

North East Joint Transport Committee

Date: 17 September 2019

Subject: Discharge of Transport Functions by Northumberland County Council

Report of: Interim Executive Director: Place, Northumberland County Council

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on the discharge by Northumberland County Council of the functions delegated to it by the Joint Transport Committee, in the financial year 2018/19.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Committee note the transport responsibilities of Northumberland County Council and the activities undertaken in 2018/19.

1. Background Information

- 1.1 When the North East Joint Transport Committee approved its Standing Orders in November 2018, it delegated to Durham and Northumberland County Councils transport functions under parts 4 and 5 of the Transport Act 1985 and functions under part 2 of the Transport Act 2000.
- 1.2 Also included in the Standing Orders is an expectation that each county council will provide annually to the Joint Committee a report regarding the use of the delegation.

2. Proposals

- 2.1 Members are requested to note the contents of the report.

3. Reasons for the Proposals

- 3.1 The report provides the Joint Committee with a summary of the exercise of the transport functions exercised by the County Council under the delegation, and an opportunity to ask questions of the representatives and/or officers of the County Council regarding its contents which might inform future decisions of the Joint Committee on the continued delegation of these functions or the delegation of others within its remit.

4. Next Steps and Timetable for Implementation

- 4.1 The proposal is that report is for noting only: there are therefore no next steps identified.

5. Potential Impact on Objectives

- 5.1 The tasks reported in this document support the objectives of creating the best possible conditions for growth in jobs, investment and living standards, to make the North East an excellent location for business, to prioritise and deliver high quality infrastructure and to enable residents to raise their skill levels and to benefit from economic growth long into the future.

6. Financial and Other Resources Implications

- 6.1 For 2018/19, the funding for Transport functions in Northumberland County Council was transferred into the North East Joint Transport Committee, which in turn delegated the funding to the Council to cover the discharge of its transport functions.

7. Legal Implications

- 7.1 In order to enable the Transport functions to be carried out lawfully by the employees who carry them out currently, authorisation has been obtained from the Cabinet of Northumberland County Council.

8. Key Risks

8.1 There are no specific risk management issues arising from this report.

9. Equality and Diversity

9.1 There are no specific equality and diversity issues arising from this report.

10. Crime and Disorder

10.1 There are no implications for crime and disorder arising directly from this report.

11. Consultation/Engagement

11.1 There are no specific consultation/community engagement implications arising from this report.

12. Other Impact of the Proposals

12.1 There are no other impacts arising from this report.

13. Appendices

13.1 Appendix 1
North East Joint Transport Committee
Northumberland County Council Transport Activity Report 2018/19.

14. Background Papers

14.1 The North East Joint Transport Committee Standing Orders dated January 2019

15. Contact Officers

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16. Sign off

- Head of Paid Service:
- Monitoring Officer:
- Chief Finance Officer:

Appendix 1
North East Joint Transport Committee
Northumberland County Council Transport Activity Report
2018/19

The Supported Bus Service Network

1. The vast majority of bus routes operating in Northumberland are run commercially without any input, subsidy or support from Northumberland County Council. This commercial network which covers approximately 80% of all services covers those routes that are profitable. The remaining 20% of services are either fully or partially subsidised by Northumberland County Council, these services would not operate without the ongoing support of the council.
2. The supported services comprise approximately 45 routes, or parts of routes, that cover mainly rural areas of Northumberland. These supported services include instances of services running commercially at popular/peak times, but where support is given to maintain journeys at other times (early morning and late evening for example). They also include support the County Council gives to key tourist services that help boost the local economy and safeguard the environment by ensuring that people can visit notable locations without needing a car. All supported routes are shown on Map 1 overleaf.
3. Historically, criteria for subsidising bus services has been based on maximum subsidy per passenger and where these figures are exceeded the service concerned should not be provided i.e. it will be withdrawn. A more considered approach has now been implemented that looks at accessibility, integration and procurement to ensure services deliver the maximum accessibility from the given budget. This approach has allowed us to realise substantial savings with minimal disruption to the supported bus network.

	Supported Services Budget
Supported Bus Services Gross Expenditure 2018/2019	£1.2m* (Incl. £500k BSOG)
Funding available as of the 1 st April 2019	£1.2m

* In addition to the stated expenditure additional funding is provided by partner organisation to support specific services and a significant recharge from home to school transport for those elements of the supported bus network that are used to carry scholars.

Map 1: Bus services that are fully or partly subsidised by Northumberland County Council

Northumberland Public Bus Service Route Lines

— subsidised by NCC



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Northumberland
Northumberland County Council

Home to School Transport

- Northumberland County Council provides free home to school transport for 7,160 eligible children attending mainstream and Special Educational Needs (SEN) schools at an annual cost of over £14m (£8.6m mainstream & £5.5m SEN). Home to school transport policy is largely restricted to statutory criteria but free provision is made for children to enable them to attend a particular school on grounds of religion or belief. The school transport network covers all of Northumberland and substantial use is made of “feeder” transport (operated mainly by taxis) connecting into “trunk” services (operated by buses) at village hubs etc. A rolling programme of “clean sheet” area route review activity is undertaken on an annual basis which involves a complete re-design of the school transport network before a re-tendering exercise is undertaken. The order in which routes reviews are being undertaken at present is largely being dictated by school reorganisations. Historically, the County had a three-tier system of education in place, but this is evolving and a substantial number of schools and academies have elected to transition to a two-tier system of primary & secondary schools. This has a major impact on the school transport network.
- In 2017/18 the Council discharged its legal obligation to facilitate transport for students attending high school sixth forms and further education colleges by means of public transport, the cost of which was paid by families or (in its absence), by means of contracted school transport services where an annual charge of £600 applied. However, following a public consultation, free Post-16 transport was re-introduced in 2018/19 on the basis that a student is attending their local high school or FE college. Free travel continues to be available for Post 16 students with special needs.

Transport by Category	Pupils
Pre 16 mainstream	5,294
Post 16 mainstream	867
Pre 16 SEN	857
Post 16 SEN	142

Mainstream spend (Post & Pre 16) £8,581,606

SEN (Pre & Post 16) £5,493,508

- Transport to special schools is provided free for eligible pupils at a cost of just over £4.5M. A significant number of students attend out of county establishments such as Percy Hedley School, Forest Hall, Newcastle Upon Tyne & Northern Counties School, Tankerville Terrace, Newcastle Upon Tyne, though the vast majority attend in-county provision. Most special schools in Northumberland are based in the south east of the County.

Concessionary Travel Scheme

- Northumberland County Council participates in the government’s English National

Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS). The national scheme entitles pass holders who are resident in England to free off-peak travel (after 09:30) on local bus services throughout England. This scheme covers both disabled people and eligible older people.

8. In addition to the national scheme entitlements, Northumberland County Council also provides a number of local enhancements to the scheme, pass holders can travel from 09:00 onwards on journeys beginning in Northumberland. Northumberland is also one of a few Councils to provide companion passes to eligible disabled persons. Companion passes allow an additional person to travel for free when accompanying a companion pass holder.
9. The costs of providing this scheme exceeded £4.62m for 2018/19. This represents a slight decrease on the previous year's outturn. Passenger numbers in 2018/19 have declined slightly reducing by 0.3% to 3.55m concessionary travel journey when compared with 2017/18, this reduction is partly due to a contracting supported bus network and commercial networks.
10. 2018/19 also saw the implementation of a new concessionary travel system, this system is being delivered free of charge to Northumberland County Council for the first three years, funded via an underspend in the North East Smart Ticketing Initiative (NESTI), with NESTI members committing to funding the ongoing system costs in years four and five. The new system which was implemented in December 2018, will be used to manage the 67,713 concessionary travel passes in circulation across Northumberland, the system also offers a self-serve model and an improved reporting tool, which has been welcomed by users.

Type of pass	Number
Senior	61,403
Disabled	4,729
Disabled with Companion	1,581

NESTI Smart Ticketing

11. The main aims of the North East Smart Ticketing Initiative Project was the introduction of a Region wide smart ticketing infrastructure on all public transport and the introduction of a single smart payment method accepted on all forms of public transport across the region.
12. Pop PAYG: Is now accepted on all public transport modes and operators across Northumberland. All Payzone merchants across the Northumberland are able to undertake PAYG top up transactions and Purple Pop cards are available for sale at selected Payzone merchants.

Community Transport

13. Community transport has a key role to play in the mix of transport solutions for Northumberland. Community transport is about providing flexible and responsive solutions to unmet local transport needs and often represents the only way in which particular user groups can access a range of essential services. Because community transport is regulated under different rules from 'conventional' bus services, it is particularly well placed to offer innovative solutions where commercial services are not available. As a result it can provide the connectivity needed to get to a range of destinations for otherwise isolated or excluded groups of people, helping to develop sustainable communities and contributing to social inclusion.
14. There are a range of Community Transport operators in Northumberland, some offering services without subsidy and support from the Council and others contracted by Northumberland County Council to deliver specific activities. Community Transport providers in Northumberland who currently deliver services under contract with Northumberland County Council:
- Adapt (North East), Burn Lane, Hexham
 - NEED Ltd, Fire Station Houses, Alnwick
 - WATBus Community Transport, Wansbeck Workspace, Ashington

As the commercial bus network continues to diminish in rural parts of Northumberland more emphasis will be given towards Community Transport solutions. Users of community transport include people of all ages, disabled people, unemployed people, people in communities that don't have access to conventional public transport, children and young people as well as older people. Because community transport is embedded in the communities in which it operates, it is well placed to focus on very local needs and on one-to-one help, providing both choice and quality services.

15. Northumberland County Council was into the final year of a three-year contract to provide a Northumberland wide Get-about Car Scheme. The car schemes are delivered by volunteers who drive their own cars in return for mileage expenses. It is a demand responsive, flexible and accessible transport service for individuals and groups who cannot access public transport, due to mobility, illness, infirmity or restricted access. Adapt (North East) Ltd operate the volunteer car scheme across Northumberland. The volunteer car drivers are subject to an Enhanced CRB disclosure. Service users contact Adapt (North East) Ltd to book a journey with the scheme coordinators organising the door to door journeys. A 12-month extension to the current contract has been agreed to ensure the continued delivery of the Get-about Car Scheme through 2019/20 and build on the success of the previous scheme which saw 333 journeys provided.

Passenger Information Services

16. Since April 2016 Northumberland County Council has been in partnership with Nexus for the provision of passenger information services. As part of this agreement Nexus have delivered printed timetable information at over 850 stops in Northumberland, alongside a fully managed digital information offering. This digital offering includes:
- LiveTravel Map in Northumberland to deliver Real time via smart devices and a direct link through from the QR / NFC tags installed in Northumberland.

- Journey Planner and NaPTAN stop information will also be fully managed by Nexus on behalf of NCC.
- This partnership also allows NCC to benefit from any enhancements to Nexus systems in future months and years.

17. By entering into partnership with Nexus we will deliver accuracy and consistency of information, especially on cross boundary trips between Northumberland and Tyne & Wear, whilst also delivering a vast improvement on the previous NCC offering. In particular the inclusion of the Live Travel Map web-app where passengers can benefit from RTi at their fingertips is a step-change in passenger information delivery. This three-year contract which expired in May 2019 has been extended by a further twelve months.

Passenger Focus

18. In Autumn 2018 Northumberland County Council commissioned Passenger Focus to undertake a Bus Passenger Survey on our behalf. The results of the survey were slightly disappointing with most metrics showing a reduction in performance when compared with previous years. However, performance across Northumberland is still above average when compared with other authorities.

Key Performance Measures	Northumberland County Council		
	2016	2017	2018
Overall experience: journey satisfaction	92%	94%	89%
Punctuality	80%	83%	75%
Journey Time	88%	85%	89%
Value for Money	56%	65%	61%

19. Northumberland County Council overall journey satisfaction outturn shows a reduction of 5% when compared with the previous year. One possible explanation for this could be due to the 8% reduction in punctuality which would invariably affect users overall satisfaction with the service.

20. Over the last few years Northumberland has seen a reduction in both the supported and commercial services, with the latest figures available showing total bus mileage in 2017/18 decreasing by 3.4% when compared with 2016/17, this decrease has manifested in reductions in the frequency of services and the removal of diversions into smaller settlements, which has reduced the public travel options for a number of our communities. Whilst urban areas continue to enjoy excellent transport links to major employment and leisure centre in both Northumberland and Tyne and Wear. The rural parts of Northumberland continue to rely on supported services and community transport to meet their public transport needs.