

Appendix 5 – Bus Service Review 2024

Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) Engagement and our equality duty

Whilst [the Gunning Principles](#) set out the rules for consulting ‘everyone’, additional requirements are in place to avoid discrimination and inequality.

Cheshire East Council is required to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty. The Equality Act 2010 simplified previous anti-discrimination laws with a single piece of legislation. Within the Act, the Public Sector Equality Duty (Section 149) has three aims. It requires public bodies to have due regard to the need to:

- eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by the Act, by consciously thinking about equality when making decisions (such as in developing policy, delivering services and commissioning from others)
- advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not share it, by removing disadvantages, meeting their specific needs, and encouraging their participation in public life
- foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and people who do not

The Equality Duty helps public bodies to deliver their overall objectives for public services, and as such should be approached as a positive opportunity to support good decision-making.

It encourages public bodies to understand how different people will be affected by their activities so that policies and services are appropriate and accessible to all and meet different people’s needs. By understanding the effect of their activities on different people, and how inclusive public services can support and open up people’s opportunities, public bodies are better placed to deliver policies and services that are efficient and effective.

Complying with the Equality Duty may involve treating some people better than others, as far as this is allowed by discrimination law. For example, it may involve providing a service in a way which is appropriate for people who share a protected characteristic, such as providing computer training to all people to help them access information and services.

The Equality Act identifies nine 'protected characteristics' and makes it a legal requirement to make sure that people with these characteristics are protected from discrimination:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnerships
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

Applying the equality duty to engagement

If you are developing a new policy, strategy or programme you may need to carry out an Equality Impact Assessment. You may be able to ascertain the impact of your proposal on different characteristics through desk-based research and learning from similar programmes, but you also need to carry out some primary research and engagement. People with protected characteristics are often described as 'hard to reach' but you will find everyone can be reached – you just need to tailor your approach, so it is accessible for them.

Contacting the [Equality and Diversity mailbox](#) will help you to understand how you can gain insight as to the impacts of your proposals and will ensure that you help the Council to comply with the Equality Act 2010 and the Public Sector Equality Duty.

Section 1 – Details of the service, service change, decommissioning of the service, strategy, function or procedure

Proposal Title	Bus Service Review 2024
Date of Assessment	August 2024
Assessment Lead Officer Name	Chris Taylor/ Richard Hibbert
Directorate/Service	Highways and Transport
Details of the service, service change, decommissioning of the service, strategy, function or procedure.	<p>The bus network in Cheshire East plays a key role in providing access to jobs and services and connecting people and places. Buses are an essential component of an integrated transport network. They have a vital role in delivering key Council policy priorities for the economy, social cohesion, environmental sustainability, including decarbonisation.</p> <p>The local bus network is made up of 37 bus services, of which 21 services are fully supported by the Council (57%), 8 are partially supported by the Council (22%), such as evening journeys, and 8 services (22%) are fully commercial. The Council currently spends £2.8m supporting bus services which are not commercially viable but are deemed important and socially necessary.</p> <p>The last strategic bus service review was undertaken in 2017 and much has changed in that time. In 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic struck with significant impacts for passenger transport services and government published the National Bus Strategy in March 2021, which set out to rebuild bus patronage to 2019 levels and beyond.</p> <p>A methodology has been adopted based on an evidence-led approach which ensures our planning is informed and influenced by robust data and stakeholder consultation. The key tasks in the methodology are set out as in Appendix 1 to the Committee report, including the bus support criteria, performance data, accessibility mapping and gap analysis.</p>

	<p>An 8-week consultation was undertaken between 7th May and 3rd July 2024 to seek the views of bus operators, service users, local businesses and residents.</p> <p>With supported bus contracts due to come to an end on 31st March 2025, there is a need to review the existing service provision to ensure retendered services offer value for money and the best possible coverage to serve residents of the borough with the right services in the right places. This bus service review will help to inform the process of retendering of services.</p> <p>In 2021, the Council was awarded £1.2m from the DfT Rural Mobility Fund to deliver a flexible, demand responsive transport (DRT) service in the south and west area of Nantwich – Go-Too was launched in October 2021 as a 3-year pilot project.</p> <p>As part of the bus service review, careful consideration has been given to the blend between fixed route and flexible transport services. There are many lessons learnt from the Go-Too pilot project which can be applied across the borough and there are clear opportunities to modernise the FlexiLink service and respond to consultation results from September 2023. These services will be included in the bus service review 2024 and associated consultation process.</p>
<p>Who is Affected?</p>	<p>Three proposals were developed and consulted upon. These include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nantwich rural service adjustments • Poynton-Stockport frequency enhancement • Flexible transport / DRT reconfiguration <p>Based on these proposals the following groups are likely to be directly impacted:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nantwich residents (particularly those in rural areas) • Residents of Poynton • FlexiLink users • Go-Too users <p>Looking at a wider picture of who might be affected by these proposals the below could also be affected:</p>

- The general public (including residents and visitors to the borough);
- Cheshire East Council stakeholders;
- Public transport operators and staff;
- Local businesses/organisations;
- Schools and education establishments;
- Neighbouring local authorities;
- Governmental bodies (e.g. Local Enterprise Partnership);
- Statutory transport bodies (e.g. Department for Transport and Transport for the North).
- Partner organisations
- Town and Parish Councils;
- Umbrella organisations for people with specialist transport needs; such as:
 - Age UK
 - Space4Autism
 - Disability Information Bureau (DIB)
 - Cheshire Centre for Independent living
 - Deafness Support Network
 - ADCA Medical Transport Service
 - Congleton Disabled Club
 - Care4CE
 - Leonard Cheshire Disability
 - The Stroke Association
- Transport interest groups; such as:
 - Crewe & District Bus Users Group
 - Transition Wilmslow
 - Active Travel Congleton
 - Travel Cheshire
- Environmental groups
- MPs

	<p>This list has been devised considering the current users of bus services across the borough who would be affected positively or negatively by service adjustments.</p>
<p>Links and impact on other services, strategies, functions or procedures.</p>	<p>Cheshire East's corporate plan recognises the importance of the bus network in supporting key strategic objectives such as reducing air pollution, reducing carbon emissions, enabling housing and employment growth, improving quality of place and protecting the environment.</p> <p>The Local Transport Plan (2019-2024) outlines the role transport will play in supporting the long-term goals to improve the economy, protect the environment, improve health and wellbeing and the quality of place. The methodology used to undertake the network review reflected this framework, considering social, economic and environmental impacts of bus services across the borough.</p> <p>Cheshire East's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) sets out the ambition for the bus network to improve the speed, reliability and quality of public transport, to encourage more residents to choose bus, make fewer car journeys and contribute to carbon reduction.</p>

<p>How does the service, service change, strategy, function or procedure help the Council meet the requirements of the Public Sector Equality Duty?</p>	<p>Ensuring pre-consultation engagement takes place prior to a formal consultation will provide better evidence as to how the Council is fostering good relations and advancing equality of opportunity.</p> <p>Conducting a bus service review and public consultation exercise will ensure that any changes to the supported bus network will, where possible, not impact users who are considered to have protected characteristics.</p>
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Section 2- Information – What do you know?

<p>What do you know?</p>	<p>What information (qualitative and quantitative) and/or research have you used to commission/change/decommission the service, strategy, function, or procedure?</p>
<p>Information you used</p>	<p>Patronage data for the Council’s supported bus network reveals that a significant number of passengers use concessionary passes. As of February 2024, this equates to over 24,000 passengers which is 36% of total travellers on supported bus services. This data is informed by regular passenger number updates that are received from bus operators of these services. These concessionary pass holders are likely to have one or multiple protected characteristics, including disabilities and being of young or old age.</p> <p>Bus services across Cheshire East are available to all people and therefore any service changes as a result of the bus service review and consultation have the potential to impact others with protected characteristics, including gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnerships, pregnancy and maternity, race, religious or faith groups, sex and sexual orientation.</p> <p>As part of the consultation undertaken between 7th May and 3rd July 2024, the following responses were received regarding the proposals put forward at that time:</p> <p><u>Proposal 1 – Rural Nantwich:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Will lead to rural isolation for those with no other modes of transport potentially impacting mental health and leading to loss of jobs.

- Will impact on the elderly – as the Nantwich rural bus services are the means of reaching Nantwich for shopping, access to the hospital, opticians, dentists, and meeting friends. Withdrawal would leave those with reduced mobility and reduced vision housebound and isolated.
- Alternative (flexible transport) not suitable to those who are digitally excluded such as those within low-income households and those who do not have a mobile phone / access to internet. Concessionary passes cannot be used on flexible transport creating a disadvantage compared to the fixed route services.
- Young people use the bus (70) to connect onto Chester on the 84 – gives them independence and freedom – lifeline for them to meet up with friends and get out of the house.

Proposal 2 – Route 391/392 (not directly related to the proposal, however some suggestions for improvement):

- Disabled people aren't able to get on the 391/392 bus service because of limited access – ageing buses difficult to embark / disembark.
- Recent changes to the 392 service (taking the 392 bus off Crossfield and South West avenue) has made it difficult for disabled and older residents to access the service as they must walk to the main road.

Proposal 3 – Flexible Transport:

- Needs to be affordable for those on low income.
- Important that the elderly can still get door-to-door pick up and drop off.
- Service should be free for the elderly; the charge is unfair to those with passes.
- Many elderly people cannot use apps or smart phones a phone line should always be available.
- Pre-booking is prohibitive for some disabled people.
- Should also be available for carers of disabled people as unable to travel without assistance.
- 09:30-14:30 is not useful to all disabled people as carers do not always arrive on time and can take people a long time to get dressed, eat, etc.
- Some residents use Go-Too to get to school, as they are not able to secure a place on the school bus and there is no other way to get there.

Gaps in your Information	There is a higher incidence of bus use amongst young people, older people, people with disabilities and women. We therefore anticipate that any alterations to services will disproportionately impact on these population groups. Currently data regarding certain protected groups and bus utilisation is sparse. The public consultation provides an opportunity to have greater engagement with these groups to ensure any proposals consider the potential impact and potential mitigation measures.
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3. What did people tell you?

What did people tell you	What consultation and engagement activities have you already undertaken and what did people tell you? Is there any feedback from other local and/or external regional/national consultations that could be included in your assessment?
Details and dates of the consultation/s and/or engagement activities	<p>Pre-consultation engagement with Poynton Town Council helped to understand the needs of bus users (in particular those with protected characteristics) and to help build improved relationships with the Council. This engagement allowed for the needs of residents to be understood early in the process and mitigation built into the proposals.</p> <p>The Council also receives regular communication from bus users and engagement with bus user groups who have raised concerns about the lack of direct access from Nantwich to Leighton Hospital. This was considered as part of the process and mitigation built into the proposals.</p> <p>A period of consultation took place for 8 weeks during 7th May and 3rd July 2024. The findings of this consultation are presented in detail within the consultation summary report. There was broad agreement with all proposals during this consultation period.</p>
Gaps in consultation and	At this stage a list of key stakeholders was developed to ensure a wide range of views were captured and reflected as part of the consultation process. Ongoing engagement will be undertaken through email and telephone correspondence, as well as focus group sessions with interested stakeholders.

engagement feedback	
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4. Review of information, consultation feedback and equality analysis

Protected characteristics groups from the Equality Act 2010	What do you know? Summary of information used to inform the proposal	What did people tell you? Summary of customer and/or staff feedback	What does this mean? Impacts identified from the information and feedback (actual and potential). These can be either positive, negative or have no impact.
Age	<p>A key market for bus services across Cheshire East are both residents of old and young age. Within Cheshire East there are over 40,000 young people and 80,000 people of retirement age (Census, 2021).</p> <p>This is demonstrated within the consultation sample, where 56% of respondents were over the age of 65.</p> <p>Alterations may result in services operating in a different way, which may have a disproportionate impact on older people and young people.</p> <p>UK Statistics (Age UK) show that those aged 70-84 are the most likely to use the bus at least weekly (61.2% do so), followed by those aged 85+ (57.1%,</p>	<p>Consultation responses have been provided from a range of age groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 16-24 4% • 25-34 4% • 35-44 7% • 45-54 11% • 55-64 15% • 65-74 24% • 75-84 23% • 85 and over 9% <p>For all age groups the majority agree with the three proposals that have been put forward.</p> <p>However, some concerns have been raised regarding the withdrawal of</p>	<p>The information tells us that the majority of people from all age groups are in favour of the proposals. This is a positive response and allows us to progress towards implementation of these proposals.</p> <p>There are some concerns regarding the withdrawal of some Nantwich rural services and the impact this has on accessibility for elderly residents.</p> <p>This will need to be carefully managed and supplemented by flexible transport, where possible, which will be used to mitigate the negative impact of service</p>

	<p>whilst people aged 60-69 are least likely to use the bus weekly (39.3%).</p> <p>Alternatively, UK statistics (National Travel Survey 2022) show that those aged 17 to 20 made the highest proportion of their trips using public transport modes (22%).</p> <p>Conversations with user groups revealed that they have a higher proportion of elderly residents and highlighted the importance of bus services. The group felt that Cheshire East and bus operators cannot only focus on what is best for the masses as their bus services cover rural locations and are a lifeline to many elderly and infirm residents.</p>	<p>some Nantwich rural services, replacement with DRT and the impact this will have, particularly on elderly residents.</p> <p>Residents are wary of DRT and giving out bank card details over the phone or online. Age UK proactively advise against this and not enough has been communicated to residents to increase assurance.</p> <p>It is also noted that concessionary fares are being charged on DRT services which would be a disadvantage for existing bus users who travel for free. Concessionary users feel aggrieved that having paid taxes all their lives, they can't use the passes on the flexible system proposed.</p> <p>Nantwich residents also outlined that school children predominantly attend Tarporley High School. Meeting with friends can be difficult and they often feel disconnected during school holidays.</p>	<p>withdrawal within rural Nantwich, providing service to key service centres from areas previously served by the 70 service (i.e. Bunbury and Bulkeley).</p>
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Disability	<p>Disability and accessibility statistics for England demonstrate that disabled adults appear to rely more on the bus than non-disabled adults. Adults with disabilities made a greater proportion of their travel by bus (7%) compared with 5% for adults without disabilities.</p> <p>Of those completing the survey a significant proportion (47%) outlined that their activity is limited due to health problems/disability.</p> <p>Any alterations to services as a result of the review may adversely impact on disabled transport users. This is possible as disabled residents represent a significant proportion of bus users (with limited transport alternatives) and are dependent on</p>	<p>FlexiLink users must be over the age of 80 and/or have a disability. These existing users have been targeted as part of this consultation to ensure their views inform and influence any service changes.</p> <p>187 existing users responded to the consultation and 73% of these agreed with the FlexiLink proposals.</p> <p>We also received strong support from Nursing Homes, Carers Hubs and community groups for improved bus connections to Leighton Hospital, which is being delivered as part of our Nantwich rural service enhancement.</p> <p>Residents raised concerns with the Go-Too service in that disabled passengers</p>	<p>The consultation responses reveal that disabled residents are in favour of the proposals put forward. This positive response allows us to progress with these proposals.</p> <p>However, concerns regarding service withdrawals and concessionary fares will need to be mitigated prior to service delivery. These mitigations will be co-designed considering the consultation outcomes and through discussions with key partners (operators, users, user groups).</p> <p>From 1st April 2025 it is proposed that the flexible transport service</p>

	bus services. Any service adjustments that reduce the level of service or introduce passenger fares (where free concessionary travel was previously available) will be seen as a negative impact.	have reported replacement services do not have wheelchair access. There is a perception that this would leave disabled residents at a disadvantage if flexible transport was to replace fixed route services.	operates at designated pick-up points, with the reassurance of a door-to-door service for those with limited mobility.
Gender reassignment	No information reviewed at present		
Pregnancy and maternity	No information reviewed at present		
Race/ethnicity	No information reviewed at present		
Religion or belief	No information reviewed at present		
Sex	Nationally public bus services are generally used more by women than by men – consequently any alteration to bus service provision may have a greater effect on women. A study by TfL revealed that within the UK women are more likely to use the bus at least once a week (64%) than men (57%).	Consultation responses had good representation from male and female genders. 40% male, 57% female and 3% other. In all gender categories there was broad agreement with the proposals.	A positive response has been received from all genders allowing us to progress with the proposals to implementation.

Sexual orientation	No information reviewed at present		
Marriage and civil partnership	No information reviewed at present		

5. Justification, Mitigation and Actions

Mitigation	What can you do?
<p>Please provide justification for the proposal if negative impacts have been identified? Are there any actions that could be undertaken to mitigate, reduce or remove negative impacts?</p> <p>Have all available options been explored? Please include details of alternative options and why they couldn't be considered?</p> <p>Please include details of how positive impacts could be further enhanced, if possible?</p>	<p>Actions to mitigate any negative impacts or further enhance positive impacts</p> <p>A wide range of engagement has been undertaken with residents, businesses, stakeholders and Council members to ensure the needs of the bus users are understood and proposals were sufficiently designed to meet these needs.</p> <p>During these discussions the need for a connection from Nantwich to Leighton Hospital was revealed as a key concern and low bus frequencies within Poynton were identified. Service proposals have been designed to address these local concerns. Where services are to be withdrawn in rural Nantwich (service 70) there was a risk that vulnerable groups, including the elderly and disabled, will be without a reliable mode of transport, leading to isolation.</p> <p>To mitigate this, a single integrated flexible transport service is proposed from 1st April 2025 to fill the gap in rural communities such as Bunbury, Bulkeley, Lightwood Green and Burleydam and ensure a service is available.</p> <p>Concessionary passes will be accepted on the flexible transport service allowing free travel at statutory times. This should provide a viable alternative to disabled and elderly residents.</p>

	<p>The flexible transport service will also have a telephone booking system, as well as online bookings, to avoid isolation for those without digital connectivity.</p> <p>The flexible transport service will operate at designated pick-up points with the reassurance of a door-to-door service for those with limited mobility.</p> <p>The flexible transport service will use fully accessible vehicles to ensure equal access for people with disabilities under normal service conditions.</p>
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6. Monitoring and Review -

Monitoring and review	How will the impact of the service, service change, decommissioning of the service, strategy, function or procedure be monitored? How will actions to mitigate negative impacts be monitored? Date for review of the EIA
Details of monitoring activities	<p>Service changes as a result of the bus service review will be subject to performance monitoring (in terms of patronage by time of day and day of week), analysis of complaints post implementation, and equality monitoring data through passenger surveys and Transport Focus' Your Passenger Journey Survey.</p> <p>This monitoring will also evaluate information on whether actions to mitigate negative impacts have achieved their desired outcome.</p>
Date and responsible officer for the review of the EIA	Richard Hibbert – July 2025

7. Sign Off

When you have completed your EIA, it should be sent to the [Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Mailbox](#) for review. If your EIA is approved, it must then be signed off by a senior manager within your Department (Head of Service or above).

Once the EIA has been signed off, please forward a copy to the Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Officer to be published on the website. For Transparency, we are committed to publishing all Equality Impact Assessments relating to public engagement.

Name	Tom Moody
Signature	
Date	10 th September 2024

8. Help and Support

For support and advice please contact EqualityandInclusion@cheshireeast.gov.uk