

Decision Report - Executive Decision

Forward Plan Reference: FP/23/07/14

Decision Date – 6 December 2023

Key Decision – Yes



Award of a contract for the provision of the Park and Ride Service in Taunton and adoption of a Taunton Integrated Parking Strategy

Executive Member(s): Cllr Mike Rigby – Lead Member for Transport and Digital
Local Member(s) and Division: Cllr John Hunt and Cllr Caroline Ellis – Bishops Hull & Taunton West

Cllr Ross Henley and Cllr Sarah Wakefield – Blackdown & Neroche

Lead Officer: David Carter, Service Director – Infrastructure and Transport

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Summary / Background

1. The Unitary Authority provides an opportunity to introduce more integrated parking strategies, and the current operator of the Taunton Park and Ride service has given notice on the current contract. A new contract is required from 12th February 2024 to ensure we can continue to deliver a Park and Ride service within the town.
2. An open tender was advertised through the Southwest Supplier Portal, with support from the Commercial and Procurement Team, as detailed in Appendix A.
3. The contract has been tendered to operate from both the Silks Mills and Gateway sites, serving the town centre and Musgrove Park Hospital, as well as a number of other designated stops along the route. The £1 single fare currently funded through the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) will continue to apply on the service until the end of the BSIP funding period of March 2025.
4. Following evaluation of the bid submissions, the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT) has been identified.

Recommendations

5. That Executive:
 - **Adopts and implements the Taunton Integrated Parking Strategy set out in Appendix G, aimed at improving the town centre environment and economy, reducing demand for town centre**

parking and encouraging greater use of the Park and Ride and local bus services.

- **Approves the award of a 3+2+2 year contract for park and ride services commencing on 12th February 2024, based on the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT), as set out in confidential Appendix B.**
- **Delegates the decision to exercise the contract extension options in accordance with the terms of the contract, to the Executive Director – Climate and Place.**
- **Approves the use of surplus income from the rental of car-parking spaces to EDF energy at the Gateway Park and Ride site to assist in balancing the Council's budget and the on-going budget challenges that the Council faces.**
- **Agrees the case for applying the exempt information provision as set out in the Local Government Act 1972, Schedule 12A and therefore to treat the attached confidential Appendix B and Appendix F in confidence, as it contains commercially sensitive information, and as the case for the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing that information.**
- **To exclude the press and public from the meeting where there is any discussion regarding confidential Appendix B and confidential Appendix F (to be treated as exempt information).**

Reasons for recommendations

6. Any additional surplus from the EDF rental income can be used to support the wider delivery of services, which helps balance the Council's budget.
7. An integrated parking strategy would provide the mechanism to achieve the environmental and economic objectives set out in Appendix G including encouraging greater use of the Park and Ride service and other local bus services in the town. The overall strategy could take approximately 1 year to fully implement allowing time for the appropriate consultation, communication and implementation processes, however changes to parking charges can be introduced at an early stage.
8. A compliant tender exercise has been conducted, as detailed in Appendix A, and following evaluation of the bid submissions the winning supplier has been identified based on the Most Economically Advantageous Tender (MEAT).
9. The Park and Ride service forms part of the wider public transport strategy for Taunton and also fits within the broader activities associated with the BSIP and

the Somerset Climate Emergency Strategy which aims to encourage and facilitate behavioural change by reducing single occupancy car journeys, increasing public transport usage and reducing the need to travel by car. The Park and Ride is the only regular bus service in the town serving the Musgrove Park Hospital site. The service also provides an affordable all-day parking option for many people working within the town centre.

10. The reason for the frequency option being recommended is detailed in confidential Appendix F.
11. The accompanying confidential Appendix B and Appendix F contains commercially sensitive information relating to the contract and the Council's financial and business affairs. Officers recommend that this is treated as exempt information. "Exempt Information" is defined by Section 100 of the Local Government Act 1972, by Schedule 12A to that Act.

Other options considered

12. The tender specification included two different Lots, Lot 1 for the provision of a 15-minute service Monday to Friday and 20 minutes on Saturday using single deck vehicles, and Lot 2 to deliver the service on a 20 minute frequency Monday to Saturday using double deck vehicles.
13. The option to deliver the contract in-house has been explored and discounted on the basis that it does not offer any financial benefit compared to the contract and would expose the Council to additional risk.
14. The council has an option not to award this contract and discontinue the service in order to achieve financial savings in light of the financial emergency. Whilst the Park and Ride Service is non-statutory, there are equalities implications associated with ceasing the service completely as set out in the EIA attached at Appendix E. In addition, the £1 fare scheme on the Park and Ride is currently funded through the government's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) Scheme. If the Park and Ride were to cease operation, then permission would need to be sought from the Department for Transport (DfT) to re-direct the money to an alternative scheme or we may be required to return the remaining funding. This could impact on our reputation to deliver government funded schemes and may impact on our ability to secure further funding in future rounds of BSIP.

Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan

15. This decision links to the following priorities within the Somerset Council Plan:
 - **Greener, more sustainable Somerset** – the provision of the Park & Ride service, encourages people to use the Park & Ride sites on the outskirts of the town, which reduces the number of cars travelling into the town centre, which in turn reduces congestion and carbon emissions.

- **Healthy and caring Somerset** – the Park & Ride service facilitates access to essential retail, leisure, social or health services which helps people remain independent, healthy and active.

Financial and Risk Implications

16. Income is generated through fares revenue taken on the Park and Ride service and also currently through the rental of car parking spaces at the Gateway Park and Ride site to EDF (for staff at Hinkley Point using their bespoke Park and Ride Service). The service is currently funded through fees and charges as set out in Confidential Appendix F which contains commercially sensitive information relating to contract prices. It is recommended to use any surplus from the EDF rental income to assist in balancing the Council's budget and the on-going budget challenges that the Council faces.
17. The creation of the Unitary Authority provides the opportunity to implement an integrated parking strategy (Appendix G) which reduces demand for town centre parking and encourages use of the park and ride in Taunton, as well as other local bus services. The strategy provides the mechanisms to encourage modal shift to other forms of transport by discouraging private car journeys through the use of increased car parking charges and the removal of freely available parking. Surplus income can be used for the provision of public transport services and facilities including park and ride to deliver an integrated approach in line with the Road Traffic Regulation Act (1984) Section 55. The integrated strategy creates a more financially sustainable model for the provision of park and ride/public transport services and reduces the need for subsidy from the Council's general budget.
18. The park and ride contract can be terminated with 12 months' notice if necessary, without cause, should the funding model become unsustainable in the future.
19. The option to award the Park and Ride contract has been considered by the Commercial and Procurement Control Board. They considered that the option of ceasing the service and maintaining the surplus income from renting spaces to EDF was the preferred option of the Board given their specific remit of challenging non-statutory spend and achieving financial savings in light of the financial emergency.
20. As highlighted in paragraph 14 of this report, if the Park and Ride service ceases then there are implications for the BSIP funding provided by government, which may need to be returned and could impact on our reputation to deliver future initiatives and secure additional funding.

Legal Implications

21. The Council's legal team were consulted and updated the contract Terms and Conditions for the Park and Ride service, ahead of the procurement exercise commencing.

22. The Commercial and Procurement team have supported the procurement process and facilitated a tender exercise through a compliant route to market.

HR Implications

23. The HR Implications are detailed in the confidential Appendix B.

Other Implications:

Equalities Implications

24. Prior to commencing the procurement exercise, an Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA) was completed for both frequency options to ensure all impacts were considered and mitigating action factored into the procurement process where appropriate (see Appendix C).

The implications highlighted related to accessibility, capacity for wheelchairs and also the impact for certain protected groups if timetables and information displays are not provided correctly. The tender specification addressed the issues around accessibility, policy for wheelchair users and the need for compliance with the reasonable adjustment element of the Equalities Act 2010.

The draft EIA attached at Appendix D considers the high-level impacts of developing and introducing an Integrated Parking Strategy. This is currently in draft format and is provided for information only to support the decision-making process. As the detailed proposals are developed, more in-depth, robust impact assessments will be completed.

Community Safety Implications

25. There are no Community Safety Implications associated with this decision.

Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

26. The award of the contract will ensure the continued provision of an alternative parking option for car users not wishing to travel into the town. Signage on the main routes into the town will continue to promote the use of the Park and Ride sites. This aims to reduce the number of cars travelling into the town centre and reduce congestion as well as carbon emissions.

Health and Safety Implications

27. There are no Health & Safety implications associated with the award of this contract.

Health and Wellbeing Implications

28. The continued provision of a Park & Ride service facilitates access to essential retail, leisure, social or health services which helps people remain independent, healthy and active. It is the only regular bus route serving Musgrove Park Hospital throughout the day.

Social Value

29. The tender process required suppliers to complete and submit a social value calculator for each Lot they were bidding on. Social Value was assessed as part of the tender evaluation process.

Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

30. The Scrutiny Committee for Climate and Place considered the contract award at their meeting on 22nd November. They raised concerns regarding the option to cease the service, particularly in terms of any environmental impacts but understood the financial implications. They raised no objections to awarding the contract.

Background

31. The current Park & Ride Service operates Monday to Saturday. It runs every 15 minutes Monday to Friday between 06:35 and 19:30, and every 20 minutes on Saturday between 08:15 and 18:30. The service is currently operated with single deck vehicles. The two sites are served during the evening by other local buses services (the 1E and 30) which does not form part of the Park & Ride contract, and this arrangement will continue for the duration of the BSIP funding.
32. The current contract was awarded on a cost contract basis, whereby the Local Authority retain the fares. This has enabled us to introduce the lower BSIP funded fares (£1 single/£2 return). This initiative is funded until 31st March 2025.
33. The current contract commenced 6th July 2021 and was awarded on a 5+1+1 year basis, however the operator gave notice on the contract as it was no longer viable for them.
34. The local member for Silk Mills raised concerns that traveller incursions of the park and ride sites discouraged use.

Background Papers

- NKD authorising the commencement of a procurement exercise – 14th July 2023

Appendices

- Appendix A – Tender Evaluation Report
- Confidential Appendix B – Tender Evaluation Report
- Appendix C – Equalities Impact Assessments (15- and 20-minute frequency)
- Appendix D – DRAFT Equalities Impact Assessment (introducing an integrated parking strategy)
- Appendix E – Equalities Impact Assessment (ceasing the Park & Ride Service)
- Confidential Appendix F – Funding options
- Appendix G – Taunton Integrated Parking Strategy for Approval

Report Sign-Off (if appropriate) (internal use only - not for publication)

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Legal & Governance Implications	David Clark	27/11/23
Communications	Peter Elliott	16/11/23
Finance & Procurement	Nicola Hix	27/11/23
Workforce	Alyn Jones	27/11/23
Asset Management	Oliver Woodhams	11/11/23
Executive Director / Senior Manager	Mickey Green/ David Carter	27/11/23
Strategy & Performance	Alyn Jones	27/11/23
Executive Lead Member	Cllr Mike Rigby – Lead Member for Transport and Digital	20/11/23
Consulted:	Councillor Name	
Local Division Members	Cllr John Hunt	27/11/23
	Cllr Caroline Ellis	27/11/23
	Cllr Ross Henley	27/11/23
	Cllr Sarah Wakefield	27/11/23
Opposition Spokesperson	Cllr Diogo Rodrigues – Opposition Spokesperson for Transport and Digital	Original report sent 10/11/23 Briefed 24/11/23
Scrutiny Chair	Cllr Martin Dimery	23/11/23
	Cllr Adam Boyden (Vice Chair)	27/11/23