



Service and Community Impact Assessment (SCIA)

Directorate and Service Area: Environment and Economy, The Transport Hub

What is being assessed: Proposed changes to subsidised bus services and to the Dial a Ride service in Oxfordshire

Responsible owner / senior officer: Sue Scane, Director for Environment and Economy

Date of assessment: June 2015

Summary of judgement:

The proposal to reduce or withdraw bus subsidies and cease funding the Dial a Ride service will have an impact across Oxfordshire, but risks particularly affecting rural communities, young people, older people and people with disabilities.

We aim to mitigate against this by working with bus operators to try and keep as many subsidised bus services as possible running. Where this isn't possible we will be working with the voluntary sector to encourage setting up alternatives for subsidised bus services and Dial-a-Ride.

Our evidence-based approach to reducing bus subsidies and proposal to protect off-peak services also ensures that older people and people with disabilities who have no commercial bus alternative are our highest priority when targeting our remaining budget.

Further details on specific risks and mitigations are provided below.

This SCIA is in draft format and will be updated as feedback is received from the public throughout the consultation. As part of the consultation process we are encouraging communities to come forward and let us know about the impact of withdrawing or reducing bus subsidies, and ceasing to fund Dial a Ride, in their area. We have commissioned Oxfordshire Rural Community Council to lead the consultation and engagement with Oxfordshire's communities. This will include facilitating public meetings, running focus groups and other outreach work with individuals affected by these proposals. This information will then be used by Cabinet when it makes its final decision about how to proceed

Detail of Assessment:

Purpose of assessment:

This assessment has been undertaken in order to understand the impact of proposals to reduce or withdraw all funding for subsidised bus services, and cease funding the Dial-a-Ride service, on different groups of people in Oxfordshire. The assessment considers how these changes may affect the people of Oxfordshire – with particular emphasis on groups with the protected characteristics listed below – and how this can be mitigated against.

Section 149 of the Equalities Act 2010 (“the 2010 Act”) imposes a duty on the Council to give due regard to three needs in exercising its functions. This proposal is such a function. The three needs are:

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the Equality Act.
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic, and those who do not.

Complying with section 149 may involve treating some people more favourably than others, but only to the extent that that does not amount to conduct which is otherwise unlawful under the new Act.

The need to advance equality of opportunity involves having due regard to the need to:

- remove or minimise disadvantages which are connected to a relevant protected characteristic and which are suffered by persons who share that characteristic,
- take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and which are different from the needs other people, and
- encourage those who share a relevant characteristic to take part in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such people is disproportionately low.
- take steps to meet the needs of disabled people which are different from the needs of people who are not disabled and include steps to take account of a person’s disabilities.

The need to foster good relations between different groups involves having due regard to the need to tackle prejudice and promote understanding.

These protected characteristics are:

- age
- disability
- gender reassignment
- pregnancy and maternity
- race – this includes ethnic or national origins, colour or nationality
- religion or belief – this includes lack of belief
- sex

- sexual orientation
- marriage and civil partnership

Context / Background:

Ongoing cuts in central government funding mean Oxfordshire County Council has to make savings. The council is currently in the process of making approximately £290 million of savings. Those savings began in 2010 and run until 2018. On top of those savings, the council currently believes it may need to save a further £60 million. These calculations are based on the Government's broad savings targets across the public sector for the new parliament.

The minimum amount of savings needed from the service change proposals set out in this consultation (£2.6 million) were agreed by councillors as part of the council's budget setting process in February 2015. At this meeting the councillors reduced the overall supported transport budget by a fifth (£6.3 million).

As far as possible, we are trying to make savings in supported transport by running services more efficiently. We have identified that we can achieve nearly £3.7 million in savings by bringing together all the supported transport services we operate and fund. However, this is not enough.

The council needs to find a minimum of £2.6 million in additional savings and this means looking at supported transport services which the council is not required to provide by law. This will inevitably impact some people in the county.

Proposals:

We have set out how we think we can save nearly £4m from running supported transport services more efficiently. However, with a further £2.6m to find, unfortunately we need to look at reducing funding to the supported transport services which we are not required to provide by law: subsidised bus services and Dial-a-Ride.

Subsidised bus services

Oxfordshire County Council's decision-making Cabinet has asked for the consultation to explore two proposed options and these are explained below.

Option 1: withdraw all bus subsidies

This proposal will affect over 100 bus services across Oxfordshire, approximately 9% of the Oxfordshire bus network. The changes to each subsidised bus service will vary and in some cases this could simply mean one or two stops are removed and in other cases a greater impact would be felt.

If this option is agreed, the proposed changes would come into effect as existing contracts with commercial bus operators' end. All bus subsidies under this option would be fully withdrawn by the end of this financial year.

Option 2: reduce bus subsidies by £2.3m (as demanded by current savings targets)

This proposal would affect only a proportion of the 100 plus bus services across Oxfordshire supported in some way by a council bus subsidy.

Under this option we propose to adopt the principle of, as far as possible, protecting the off-peak services which tend to be used by older people and people with disabilities when reducing bus subsidies by £2.3m.

Again, changes to each subsidised bus service will vary and in some cases this could simply mean one or two stops are removed and in other cases a greater impact would be felt. Overall, the impact of this proposal would be less than in option 1.

If this option is agreed, the proposed changes would be come into effect as existing contracts with commercial bus operators' end. All bus subsidies under this option would be fully withdrawn by the end of this financial year.

Dial-a-Ride

Our proposal is to work with community transport groups across the county to try and develop schemes which can meet similar needs to those which Dial-a-Ride currently serves and to stop funding Dial-a-Ride directly. Funding from the Council would be gradually reduced as and when new schemes are created throughout this financial year, with Council funding for the service ceasing altogether by the end March 2016.

Evidence / Intelligence:

As part of the consultation process we are encouraging communities to come forward and let us know about the impact of withdrawing or reducing bus subsidies, and ceasing to fund Dial-a-Ride, in their area. We have commissioned Oxfordshire Rural Community Council to lead the consultation and engagement with Oxfordshire's communities. This will include facilitating public meetings, running focus groups and other outreach work with individuals affected by these proposals. This information will then be used by Cabinet when it makes its final decision about how to proceed.

We have been in ongoing dialogue with bus operators and the community transport sector when developing our proposals and will be encouraging their input into the consultation process.

Subsidised bus services

We have deliberately pursued an evidence-based approach when developing our proposal to reduce bus subsidies by £2.3m. A detailed explanation of this process can be found in Annex W.

We followed a strict methodical process to calculate which bus subsidies are best value for money, and which are worst value. "Value for money" is judged upon how many addresses are served by a subsidised bus, where an address has no commercial alternative.

The results provide a ranking of all subsidised services. The ranking is based on the cost of each subsidy to the council, compared to how many unique addresses it is enabling the bus network to serve.

This entire process was repeated three times to prioritise services at different times of day (time band), allowing evaluation of potential impacts on different types of bus user.

We also hope that by providing a full list of the services affected (including a description of exactly which part of the service is subsidised, if it is only partially subsidised) communities will be able to understand the potential impact of both options 1 and 2 and comment on specific services in their areas. This feedback will then be used to inform the Cabinet's decision on whether or not proceed with either option. To assist with this we will also be publishing an online interactive map of bus services, which will tell people which services / parts of services are subsidised.

Dial a Ride

Currently 238 people across Oxfordshire use Dial-a-Ride as a regularly scheduled service. We have reviewed these people (by district) and found that, overall, 215 of them are able to walk. Of these, 160 are within 400 metres walking distance of a bus stop and the majority have concessionary bus passes that allow them free travel at off-peak times. In addition, we've identified that many of the people classed as 'walkers' would be able to travel using public transport if necessary.

Alternatives considered / rejected:

Subsidised bus services

In developing our proposal to prioritise off-peak services, we also considered different ways we could prioritise services and reduce funding. We considered two other approaches:

- Prioritising services running at 'peak' hours during weekdays (06:30-09:30 in the morning, and 16:00-19:00 in the evening).
- Prioritising services running in the evening and at the weekend, which are commonly used by people to access leisure activities.

In Annex Z we have provided a table of results which show how services would be prioritised if we adopted these different approaches.

We decided against following these different approaches for a number of reasons:

- While all our subsidies support services which are of value and significance to the communities they serve, the council's first duty is to protect our most vulnerable public transport users. This is part of our overall corporate commitment to provide a 'safety net' of support and resources for our most vulnerable residents.
- Off-peak services are less likely to ever be taken up on a commercial basis by operators, given the relatively low number of people that use them. They are also

often cheaper to subsidise than other services, as they run at times when operators have spare vehicles available. This means that prioritising off-peak services leads to more services / service enhancements being protected.

- In contrast to off-peak services, peak hour services are usually far more expensive in terms of their total contract cost because running a peak route often requires a bus company to purchase an additional vehicle.

Dial-a-Ride

We considered maintaining the service as it is. However, we decided to reject this option for a number of reasons:

- We need to find big savings and unfortunately this means looking at services which we aren't required to provide by law.

- Dial a ride users pay an annual subscription fee of £5. This contrasts with people going to Council day centres, who have to pay £5 per journey, and we think this inconsistency is unfair.

- The service uses specialist transport resources which arguably would be better allocated towards higher need SEN (special educational needs) users travelling to school.

- We've already had success setting up an alternative voluntary scheme in the City, and so think this is an option worth pursuing across the rest of the County.

Impact Assessment:

Subsidised bus services

Option 1: withdraw all bus subsidies

Annex X provides a table of all subsidised bus services which would stop receiving a subsidy under this option. It also shows which services are only partially subsidised, and which parts of the route the subsidy is provided for so that people can see exactly which part of their route is affected by the option.

Alternatively, find out if and how a bus service on a route you use may be affected by using the online map [here](#).

Option 2: reduce bus subsidies by £2.3m

Annex Y provides a table of all subsidised bus services in order of their priority, using the councils preferred approach of making savings by prioritising off-peak services along with our additional criteria (see methodology paper in **Annex W**). It also shows which bus services are only partially subsidised, and which parts of the route the subsidy is provided for so that people can see exactly which part of their journey is affected by the proposal.

This table helps people to see which bus services we will prioritise when it comes to spending any remaining budget and negotiating with bus companies. It's not, however, a definitive list of which bus services will and won't be subsidised in the future under this option. The true impact of reducing our subsidies in this way will not be fully known until we've had detailed conversations with bus operators about what they can continue providing with the remaining funds available.

Through negotiations with bus operators we will aim to get the best possible deal for Oxfordshire with the money we have left. In some instances, getting the best deal for Oxfordshire might involve making changes to higher priority services as well, e.g. by reducing their frequency, so that the money saved can be used to maintain coverage elsewhere.

Annex Z provides a more detailed version of the same table, including full results of the analysis.

Alternatively, find out if and how a bus service on a route you use may be affected by using the online map [here](#).

Either option will have an impact on those communities which currently use subsidised bus services. These tend to be rural communities and, in general, those most affected would be people without a public transport alternative or a car. Below we have assessed the impact of these proposals on four community groups with protected characteristics which we think are potentially particularly at risk: rural communities, young people, older people and people with disabilities.

Overall mitigation

Under either option we will work with bus operators to try and keep as many services as possible running. Where this isn't possible we will be working with the voluntary sector to set up alternatives. Our evidence-based approach for option 2 means that, as well as favouring off-peak services, we are prioritising services which serve the most addresses without a commercial bus alternative, thereby favouring those rural communities most at risk of isolation.

As part of the consultation process we are encouraging communities to come forward and let us know about the impact of withdrawing or reducing bus subsidies in their area. We have commissioned Oxfordshire Rural Community Council to lead the consultation and engagement with Oxfordshire's communities. This will include facilitating public meetings, running focus groups and other outreach work with individuals affected by these proposals. This information will then be used by Cabinet when it makes its final decision about how to proceed.

Dial-a-Ride

If our proposal is agreed, we will cease funding for the Dial-a-Ride service and current users will have to find alternative methods of transport. Below we have assessed the impact of this proposal on three community groups with protected characteristics which we think are potentially most at risk: rural communities, older people, and people with disabilities.

Overall mitigation

We will be working with the voluntary sector across Oxfordshire to try and set up schemes which can meet similar needs to those currently served by Dial-a-Ride. We have already been successful in doing this in Oxford City and will be offering a package of support, including one-off pump-prime funding, to help get new schemes up and running in other parts of the County.

However, it may not be possible to start such schemes across the whole of Oxfordshire. But we won't know whether there will be any gaps in coverage (and if so, where they will be) until we've spent sufficient time working with communities and voluntary groups.

In addition, we won't be ceasing funding until the end of March 2016 – so that communities have time to come forward and work with us to create new schemes, thereby reducing the likelihood of any sudden gaps in service provision.

As part of the consultation process we are encouraging communities to come forward and let us know about the potential impact in their area of ceasing to fund Dial a Ride and looking to voluntary sector alternatives. We have commissioned Oxfordshire Rural Community Council to lead the consultation and engagement with Oxfordshire's communities. This will include facilitating public meetings, running focus groups and other outreach work with individuals affected by these proposals. This information will then be used by Cabinet when it makes its final decision about how to proceed.

Impact on Individuals and Communities:

Subsidised bus services

Rural communities

The majority of subsidised bus services are run in the County's more rural areas. This is because bus subsidies are provided for services which are uneconomical for bus companies to provide on their own, and these tend to fall in rural areas where there are less people, and therefore less prospective passengers than necessary to make a service profitable.

Mitigations:

Our methodology for ranking subsidised bus services under option 2 aims to prioritise those services which serve addresses without any commercial bus alternatives, thereby favouring those rural communities most at risk of isolation. Under either proposal we will work with bus operators to try and keep as many services as possible running. Where this isn't possible we will be working with the voluntary sector to set up alternatives

Rural communities concerned about the impact of these proposals are encouraged to make their views known as part of the consultation process, so that they can be properly assessed and taken into account when Cabinet makes its final decision on how to proceed.

Older people and people with disabilities

We know that some older people and people with disabilities rely on public transport to help them stay independent, particularly if they are no longer able to use a car. There is therefore a risk that reducing or withdrawing subsidised bus services will make it harder for some of the County's older people or people with disabilities to stay active and get out and about.

Mitigations:

As already stated, our methodology for ranking subsidised bus services under option 2 aims to prioritise those services which serve addresses without any commercial bus alternatives.

In addition we are proposing to prioritise off-peak services traditionally used by older people and people with disabilities, who have concessionary bus passes that allow them free travel on such services.

Under either option we will work with bus operators to try and keep as many services as possible running. Where this isn't possible we will be working with the voluntary sector to set up alternatives

Older people or people with disabilities who are concerned about the impact of these proposals are encouraged to make their views known as part of the consultation process, so that they can be properly assessed and taken into account when Cabinet makes its final decision on how to proceed.

Young people accessing employment

There's a risk that young people currently reliant on a subsidised service – and who are less likely to have the means to own a car – will be hindered in their ability to access employment or training opportunities.

Mitigations:

As already stated, our methodology for ranking subsidised bus services under option 2 aims to prioritise those services which serve addresses without any commercial bus alternatives, thereby favouring those communities, including young people, most at risk of isolation

As well as working with bus operators and community providers to ensure transport is available in affected areas, we are also supporting the set up and delivery of a community sector 'Wheels-to-Work' pilot scheme, to provide young people with a means to travel independently to their employment, education or training. Initially the scheme will be run as a pilot in the Vale district in 2015/16, but if proven sustainable it could be extended to the rest of the County in the future.

Other protected characteristics

We have not identified any other groups with protected characteristics which would be disproportionately affected by these proposals.

Dial-a-Ride

Rural communities

While Dial-a-Ride is a countywide service, those users who live in rural areas are less likely to have a transport alternative if the service is ceased.

Mitigation:

Through our work with bus operators and voluntary providers we hope to ensure that current Dial a Ride users are able to access alternative means of transport, if funding to the service is ceased.

Older people and people with disabilities

The service is used by older people and people with disabilities, who predominantly use it to go shopping.

Mitigation:

We've looked at those people currently using the service, and have found that 160 of 238 are able to walk and live within 400 metres of a bus stop. We also know that the majority of these people hold a concessionary bus pass that allows them free travel on Oxfordshire's buses during off-peak times.

However, for the remainder of service users, or for those who can walk but are unable to use the bus for whatever reason, we'll be encouraging voluntary groups with one-off funding and other support to set up schemes which can serve similar needs to those currently met by Dial-a-Ride.

In addition, we won't be ceasing funding until the end of March 2016 – so that communities have time to come forward and work with us to create new schemes, thereby reducing the likelihood of any sudden gaps in service provision.

Other protected characteristics

We have not identified any other groups with protected characteristics which would be disproportionately affected by this proposal.

Impact on Staff:

A structure and process review of all staff working in supported transport will take place over summer 2015. While no reductions in posts are foreseen, staff roles and responsibilities may change.

Impact on other Council services:

None.

Impact on providers:

Bus companies

If either option is pursued then bus companies will face a reduction or total withdrawal of the money they receive from the Council.

We are in conversation with Oxfordshire's bus operators about these proposals and will continue to keep them abreast of and actively engage them regarding any developments.

We will also continue to assess any unexpected impact on commercial routes which cannot be predicted at this stage, in order to monitor for potential adverse impacts.

Community transport providers

If our proposals are approved then it's likely that there will be an increased pressure on the community transport sector to provide more journeys.

We are offering a package of support to help existing and new schemes with this potential increase in demand, including start up grants, as well as the possibility of larger one-off pump-prime grants to get new schemes going. We are and will continue to actively engage with the sector about our plans, through our partner Oxfordshire Rural Community Council.

Action plan:

Action	By When	Person responsible
Continued engagement with bus operators regarding impact of proposals and possible mitigations	On-going	Alexandra Bailey, Service Manager for Supported Transport , OCC
Continued engagement with community transport providers regarding impact of proposals and possible mitigations	On-going	Oxfordshire Rural Community Council
Engagement with users of subsidised bus services and Dial-a-Ride to understand impact of proposals and possible mitigations, through public meetings, focus groups and other outreach work	On-going	Oxfordshire Rural Community Council
Assess consultation responses and consider whether any community	On-going	Oxfordshire Rural Community Council and Josephine Elliott.

groups with protected characteristics are disproportionately affected by the proposals		Supported Transport Programme Manager, OCC
Update SCIA throughout consultation process as and when relevant feedback is provided	On-going	Josephine Elliott, Supported Transport Programme Manager, OCC

Monitoring and review:

At the latest, the SCIA will next be reviewed and updated following the public meetings in early July.

Person responsible for assessment: Alexandra Bailey, Supported Transport Service Manager, OCC

Version	Date	Notes (eg Initial draft, amended following consultation)
V1.0	June 2015	First draft