



North Devon Council

Report Date: Monday, 3 March 2025

Topic: Night Bus Service Funding

Report by: Darren Hale, Lead Environmental Health Officer Environmental Protection

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. A night bus service has operated by Stage Coach from July to December 2024, which offers a reduced fare of £2.00. This is supported by partner agencies of the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPPC), Devon County Council, North Devon District Council and Torrington District Council. Devon and Cornwall Police have negotiated the agreement with Stage Coach and calculated the proportions due to each partner to support the project.

1.2. North Devon Council's element of the support funding, to date, has been provided in 2023 and 2024 from small savings and underspend within other budgets. There is no specific budget to fund this scheme. The reliance on underspends and use of different budgets is not sustainable and puts the scheme locally at risk if funding is not found.

1.3. In order to guarantee the support for the service it is essential to agree a specific and regular budget provision and also review the value and cost of the service.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1. Members approve the funding of the North Devon District element of the night bus service between Bideford, Barnstaple and Ilfracombe.

2.2. Members approve £3,000 from Strategic Contingency Reserve to fund the scheme.

2.3. Members give delegated power to the Head of Environmental Health and Housing to consider any continuation of the agreement and the service beyond 2025 subject to funding being found from existing budgets.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1. To secure a commitment to financially support the night bus in future years, until such time as it becomes self-sustainable.

4. REPORT

4.1. The community safety partnership (CSP) has a number of key priorities, two of which are pertinent to this report.

- Reducing, Serious violence and specifically includes Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)
- Safer Streets & Anti-Social Behaviour

- 4.2. To support these priorities, a Saturday night / Sunday morning bus route between Bideford, Barnstaple and Ilfracombe has been provided by Stage Coach to ensure that safe routes exist between these towns.
- 4.3. This route was developed by Devon and Cornwall Police who have negotiated with Stage Coach to provide a service. To ensure the route is economically viable and is priced to encourage its use, the 21 bus has been supported by additional funding from Devon and Cornwall Police, North Devon District and Torrington District Councils.
- 4.4. For 2025/26 the northern Devon councils' have agreed contributions of £2,500 for Torrington District and £3000 for North Devon District. North Devon Council area is slightly more due to extending the Night Bus to Ilfracombe.
- 4.5. The route has operated since October 23 through to New Years' Eve 2024, which has involved two pilot exercises, initially between Bideford and Barnstaple, then extended to include Ilfracombe. This captures the Christmas and New Year period where the night-time economy is generally busier. The fare has been set at £2 to encourage the use of this service as opposed to other less safe options.
- 4.6. Although there are many other factors that effects the night-time economy this service would have some positive benefits that are supported by the evidence of the volumes of use at appendix A to this report.
- 4.7. By looking at one example at appendix A, it can be seen that the bus is transporting a relatively high number of passengers at key times during the early hours, which typically is when the main bars and clubs close. This has several benefits on community safety. Most passengers will be aware of the departure times and will leave the premises and make their way straight to the pickup location, which avoids crowds hanging around in the streets. Groups of individuals can cause disturbance to local residents and increase the risk of wider anti-social behaviour and or violence. Removing larger numbers of people quickly and at known times will assist with more efficient dispersal at the end of the night. This also impacts positively on the general perception of safety in the area.
- 4.8. After a night out and with the addition of alcohol, those taking advantage of the night-time economy are more at risk of violence and at particular risk are women and girls. The night bus provides an alternative to choosing less wise options such as accepting a lift with strangers. Groups of friends can become separated and even where there was a pre-arranged transport these plans can change and lone individuals are left attempting to find an alternative route home.
- 4.9. At peak and or busy times there may be limited taxis available or there may be a considerable wait. Whilst taxis are well regulated and generally a safe option they may be prohibitively expensive option for longer distances.

4.10. The bus route would not be economically viable for the provider and therefore requires support of partners financially to ensure it continues to operate and is priced at a level to encourage its use.

4.11. The contract for the provision of the bus is negotiated by Devon and Cornwall Police. Financial support is then shared between relevant partners based on the proportion of route / distances etc.

4.12. The goal is to make the night bus service self-sustainable in the future and not rely on the support funding. Devon and Cornwall Police will work closely with Stage Coach on how this can be achieved. This could include increasing the fare to make it viable but yet still encourage the use.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

5.1. The contribution of £3000 will come from the Strategic Contingency Reserve.

6. EQUALITIES ASSESSMENT

6.1. None

7. ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT

7.1. The use of the bus will significantly reduce the number of car journeys and therefore be positive.

8. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

8.1. What impact, positive or negative, does the subject of this report have on:

8.1.1. The commercialisation agenda:

8.1.2. Improving customer focus and/or

8.1.3. Regeneration or economic development

9. CONSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT

9.1. Save as provided in paragraph 9.2 below, the decision in respect of the recommendations in this report can be made by this Committee pursuant to delegated powers provided in Part 3 Annex 1 paragraph 1

10. STATEMENT OF CONFIDENTIALITY

This report contains no confidential information or exempt information under the provisions of Schedule 12A of 1972 Act.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

The following background papers were used in the preparation of this report:
None



12. STATEMENT OF INTERNAL ADVICE

The author confirms that advice has been taken from all appropriate Councillors and Officers: Ken Miles (Chief Executive), Nina Lake (Head of Environmental Health and Housing), Jon Triggs (director of Finance).