

COMMITTEE: BISCOT, HIGH TOWN, ROUND GREEN AREA
COMMITTEE

DATE: 29 JUNE 2004

SUBJECT: SELBOURNE ROAD MINIBUS SERVICE

REPORT BY: HEAD OF ENGINEERING & TRANSPORTATION

CONTACT OFFICER: SIMON AYRES 01582 547165

IMPLICATIONS:

LEGAL	COMMUNITY SAFETY
EQUALITIES	ENVIRONMENT
FINANCIAL ✓	CONSULTATIONS
STAFFING	OTHER

WARDS AFFECTED: BISCOT, SAINTS

PURPOSE

1. To inform members of steps being taken to restore a bus service to Selbourne Road.

RECOMMENDATION(S)

2. Biscot, High Town, Round Green Area Committee is recommended to note the report.

BACKGROUND

3. The withdrawal of Arriva's commercial bus service from Selbourne Road and Wingate Road was the subject of a report to the Area Committee on 26th January 2004. The report itself was prompted by a petition containing 171 signatures protesting against the withdrawal.
4. The report of the Head of Engineering & Transportation outlined the reasons for Arriva's withdrawal from Selbourne Road and identified the options open to the Borough Council for reinstating a service.

5. Committee resolved that a report be submitted regarding the provision of a mini bus service for the area of Selbourne Road.

REPORT

6. Subsequent discussions with a number of local bus operators revealed that one company was considering the possibility of providing a new commercial bus service to the Selbourne Road area. We were asked to consider whether the Council would be prepared to “pump prime” a new bus service for an initial period.
7. “Pump priming” is a term adopted by Government in 2003 as a preferred method of introducing new and innovative bus services, which are intended to become commercially self-sufficient but which require an initial injection of public funding until they are established. The Government has subsequently relaxed “de-minimis” regulations to make it easier for local authorities to procure local bus services without the need for competitive tendering.
8. Three Star Minicoaches’ proposal is for a regular service between Wingate Road, Selbourne Road and Luton Town Centre (Park Square) between the hours of 08:00 am and 19:00 on Mondays to Fridays. The service, which will run every half hour, will also include Maidenhall Road and Sherwood Road. Fare levels have not yet been decided but will not exceed the general level of bus fares in the Luton area. After four weeks of operation, the company proposes to introduce a service on Saturdays. Luton Travel Permits for Senior Citizens and People With Disabilities and Travel Aid passes will be accepted, but Arriva return and season tickets will not.
9. The service proposed by Three Star is more intensive than any bespoke service that the Council could reasonably afford to procure. As it appears to be the most cost-effective means of meeting the needs of local residents, the Passenger Transport Unit has agreed to financially support the Selbourne Road section of the service for a trial period of three months. During this time we will assess the level of patronage from the area. If the service is a commercial success, the operator would wish to continue to operate it without subsidy and to extend it to serve other markets.

PROPOSAL/OPTION

10. Members are recommended to note the actions of the Head of Engineering and Transportation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

11. The initial committee report suggested that an off-peak minibuss service between Selbourne Road and the Town Centre might cost in the order of £30,000 per annum and that this would cause the Passenger Transport Unit to exceed its budget for tendered local bus services.
12. The trial arrangement described in this report would cost approximately £7,000 for an initial period of three months. This could be met from within the existing budget. Any subsequent liability would be dependant upon the performance of the service, which would be reviewed periodically. If at the end of the trial period subsidy is still required, this will be on a gradually declining scale and subject to budget availability.
13. These financial implications were agreed by the Finance Manager on 8th June 2004.

APPENDIX

Map and timetable not available at the time of writing, but will be available at the meeting.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS **LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972, SECTION 100D**

There are no background papers relating to this report.