherwise commercial, including evening or weekend journeys.
- 6.5.** Local authorities in the UK have powers under the Transport Act 1985 to provide support to enhance the local bus network, in instances where a service cannot be provided on a commercial basis. However, this is a non-statutory provision, meaning that a Council is able to determine the need and ability to provide subsidy locally, on a case-by-case basis.
- 6.6.** Cheshire East Council published its first Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) in October 2022, in accordance with Government's National Bus Strategy – "*Bus Back Better*" – (March 2021). This plan covers a five-year period up to 2026/27. Like many rural local authorities, Cheshire East received no Government funding for its BSIP, which severely constrains the level of investment in the local bus network. Our BSIP called for improvements to services, including off-peak and night-time transport services over coming years.
- 6.7.** The Council has entered into an Enhanced Partnership with local bus operators, where we can work collaboratively to improve the offer to passengers. By working with operators, we can explore the viability of a range of service changes, including options to use the Government's Safety of Women at Night Fund to provide extra night services.
- 6.8.** Government has announced a national £2 fare cap will be trialled during the period January to March 2023. This initiative is intended to promote further recovery in bus patronage following the pandemic, demonstrating the impact of reducing fares on local bus ridership. Arrangements for the Fare Cap are being negotiated directly between bus operators and the Department for Transport.
- 6.9.** There is no history of municipal ownership of bus companies in Cheshire East, in fact there is a very limited number of municipally-owned bus companies nationwide. Typically, those currently operating are legacy companies that pre-date the period of privatisation from the mid 1980's. Establishing a new municipal operator would be largely without precedent and would face a number of stringent tests to ensure it did not undermine the commercial bus sector.
- 6.10.** In Cheshire East, before privatisation and de-regulation in the mid 1980's, the predominant operator was Crosville, a part of the former National Bus Company. Following privatisation, a number of private operators have worked in the borough; both small and medium-sized independents plus a number of the "big 4" nationals. No detailed evaluation of a move to municipal ownership of buses in the borough has been completed. There is no evidence that municipal ownership would yield lower prices for the customer or costs to the Council; noting that the cost base for municipally-owned companies is generally comparable to that for commercial companies.

- 6.11.** The Greater Manchester Combined Authority (GMCA) is moving forward with provisions for bus franchising using powers under the Bus Services Act 2017. Recourse to bus franchising is limited to Mayoral Combined Authorities, with other local authorities using Enhanced Partnership working arrangements to improve local services. GMCA are obliged to engage with all neighbouring authorities and they have been doing so throughout the development of their franchise plans. This is particularly important to ensure continuity of cross-boundary services linking Cheshire East and Greater Manchester.

## **7. Consultation and Engagement**

- 7.1.** Following a committee resolution on 24<sup>th</sup> November, the Council is to consult on changes to its Criteria for Supporting Local Bus Services in January 2023. This consultation is an opportunity for all stakeholders to make representations on how the Council should prioritise its funding for local bus subsidies, including night-time bus services.
- 7.2.** Consultation will be carried out with local bus operators and key stakeholders as part of the Cheshire East Enhanced Quality Partnership for buses. Statutory consultees including local bus operators, Traffic Commissioner, Transport Focus, neighbouring councils and local public transport user groups.

## **8. Implications**

### **8.1. Legal**

- 8.1.1.** The Council operates an Enhanced Partnership arrangement with bus operators and decision making on bus services and timetabling need to be taken in accordance with the Enhanced Partnership Scheme and Plan framework.
- 8.1.2.** The Government's Safety of Women at Night Fund is a fund set up by central Government to fund initiatives focused on preventing violence against women and girls in public spaces at night, including on related routes homes. An application to access the funds is required and any proposals would need to demonstrate how they would meet the criteria.

### **8.2. Finance**

- 8.2.1.** The committee report recommends the use of the Government's Safety of Women at Night Fund to support additional night services / supplementary taxi travel. Therefore, there are no financial implications for Council funding in this particular instance.

### **8.3. Policy**

**8.3.1.** There are no policy implications as a result of this response to the Notice of Motion, as local bus support may be implemented under existing policies and programmes adopted by the Council.

#### **8.4. Equality**

**8.4.1.** The equality implications arising as a result of this response to the Notice of Motion relate principally to the role of local bus services in providing transport opportunities, particularly to jobs requiring work at night-times.

**8.4.2.** There is evidence that a high proportion of workers relying on these bus services are women, are from ethnic minority groups and are from lower income households. Therefore, any improvement to local bus services is likely to reduce disadvantage experienced by these groups compared to the wider population.

#### **8.5. Human Resources**

**8.5.1.** There are no Human resource implications arising as a result of this Notice of Motion.

#### **8.6. Risk Management**

**8.6.1.** There are no specific risk management implications arising as a result of the response to this Notice of Motion.

**8.6.2.** Should improvements to night-time public transport be achieved, there is a likelihood the personal risks associated with travel during nights and evenings will be reduced, especially for women, ethnic minorities and other vulnerable persons.

#### **8.7. Rural Communities**

**8.7.1.** There are no specific rural communities' implications as a result of this Notice of Motion. The proposed approach would apply to all local bus service within the borough, although it should be acknowledged that there are particular challenges to making rural bus services more commercially viable.

#### **8.8. Children and Young People/Cared for Children**

**8.8.1.** The introduction of improved local bus services can have positive impacts for Children and Young People/Cared for Children within the borough. Whilst late-night services may not be used directly by large numbers of children, they can have positive impacts on children's health and well-being by enabling parents/carers to participate in the workforce therefore increasing household incomes.

#### **8.9. Public Health**

**8.9.1.** The introduction of night-time bus services can have positive impacts on public health within the borough. Increased provision of public transport can have positive impacts on levels of air quality, noise, road accident

casualties and health/wellbeing, as well as reduced dependency on private cars.

## 8.10. Climate Change

- 8.10.1. Committee will note that additional local bus services can make a positive contribution to more sustainable journeys to work and for leisure purposes, reducing congestion, improving personal safety, improving air quality and reducing carbon emissions from motorised vehicles.

Access to Information	
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Appendices:	A) Notice of Motion to Council - 19 <sup>th</sup> October 2022, " <b>Safe night-time travel for workers</b> " – Proposed by Cllr Laura Smith, Seconded by Cllr Sally Hanley
Background Papers:	Cheshire East Bus Service Improvement Plan <a href="https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/public-transport/bsip/cheshire-east-bsip-2021.pdf">https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/pdf/public-transport/bsip/cheshire-east-bsip-2021.pdf</a>  Enhanced Partnership for Buses <a href="https://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/transport-strategies">Transport Strategies (cheshireeast.gov.uk)</a>