

Action on Petitions

ACTION TAKEN ON PETITIONS

Council Members are asked to note the actions taken in relation to the under mentioned petitions which were presented to Council:-

(i) Petitions relating to recent changes to bus services - Presented to Council on 22 June 2016

Detail of the Petitions

The three petitions were as follows:-

From **Councillor Barbara McClennan (Hendon Ward)** (64 signatures)

“We the undersigned call upon the private bus operators to put people before bigger profits and to provide the bus routes people need to access services in their daily lives. We therefore call upon the bus companies to rethink their recent changes, which have cut off many people from vital services.”

From **Councillor Ian Galbraith (Barnes Ward)** (149 signatures)

“We the undersigned petition against the removal of a bus service (18/19) for residents of sheltered accommodation on Premier Road, and other residents of Plains Farm and surrounding areas.

This will leave residents stranded without any service at all for visits to their GPs and other medical appointments, and for their day to day lives in general. The closest possible service would be up to half a mile away.”

From **Councillor Gillian Galbraith (St Chads Ward)** (114 signatures)

“We the undersigned call upon the private bus operators to put people before bigger profits and to provide the bus routes people need to access services in their daily lives. We therefore call upon the bus companies to rethink their recent changes, which have cut off many people from vital services.”

Background

Sunderland City Council has no legal powers in relation to bus services in the City. Under the current deregulated operating regime for local bus services, over 95% of local bus services in Sunderland are operated commercially by three private companies, Stagecoach, Go North East and Arriva. A limited number of socially necessary bus services are secured by Nexus, the passenger transport executive on behalf of the North East Combined Authority.

Actions Taken in Response

These petitions were forwarded to the individual bus operators for their response. Given that two of the petitions were identically worded and of a generic nature, both operators provided a common response to cover both petitions. Nexus indicated that a response from the operators would be sufficient given the legal and budgetary constraints on securing replacement services.

Go North East Response: Unfortunately, there are no specific issues raised in either of the petitions, so a response has been prepared for each of the services that changed on the 22nd May 2016. This provided details of all of their service changes, their reasoning for their actions and subsequent 'tweaking' in response to feedback.

Stagecoach Response: Stagecoach responded as follows - *"With specific regards to the Service 18/19 petition, yes, this one has already been received by Stagecoach, and was attached to a letter to this company from Bridget Phillipson MP, dated 2 June 2016. In the letter, Bridget requested Stagecoach's presence at a meeting with residents, and on 22 June, I provided Bridget with a suite of available dates for this purpose. We have yet to receive further correspondence on this matter.*

Notwithstanding, you will of course recognise that this aspect was discussed with Cllr Galbraith at the "Extraordinary West Sunderland Place Board" meeting on 21 June, during which it was highlighted that an alternative provision has being offered along Premier Road by Compass Community Transport."

In respect of the other two petitions, Stagecoach also said that the absence of any specifics on the generic petition prevented a response being issued.

The three ward Councillors, as lead petitioners have been informed of these responses.

Commentary by Head of Infrastructure and Transportation

Due to the scale of the changes that took place at the end of May and beginning of June 2016, a number of other discussions and meetings took place during that period. These included an extraordinary meeting of East Area Place Board on 10 May 2016 and an extraordinary meeting of West Sunderland Place Board on 21 June 2016.

At each of these meetings the bus operators were given the opportunity to explain the rationale behind their service changes and elected Members were able to raise concerns on behalf of residents in their wards. The outcome of both meetings was a greater mutual understanding of each side's position and

of the issues arising from the changes and a clear demonstration of the value of continued engagement in dialogue with the bus operators.

The meeting with Stagecoach (referred to above) to consider service 18/19 in Plains Farm and convened by Bridget Phillipson MP took place on 15 July at Plains Farm Club and was attended by the Operations Director and Commercial Manager of Stagecoach and circa 20-25 local residents. Following that meeting, Stagecoach agreed to investigate the three options proposed by those in attendance:

- Reinstatement of service 18/19;
- Diversion of service 3 via Silksworth Lane and Premier Road; and
- A 'double run' arrangement of service 3 running the whole length of Premier Road.

All three options were investigated and scenario tested and the detailed results reported back to Bridget Phillipson MP. None of them were assessed to be viable but Stagecoach will consider residents' concerns during further periodic reviews of services in the area. It should also be noted that a partial replacement service along Premier Road is now in place in the form of secured service 99 operated by Compass Community Transport.

Separately, in response to representations from a Sandhill ward Member, Stagecoach has agreed to reinstate part of service 18 and 19 in Grindon. Under the revised arrangements, these routes will once again operate clockwise around the Gleneagles Road (west) and Gartland Road (east) loop with effect from 5 September 2016. The change date was subject to regulatory approval from the Traffic Commissioners Office, as the operator applied to make the revisions at less than the normal statutory 56-day notice period.

(ii) Petition relating to bus services in Fence Houses - Presented to Council on 21 September 2016

Detail of the Petition

The following petition signed by over 600 residents was presented by Councillor Juliana Heron on behalf of Fence Houses Residents.

"We the undersigned residents of Fence Houses petition Sunderland City Council to have the X94 bus service reinstated via Fence Houses. At the present time we have no bus service to any hospital and none in the evening."

Background

Paragraph (i) of this report sets out the legal position in respect of bus services and deregulation.

Actions Taken in Response

The petition was forwarded to Nexus and they have responded as follows:

The service X94 was provided by a commercial operator without subsidy from Nexus. It was withdrawn over 10 years ago (July 30th 2006).

It is not entirely accurate for the petition to state that there is no direct bus from Fence Houses to a hospital as the service 36 operated by Go North East provides direct access to Chester le Street Hospital.

Nor is it accurate for the petition to state that there are no evening services at Fence Houses. The service 36 operates Monday to Saturday up until 20:38 towards Chester le Street and 21:15 towards Houghton le Spring. The service 4 operates all evening Monday to Saturday and the service 237 operates all evening every evening.

It is acknowledged that there is a lack of Sunday evening service to the south of Fence Houses but within existing resources and under current severe budget constraints Nexus would not be able to supply an additional service to cover this area. Walks from Dairy lane/Front Street to access service 237 are around 450m.

Access to Sunderland Hospital or the Queen Elizabeth Hospital can be gained by using the frequent service 4 (every 10 minutes daytime) then transferring at the Galleries onto the frequent service X1 (every 10 minutes) to access the QE, or transferring at Houghton le Spring to the service 35 (every 30 minutes) to access Sunderland Hospital.

Councillor Heron and the lead petitioner have been notified accordingly.

Commentary by Head of Infrastructure and Transportation

It is with regret that there is nothing further we can do in this matter. Officers will continue to look for opportunities to plug any gaps in service as part of our on-going dialogue with Nexus and the bus operators.

(iii) Petition requesting that the Council resurface the carriageway in Chester Street, Millfield

Council Members are asked to note the action taken in relation to the under mentioned petition which was presented to Council by Councillor Niall Hodson on 21st September 2016: -

The text of the petition reads:

“We the undersigned, petition Sunderland City Council to resurface the carriageway along Chester Street, Millfield.”

The petition was signed by 10 residents of Chester Street.

Following receipt of the Petition a site visit to Chester Street was made in September 2016 by a highway inspector which revealed that there was one defect warranting immediate repairs. It was noted that the condition of the remaining length of carriageway did not warrant any resurfacing works at that time.

In addition it was identified that although the road surface was safe, there were areas of local deterioration which contributed to the less than ideal aesthetic look of the street. This year's Highway Maintenance budget is fully committed however the carriageway condition in Chester Street will be considered alongside the condition of footways and roads in the whole of the city when compiling the Highway Maintenance Programme for 2017/18.

The request by the petitioners to resurface the carriageway at the current time was declined.

The Ward Councillors and lead petitioner have been advised of the outcome.

