

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**HIGHWAYS AND PLANNING
CABINET MEMBER**

**PUBLIC TRANSPORT:
NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL – RUN BUS SERVICES**

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To determine the future of three local bus services which the Council operates.
- 1.2 We recommend that a contract for Barton Villager should be awarded to a commercial operator. We propose that the Council should retain the Wold's Villager in the short term but with a reduced timetable and that we should consult on the future of the Isle Shopper service.
- 1.3 Funding in future years is uncertain but these arrangements will make the best use of the money available.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 The Council runs three "Villager" bus services using its own vehicles and staff. These are...
 - The Barton Villager, Monday to Friday, Barton – Barrow – Goxhill New Holland with an extension to East Halton on Thursday only. Started in 2003 with grant aid from the Countryside Agency.
 - The Wolds Villager, Monday to Saturday, Brigg – Barnetby – Kirmington. Started in 2005 with "Rural Bus Challenge" funding.
 - The Isle Shoppers Bus, Wednesday and Friday only. Links Crowle, Ealand, Sandtoft, and Wroot with Epworth.
- 2.2 These services are popular with their users. They provide transport for everyday shopping and personal business and trips to the doctors. They carry a high proportion of over 60's and people with disabilities. However, it is becoming difficult to run them reliably because most of the vehicles available are ageing. Because of this, the Council has had

to “hire in” an extra bus for the last two years. It can also be difficult to cover absences from a small pool of employees.

- 2.3 Due to the issues outlined in 2.2 we invited tenders from commercial bus companies to run the Barton Villager and Wolds Villager services.

3. OPTIONS AND ANALYSIS

Barton Villager

- 3.1 The Barton Villager is the better used of the two services. The Council’s public transport policies say that we will look hard at the need for any subsidised service which regularly carries less than 7 passengers per journey and a large majority of Barton Villager journeys pass this test. The bus also carries scholars between Caistor Road and St Peter’s Primary School in Barton. The service to St Peter’s is a long-standing arrangement but is not a legal obligation.
- 3.2 We received two tenders. The winning tender on a price/quality basis is for £38,729 per year from Stagecoach. Though higher than the Council’s current costs, this is a realistic price for the work involved and is a subsidy of about £1.08 per passenger journey, including scholars. The Council’s policy is that subsidy per passenger should not usually cost more than £3.

<p>Option 1: Run the service with a Council owned bus and staff, as now.</p>	<p>Advantage: Minimises cost</p> <p>Disadvantage: Service likely to become less reliable as vehicles age.</p>
<p>Option 2: Contract Service out to a commercial bus company.</p>	<p>Advantage: Service will probably run more reliably by an operator with a bigger pool of buses and staff.</p> <p>Disadvantage: Costs more in the short term, though still well under £3 per passenger journey.</p>

- 3.3 We recommend that a contract be awarded to Stagecoach East Midlands for the operation of this service for 5½ years from 31 January 2010. Apart from one very minor timing change, the timetable will be the same as the one which runs today.

Wolds Villager

- 3.4 The Wolds Villager carries fewer passengers even though it runs six days a week. Many round-trip journeys carry less than seven passengers and Saturday journeys in particular are poorly loaded. We invited tenders for Monday to Saturday and Monday to Friday services as alternatives. The winning tenders were:

- Monday to Saturday service £61,000, about £3.54 per passenger subsidy.
- Monday to Friday service £51,000, about £3.22 per passenger subsidy.

<p>Option 1: Contract Service out to a commercial bus company.</p>	<p>Advantage: More reliable service.</p> <p>Disadvantage: High cost. Both 5 and 6 day a week options exceed the £3 per passenger subsidy measure.</p>
<p>Option 2: Retain council operation in the short term.</p>	<p>Advantage: Maintains service at lower cost than commercial tender.</p> <p>Disadvantage: May be less reliable than a bigger operator.</p>

3.5 We recommend that the Council retain the Wolds Villager Service in the short term. If the Barton Villager is contracted out, there will be a spare vehicle in our fleet and reliability is likely to improve. However, the Saturday service and the last two journeys each day Monday to Friday are poorly used and should be withdrawn.

3.6 In the medium term, we face reduced funding for rural bus services. It will become more difficult to justify the cost of the Wolds Villager, whoever runs it. There may be an opportunity to incorporate it with a school service from September 2011. This would mean that the bus would be available to the public between school times only (it would also run during school holidays) but this is likely to reduce overall costs when compared with buying two services separately.

Isle Shopper

3.7 The Isle Shoppers bus is used by very few people. Ticket machine information for 12 months up to July 2010 shows that on average there are only 17 passengers per day. The subsidy cost per passenger is over £7 and the usual benchmark is £3. We propose to consult parish councils and local members about the withdrawal of this service.

4. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

4.1 Finance

4.1.1 The approved budget for Council operated local bus services in 2010/11 is £74,770. This covers the Barton Villager, Wolds Villager and the two-day a week Isle Shoppers service. The budget for 2011/12 and later years is unknown.

4.1.2 Letting the contract for the Barton Villager at £38,729 per year will increase the cost of this however the increase will be offset by savings made on the Wold's Villager but overall there is no cost saving. However, it is essential that we act to improve reliability.

4.1.3 The potential withdrawal of the Isle Shoppers bus will save about £13,000 in a full year.

4.2 **Staffing**

4.2.1 The total number of posts within PSV Operations will remain unchanged. Three drivers are currently employed providing the services detailed in this report. All of them are on fixed term contracts, two ending on the 31st January 2011 with the other ending on the 31st March 2011. As a result of changes taking place to the supervision of PSV Operational staff (subject of a separate report) work is still available for three drivers and new contracts will be offered, although these will be on reduced hours.

5. **OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER**

5.1 **Statutory** The Council has a duty to consider public transport needs which are not met by the commercial network and powers to fill these gaps with subsidised services.

Environmental Regular bus services provide an alternative to use of the private car.

Diversity Without the Villager services, a number of settlements would have few other buses. These include New Holland, Goxhill, Kirmington and Barnetby. Withdrawal would have a serious impact, particularly on people who have no transport of their own.

The buses are important in providing access to services for people who are elderly and/or disabled.

- In the year up to 31 July 2010, the Barton Villager carried 19,442 concessionary fare passholders, 66% of all passengers excluding scholars.
- In the same period, the Wolds Villager carried 9,426 passholders, 59% of all passengers.
- The Isle shoppers service carried 1,475 passholders, 90% of all passengers.

5.5 There are no crime & disorder, property or IT implications.

6. **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION**

6.1 Parish and town councils have been consulted about the future of both services.

6.2 Barton Town Council and Barrow Parish Council support the continuation of the Barton Villager service.

6.3 Wrawby Parish Council supports the continuation of the Wolds Villager. Barnetby Parish Council wishes us to retain the Saturday service and weekday early and late journeys.

6.4 Consultation has taken place with the GMB, Unison and the staff involved. They have no objections to the proposals.

7. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

7.1 A contract be awarded to Stagecoach East Midlands for the operation of the Barton Villager service from 31 January 2011.

7.2 No contract be awarded for the operation of the Wolds Villager.

7.3 The council continue to run the Wolds Villager service but with a reduced timetable from 31 January 2011.

7.4 Officers examine further options for Wolds Villager service.

7.5 Officers consult on the possible withdrawal of the Isle Shopper Service and prepare a further report for consideration.

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report: