

Transport Programme - Equality Impact Assessment Report - Sutherland Mainstream Schools and Public Bus Services Re-tendering 2015

| Question | Answer |
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| Please list the name(s) of those who are completing this assessment | Stephen Graham, Corporate Improvement Team David Summers, Transport Coordination Unit Alison Clark/Rosemary MacKinnon, Policy Unit |
| What existing sources of information have you gathered to help identify how people covered by the protected characteristics may be affected by this policy or service? Consider staff and service users. | <p>National or local research: Socio-economic profile data for Sutherland with data sourced from 2011 Census, Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation, NOMIS and Highland Council.</p> <p>National or local research: Review of Equality Evidence in Rural Scotland Report, 2015, Rural Science and Analysis Unit, Scottish Government</p> <p>Insight provided includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Residents of remote rural areas (such as many parts of Sutherland might be described) are less likely than those in accessible rural areas and the rest of Scotland to consider they have good levels of access to public transport services. • A lack of accessible transport will reinforce the social isolation experienced by disabled people – those with physical and intellectual disabilities. • Transport provision is very important for older peoples’ ability to access medical and shopping services and social activities. • People with a long-term activity-limiting health condition are less likely to have access to a car in Sutherland. • Sutherland has an aging population – 33% are 60 years old or more. • Parts of Sutherland have a high reliance on seasonal employment. • Lack of transport can affect young people’s ability to access employment and further education. It can also inhibit socializing and access to leisure opportunities. • Young mothers may find poor transport services imposing isolation upon them. • 15 out of 21 data zones in Sutherland are in the 15% most access deprived in Scotland, with 10 of these data zones in the 5% most access deprived. Access deprived data zones tend to be in the North Sutherland area. • Services (such as GP practices, post offices and retail centres) typically take longer to reach in Sutherland in comparison to a Highland average. <p>Additionally, within the Highland Council document 'Working towards a Fairer Highland: Equality Outcomes' April 2013, Revised April 2015 which sets out the Council’s equality outcomes and which aim to contribute towards a fairer, more inclusive Highland, there are two target outcomes with particular relevance for how people may be affected by the Transport Programme.</p> |

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| | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High Level Outcome 1: People are, and feel, free to live their lives without harassment and discrimination, and can take part in community life. People feel involved and are able to participate in public life and influence decision making. Protected characteristics: All • High Level Outcome 2: People benefit from public services in a fairer way, and are able to have their say about them. Disabled people, older/younger people and women experience have improved access to public transport (through the provision of more accessible information on transport and better information about accessible services). Protected characteristics: Disability, Age, and Gender. |
| <p>Are there gaps in evidence that make it difficult to judge if the existing or proposed policy might affect different groups of people? If so, what are the gaps and how can this be addressed?</p> | <p>There are gaps in the level of detailed information regarding users of services and feedback from the consultation. This means it is difficult to identify specific impacts on current users and on equality groups in particular. The range of information available, however, is sufficient to illustrate that any changes to the level of public bus service provision have the potential to have an impact on Sutherland, particularly the various equality groups identified in the section above.</p> |
| <p>What involvement, engagement or consultation has taken place as part of the development or review of this policy? How has it informed the assessment of how people covered by protected characteristics may be affected?</p> | <p>Engagement was undertaken, during which views on equalities issues were sought from the participants. Amongst others, groups with an interest in disability and age were invited to participate, and access issues were included in the questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Workshop on 19th February 2015 with the local representatives of the Transport Programme partners – Highlands and Islands Transport Partnership, Scottish Ambulance Service, Community Transport Association, Highland Third Sector Interface represented by CVS North and Voluntary Groups – East Sutherland, Highland Council’s Care and Learning Directorate and Ward Management. NHS Highland was unable to attend and did not take up subsequent offers to submit their views. • Workshop on 26th February with the six councillors representing the two wards in Sutherland, wards 1 and 5. • Supplier briefing event on 12th March which included a question and answer session and one-to-one discussion opportunities with Highland Council transport and procurement officials. Commercial and community transport organisations were invited and attended. • Four public meetings – Durness and Lochinver on 17th March, Golspie on 24th March and Bettyhill on 27th March. • Three questionnaires – one for suppliers, one for the general public and one for community councils and community groups (such as equality organisations, advocacy groups, school parent councils, social clubs, etc.) The questionnaires were made available via various avenues including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Email distribution of the supplier and community questionnaires direct to contact lists, the community questionnaire being directly sent to a range of equalities |

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| | <p>representative groups and organisations operating in Sutherland specifically and Highland more generally.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The public questionnaire being available via Highland Council Service Points and local libraries, and via NHS Highland community outlets. ○ Highland Council’s website, the addresses being publicised in two press releases to all Highland media outlets. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Notification of, and encouragement to participate in, the surveys featuring as part of each of the workshops, supplier briefing event and public meetings defined above. <p>The Transport Unit participated in the public and supplier meetings as part of their preparations for developing the route specifications for the Sutherland re-tendering. Reports on each of the meetings were prepared and points emerging from the questionnaire responses were also collated in reports, and these were also made available to the Transport Unit as part of the process of developing route specifications for the Invitation to Tender documentation.</p> |
| <p>Having considered the information gathered (including involvement and consultation) how would you assess the likely impact of the policy?</p> | <p>The policy seeks to reduce the level of expenditure on school transport and public bus services in Sutherland by 15%. School transport is a statutory obligation and so pupils will continue to be taken to and from school. Where efficiencies are secured in the provision of home-to-school transport (for instance where it may be possible to combine routes, operate with smaller vehicles and possibly combine school and public services) this may mitigate the impact of reductions sought in public bus service expenditure.</p> <p>There is no statutory obligation on Highland Council to provide public transport services and this is where the impact will most probably occur. The likely degree of impact on current users cannot be precisely measured as the range of services which can be purchased with the reduced budget will be determined by the prices quoted by potential suppliers of those services. Should there be a diminution of service provision (either service frequency or withdrawal) this will most likely have negative impacts on the current users of the services affected. It has also not been possible to identify whether there are potential users of public transport services who may not use existing services due to reasons related to disabled access.</p> |
| <p>Identify which groups covered by the protected characteristics are affected. Briefly explain why and include both negative and positive impacts.</p> | <p>The following groups have been identified as most likely to be affected: Age (young and old); Disability; and Pregnancy and Maternity.</p> <p>Feedback from consultees suggested a range of likely impacts on these equalities groups should service frequencies be lowered or should services be withdrawn altogether.</p> <p>Suppliers considered that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Elderly and disabled people’s requirement to access health services should be met. This is also a concern for those within the pregnancy |

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| | <p>and maternity group.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of the current vehicle stock used by current suppliers minibuses and cars are the more accessible, coaches less so for elderly and disabled people. • Suppliers highlighted that the Council needs to consider the needs of school pupils with disabilities, even if there are not currently any pupils with disabilities. <p>Community Groups (which includes community councils, the local access panel and other groups) considered that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reduction in bus services would reduce access to local amenities, various services and friends, and that this would be a particular problem for older people and people with disabilities generating a loss of independence and social isolation. • Coordinating transport times with hospital appointment times is important. Community groups highlighted that current services are not adequate and people can spend a long time away from home for a relatively short appointment. <p>The general public considered that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A reduction in service would have a greater impact on older people and people with disabilities as they tend to rely more on public transport. • The accessibility of some buses and coaches was a real issue for those with disabilities and for those in older age groups: therefore the accessibility of the vehicles also needs to be considered alongside the frequency of services. • People with mobility problems may also have difficulty in getting to a bus stop, even if the service is available. This will also need to be considered to ensure equal access to these services. • Reducing services will limit access to evening and weekend activities which may have a greater impact on young people who are not old enough to drive. They also noted that reduced bus services will limit the accessibility of educational opportunities (either school or higher and further education), which again is more likely to affect young people. • There would be a loss of independence for older and younger age groups- the two age groups that are least likely to drive. • Dial- a-bus drivers seem to be more understanding of disabilities than regular bus drivers so there may be a need for additional training to ensure an equal service for all. • It can be difficult to access maternity services. |
| <p>If you have identified, or if there is the potential for, adverse or negative impact, which will disadvantage any particular group(s) can this be justified without</p> | <p>The context for justifying the potential impact is described below.</p> <p>Highland Council has a significant funding deficit over the next four years– currently estimated at £56m. The Full Council of 18th December 2014 sanctioned a range of projects which seek efficiencies to reduce expenditure whilst maintaining services as comprehensively as possible;</p> |

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| <p>changing the policy? If so, please give your reasons.</p> | <p>but in full recognition that Highland Council could not continue to provide the current range of services at the current cost.</p> <p>The Transport Programme was one of the projects approved for undertaking at the Full Council meeting. The likelihood of equality impacts was recognized at the outset and therefore efforts have been made to ensure equality issues have been included in the project's development. This included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking advice from the Equal Opportunities Officer to understand the scope of equal opportunity issues. • Identifying equalities groups to be contacted as part of the consultation. • Incorporating equality and accessibility issues in the development of the three questionnaires. • Emailing the community questionnaire to named contacts within equal opportunity groups operating in Highland generally and Sutherland specifically. • Efforts were made to ensure the consultation process was inclusive and accessible. <p>With regard to the two high level outcomes from Highland Council's 'Working towards a Fairer Highland: Equality Outcomes' the Transport Programme's consultation process and actions have sought to take cognizance by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outcome 1: Liaising with Highland Council's Equal Opportunities Officer as described above. • Outcome 2: Incorporating clear guidance within the contract documentation developed to support the transport programme concerning the range and quality of information provision and dissemination. It provides instruction that timetables and other information shall be designed in accordance with the 'Public Transport Information Good Practice' guide issued by the Association of Transport Coordinating Officers. <p>Additionally, on all public routes, if wheelchair accessible vehicles are not already in use, options are invited in the Invitation to Tender documentation for accessible vehicles.</p> <p>Should there be no current requirement for disabled pupil transport provision the likely mechanism to address the arrival of a pupil with such needs is likely to be either a contract variation, retendering of the contract or, where the needs are very specific, issuing a new contract tender to secure appropriate transport provision. There is a process in place, operated by Community Services' Transport Co-ordination Unit and Care & Learning Directorate, to assess pupil requirements for transport where additional support needs have been identified.</p> |
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| <p>If the impact cannot be justified, what action will be taken to remove, mitigate or reduce adverse impact? Please identify the action(s).</p> | <p>The actions to mitigate potential impact are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking to secure as much efficiency as possible in home-to-school transport to potentially reduce the impact on the non-statutory provision of public bus services. • Specific instruction to transport providers on the quality of information they are to provide. • Seeking tender options from suppliers for the provision of accessible services where these do not currently exist. • Forthcoming discussion with Transport Programme partners to consider the potential for the community transport sector to be more involved in delivering patient transport services. |
| <p>Please provide details of arrangements to monitor and review the policy and any mitigating actions.</p> | <p>The performance of transport providers in fulfilling the home-to-school requirements are monitored by Highland Council's Local Transport Officers. Issues are referred to the Principal Transport Officer.</p> <p>Changes which may arise in school transport requirements in Sutherland over the lifetime of the contracts to be issued as part of this policy can be monitored and addressed by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Where pupils enter a locality in Sutherland then the process for requesting school transport is enacted, the ability of the current provision to cater for the need is assessed and action undertaken as appropriate. • Where pupils leave a locality in Sutherland then the contract monitoring and management undertaken by the Transport Coordination Unit will assess whether the route remains viable as a contract or whether the pupil numbers remaining could be more effectively conveyed in a smaller vehicle or via another means such as a parental expenses arrangement. <p>The monitoring of public bus services is based on the monthly returns made by transport providers which includes numbers of, and fares value of, journeys and whether the journeys are fare-paying or concessionary, single or return. Information on the date and time of travel, and the origin and destination, can also be obtained. This process of analysis will continue to assess any emerging issues.</p> <p>Further, the Transport Coordination Unit intends to sample the quality of service delivery and these assessments will raise mitigation actions where appropriate.</p> |
| <p>Please state where the EQIA will be published</p> | <p>The EQIA can be found at:</p> <p>http://www.highland.gov.uk/transport-programme</p> <p>http://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/download/404/equality_impact_assessments</p> |