

ENVIRONMENT SELECT COMMITTEE – 6 SEPTEMBER 2011

SDC RESPONSE TO KCC'S PUBLIC BUS SERVICES IN KENT CONSULTATION: WITHDRAWAL OF THE 409 IN HEXTABLE, SWANLEY AND CROCKENHILL

Report of the: Community and Planning Services Director

Status: For Consideration

Key Decision: No

Executive Summary: KCC is proposing to withdraw the 409 commuter service between Hextable, Swanley and Crockenhill from 1 January 2012. KCC considers that the 409 commuter service scores poorly against the criteria that it has set for continuing support. In particular, the 409 duplicates part of the route provided by the 477, which operates on approximately a one bus per 30 minutes schedule throughout the day. A proposed response to KCC's consultation is set out in Appendix A. This suggests that:

- KCC and Arriva consider whether it is necessary, and whether opportunities exist, to amend the 477 timetable so that it is integrated with the timetable of the most frequently used trains at Swanley Station;
- KCC formally confirm with Arriva that they have no intentions to materially change the 477 service and continue to keep this issue under review;
- KCC continue to subsidise any commercially-marginal early morning and evening routes of the 477; and
- KCC and Arriva consider whether additional 477 services could be provided in the morning and evening peak periods.

This report supports the Key Aim of keeping Sevenoaks District Moving from the Sustainable Community Action Plan 2010-13.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Mrs Davison

Head of Service Head of Development Services – Mr Jim Kehoe

Recommendation: That the draft response is agreed with the Portfolio Holder and sent to KCC as Sevenoaks District Council's representations on the proposed withdrawal of the 409 in Hextable, Swanley and Crockenhill.

Reason for recommendation: The response seeks to ensure that residents of Crockenhill, Hextable and the three Swanley wards do not suffer a significant reduction in their ability to access jobs, shops, services and other forms of public transport as a result of KCC's withdrawal of financial support for the 409 bus.

Background

- 1 Following a reduction in its budget for supported bus services, KCC is proposing to withdraw part or all of 14 bus services that it supports from 1 January 2012. The only service affected by these proposals in Sevenoaks District is the 409 commuter service between Hextable, Swanley and Crockenhill, which the County Council proposes to fully withdraw. The 409 commuter service operates in the morning (6-8am) and evening (5-7pm) peaks. The buses affected are the 10 that run daily between Swanley and Hextable, with 4 starting at Crockenhill, and the 9 buses that run between Hextable and Swanley, with 4 continuing to Crockenhill. The 409 school services are not affected by this proposal.
- 2 KCC considers that the 409 commuter service scores poorly against the criteria that it has set for continuing support. The analysis in the 'Bus Service Withdrawals' document for the 409 (appendix B) states that the subsidy per passenger is currently £9.07, greatly in excess of KCC's maximum target of £3 per passenger journey. The 409 also duplicates part of the route provided by the 477, which operates on approximately a one bus per 30 minutes schedule throughout the day. The 477 is primarily a commercially run service, operated by Arriva with a number of KCC supported services operating in the early morning and late evening. Following discussions with Arriva, it is understood that the 477 is operating on a sound commercial basis and there are no current plans to alter the service.
- 3 District Council Members in Hextable, Crockenhill and the three Swanley wards have been consulted on these proposals (between 12th July and 14th August 2011). Whilst one objection to the principle of cuts in bus budgets was received, no objections specifically referring to a need to retain the 409 service were received. Some Members commented that the bus is rarely used but that KCC should commit to continuing to support the early morning and evening services of the 477 that it currently subsidises. It was also suggested that the 477 timetable be integrated with Southeastern's train timetable at Swanley Station. These comments have been taken into account in the draft response.

Proposed Response

- 4 A proposed response to Kent County Council is set out in Appendix A. The key points are considered to be:
 - KCC and Arriva should consider whether it is necessary, and whether opportunities exist, to amend the 477 timetable so that it is integrated with the timetable of frequently used trains at Swanley Station;

- If they have not already done so, KCC formally confirm with Arriva that they have no intentions to materially change the 477 service and continue to keep this issue under review;
- KCC continue to subsidise any commercially-marginal early morning and evening routes of the 477 to provide communities in this area with accessibility to jobs, shops, services and other public transport links; and
- KCC and Arriva consider whether additional 477 services could be provided, either operated commercially by Arriva or supported by KCC, in the morning and evening peak periods.

Other Options Considered and/or Rejected

- 5 The Council could object to the withdrawal of the 409 bus. This option has been rejected because the bus appears to be little used and duplicates another bus service. From the comments of local Members and the figures presented by KCC on existing usage, there appears to be little local support for the retention of the bus. It is possible that if this bus is not withdrawn then KCC will need to withdraw another bus in Sevenoaks District to balance their budget. This could have a greater impact on local communities, if alternatives do not exist.
- 6 The Council could choose not to respond to the consultation. This option has been rejected because it is felt that the consultation represents an opportunity to press for actions that would limit any impact of the withdrawal.

Key Implications

Financial

- 7 There are no financial implications for Sevenoaks District Council.

Community Impact and Outcomes

- 8 The draft response aims to ensure that the impact on local communities, in terms of access to jobs, shops, services and other public transport, is minimised.

Legal, Human Rights etc.

- 9 No legal issues identified for Sevenoaks District Council.

Conclusions

- 10 It is recommended that the draft response is agreed with the Portfolio Holder and sent to KCC as Sevenoaks District Council's representations on the proposed withdrawal of the 409 in Hextable, Swanley and Crockenhill.

Risk Assessment Statement

- 11 No risks identified.

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Attached Documents

Appendix A – Draft Response

Appendix B – 409 Withdrawal Document (KCC)

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