

# Appendix 4: Communications Plan - Bus Service Review 2024

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## Classification, resources and timescale

<b>Service</b>	Strategic Transport		<b>Committee</b>	Highways & Transport	
<b>CP Priority</b>			<b>CS Priority</b>		
<b>Subject</b>	Bus Service Review – Public Consultation				
<b>Comms lead</b>	Rhiannon Hilton		<b>Type</b>	Public Consultation	
<b>Budget</b>			<b>Bloom</b>	N/A	
<b>Start</b>	01/05/2024	<b>Go-live</b>	01/05/2024	<b>End</b>	26/06/2024

## Background / narrative

*An overview of the project.*

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.

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 £2.5m supporting bus services which are not commercially viable but are deemed important and socially necessary.

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.

A methodology has been prepared 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 an appendix to the Committee report, including the bus support criteria, performance data, accessibility mapping and gap analysis.

It is proposed to carry out an 8 week consultation between May and June 2024 to seek the views of bus operators, service users, local businesses and residents. The Enhanced Partnership (EP) for buses has a key role to play in the bus service review.

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.

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.

As part of the bus service review, careful consideration will be 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.

## Communications objectives/outcomes

Communications activity tries to change what people:		
Know	➔	Provide or clarify information and/or correct misinformation, misconception – in ways that are accessible and easy to understand
Think	➔	Put information into context of other knowledge and values, helping people reflect on what information means to them
Feel	➔	Nudge emotional response and personal relationship to knowledge
Do	➔	Provoke or call to action

*Communications-specific outcomes and objectives for this plan*

- Clearly describe the proposals for any bus service adjustments within Cheshire East and why these adjustments are necessary.
- Set the context for why the Bus Service Review is being undertaken and how proposals have been developed.
- Stress the impact of not implementing any service proposals on the viability of services going forward.
- Encourage Cheshire East residents to take part in the public consultation due to take place in May/June 2024.

## Audiences and stakeholders

Communications activity can take people on an engagement journey:					
Unaware >>>>	Aware >>>>>	Informed >>>	Interested >>>	Involved >>>	Leadership
We must consider people's starting attitude and position in relation what we are doing:					
Advocate	Agnostic	Sceptical	Critical	Cynical	

*Edit / add new rows as the project requires*

Audience / stakeholder	Notes
Residents and customers	
Children, young people, parents and carers	
Under-served communities	
CEC Staff	
CEC Councillors	
Community, voluntary and faith sector	

Audience / stakeholder	Notes
Key community influencers	
Businesses (local, regional and national)	
Developer and investor community	
Service delivery partners	
Schools, colleges, early years providers	
Town and parish councils	
MPs	
Local, regional and national public sector agencies.	
Neighbouring Authorities	
Vulnerable Groups – including Cheshire Eye Society, Cheshire Centre for Independent Living	

## Tactics / Approach

*How we are going to achieve the communications objectives / outcomes*

- Issue press releases, promoted also via social media, to outline clearly why the Bus Service Review is being undertaken, why the public are being engaged, what the proposals are and what the outcomes of this process will be.
- Press releases/social media must generate interest in the topic to encourage participation in the public consultation.
- Briefings to key stakeholders in advance of consultation going live and during the first week of consultation.

## Products/types of activity

*Examples of what we are going to do*

- Press releases prior to and during public consultation to encourage uptake.
- Social media posts to encourage participation in the public consultation.
- Enhanced Partnership (EP) Board and Forum meetings to discuss with operators and service users.
- Briefings with key stakeholders.

## Key messages

*The key messages and lines to take*

- The last network review was undertaken 7 years ago and since then the bus network has encountered significant challenges and change.
- The key objectives for the bus service review are:
  - a. Maximise opportunities to focus limited resources in the greatest areas of need.
  - b. Ensure supported services complement, not compete, with commercial services.
  - c. Maximise opportunities to extend the role of commercial services or transfer supported services to the commercial network.
  - d. Ensure that the network is coherent in terms of passenger needs, bus operations and value for money.
  - e. Work in partnership with operators to develop the best possible outcomes.
  - f. Identify opportunities to modernise flexible, demand responsive transport to complement fixed route bus service provision.
- The messaging will make clear that proposals for service changes and alterations are subject to consultation and that there is an opportunity for operators, service users, residents, businesses and stakeholders to inform and influence the process.

## Action plan and timeline

#	Date/time	Activity/Event	Comms/lead	Audience(s)	Channel	Notes
1	Before 01/05/2024	Councillor Briefings	Rhiannon Hilton	Committee Members	Teams Meeting	
2	01/05/2024	Press Release regarding Bus Service Review and public consultation start date.	Rhiannon Hilton	General Public/residents of Cheshire East	Press	
3	01/05/2024	Social media post regarding Bus Service Review and public consultation start date.	Rhiannon Hilton	General Public/residents of Cheshire East	Social Media platforms	
4	01/05/2024	Online publication regarding Bus Service Review and public consultation start date.	Rhiannon Hilton	General Public/residents of Cheshire East	Online (council webpage)	

#	Date/time	Activity/Event	Comms/lead	Audience(s)	Channel	Notes
5	29/05/2024	Press Release at halfway stage to further encourage participation in public consultation	Rhiannon Hilton	General Public/residents of Cheshire East	Press	
6	29/05/2024	Social media post at halfway stage to further encourage participation in public consultation	Rhiannon Hilton	General Public/residents of Cheshire East	Social Media platforms	
7	29/05/2024	Online publication at halfway stage to further encourage participation in public consultation	Rhiannon Hilton	General Public/residents of Cheshire East	Online (council webpage)	
9	TBC	Media release/social media to promote outcome of the consultation	TBC	General public and stakeholders	Website, media release & social media	

## **Evaluation, performance, reporting**

How are we going to demonstrate how well we have delivered the communications objectives and outcomes?

This will be measured directly by the number of respondents taking part in the public consultation.

Report on media pickup indicating what audiences are being reached.

Social media engagement.

## **Appendix 1: Communications products**

Record / link to final versions of media releases, statements and other products.

TBC



## **Appendix 2: Notable coverage**

List press, online, broadcast and social coverage

TBC