

328 Supported Bus Service**Report by Ricky Moffat, Head of Commercial Operations****1 Purpose of Report**

This report is put forward in response to a petition to reinstate the 328 bus service.

2 Background

The 328 supported bus service was jointly funded by Midlothian and East Lothian Councils. In January 2014, Edinburgh Coach Lines, the incumbent operator, undertook analysis of the income and expenditure on the 328 service and determined that the service was not meeting the income levels they anticipated at the time of tender.

Edinburgh Coach Lines claimed they were losing money and as a consequence they took the decision to give written notice (90 days) of withdrawal from the contract to the Council.

In response to the proposal by Edinburgh Coach Lines to cancel their contract both Midlothian and East Lothian Councils instigated a formal tender process for a replacement service or suitable alternatives.

Unfortunately the tenders returned would have required an additional £900 per week subsidy from Midlothian Council to continue with the service. At the Cabinet meeting of 22 April 2014 a decision was taken not to continue the 328 bus service and to introduce the Ring and Go service which would at least meet in part the needs of the affected rural communities.

3 Ring and Go

Following the decision not to provide an alternate bus service the Ring & Go service has been introduced which in part provides a means to connect users to other local bus services.

Two distinct areas covered by the Ring and Go service are clearly defined. Cousland is a rural settlement which is clearly defined geographically. The same is true for Cauldcoats via Hilltown and Newton Village to Millerhill.

Two taxi operators currently operate a service, one for each of the two distinct areas. To date 75 users have registered for the service in Cousland and 41 in the Newton/Millerhill area.

The times of Ring & Go have been built around the normal times and days of operation of the bus service it is replacing.

A maximum number of taxi journeys per operating day is set. Limited experience is available of running the Ring & Go service in an urban area giving an indication of what the likely usage would be. The limit is to emphasize to the taxi operator that passengers should be carried in the same vehicle wherever possible.

Taxi operators are required to take all bookings by phone and to organize people to travel together at similar times [rather than sending out a taxi for each individual booking].

4 Report Implications

4.1 Resource

The 328 service was subsidised by Midlothian Council in the amount of £101,000 per annum. Following the tender exercise the lowest cost option would have seen an increase in cost of almost 50%.

The Ring and Go service, is anticipated to be significantly less cost than the current subsidy available for public transport in the areas affected by the removal of the 328 service.

4.2 Risk

If the Council did not provide an alternative to the 328 bus service in the areas of concern a vital link would have been lost for a number of affected residents.

4.3 Single Midlothian Plan and Business Transformation

Themes addressed in this report:

- ☐ Community safety
- ☒ Adult health, care and housing
- ☐ Getting it right for every Midlothian child
- ☒ Improving opportunities in Midlothian
- ☒ Sustainable growth
- ☐ Business transformation and Best Value
- ☐ None of the above

4.4 Key Priorities within the Single Midlothian Plan

The provision of the Ring and Go service allows members of the community to (in part) maintain travel options.

4.5 Impact on Performance and Outcomes

As stated above.

4.6 Adopting a Preventative Approach

Provision of the Ring and Go service reduces the necessity for car travel. In addition it supports residents who use the service to access local employment opportunities.

4.7 Involving Communities and Other Stakeholders

No consultation has been carried out the wider community at this stage.

4.8 Ensuring Equalities

Removal of the bus service may impact on all who used this service. In particular, many of the users are elderly or have a disability. However the Ring and Go service will mitigate this.

4.9 Supporting Sustainable Development

The provision of the Ring and Go service will reduce the likelihood of increased car travel.

4.10 IT Issues

There are no IT Issues as a direct result of this report.

5 Summary

Following intimation by Edinburgh Coach Lines that they would be cancelling their contract for the 328 supported bus service a joint tender was issued by East Lothian and Midlothian Councils for a suitable replacement.

All of the tendered options available indicate a significant increase would be necessary to continue with the 328 bus service and were considered unaffordable.

A decision was taken by Cabinet at its meeting on 22 April 2014 not to provide a bus service. However, alternative provision of the Ring & Go service which allows the user to make their journey in part by taxi, connecting to the nearest connection point to an existing bus service was introduced.

6 Recommendations

Committee is asked to consider this report when considering the petition.

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Background Papers: