**Highland (excluding Sutherland) – Equality Impact Assessment Report - Mainstream Schools and Public Bus Services Re-tendering 2016**

Purpose of the Equality Impact Assessment

The Equality Act 2010 introduced a [Public Sector Equality Duty](http://www.equalityhumanrights.com/uploaded_files/Scotland/PSED_in_Scotland/essential_guide_to_the_psed.doc) (PSED) requiring public bodies to give due regard to the need to:

* Eliminate unlawful discrimination
* Advance equality of opportunity
* Foster good relations

Consideration must be given to the protected characteristics covered by the Equality Act. Assessments should ‘consider relevant evidence relating to persons with relevant protected characteristics in relation to such assessments of impact’.

The purpose of an Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) is to ensure that policies, functions, plans or decisions (hereafter referred to as ‘policy’) do not create unnecessary barriers for people protected under the Act, and that negative impacts are eliminated or minimised and opportunities for positive impact are maximised.

Screening is a short exercise to determine if a policy is relevant to equality and whether a full equality impact assessment (EQIA) should be carried out.

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| **Question** | **Answer** |
| Please list the name(s) of those who are completing this assessment | Prepared by:  Stephen Graham, Corporate Improvement Team  Reviewed by:  Transport Co-ordination Unit and Policy Unit. |
| What are the aims and objectives of the policy? | Highland Council’s Transport Programme has emerged from the process of identifying ways to reduce expenditure over 2015-19. The primary focus for 2015-19 savings activity is reducing the cost of providing for mainstream school and public bus transport services whilst maintaining statutory obligations. Within Highland the baseline 2014/15 value of contracts for mainstream schools and public bus services (which includes dial-a-bus services) is £15.003m and the savings target from these contracts is £2.246m.  The key stakeholders are: transport providers; the general public; Councillors; community councils and representative groups.  The activity has the potential to affect all those using bus services in the Highland area.  Whilst the aim is to reduce the amount spent on delivering the transport services, it will be necessary to fulfil the statutory obligation of home-to-school transport. Beyond that it is intended to provide as comprehensive a service as financial resources permit – prices are market-driven, although prospective suppliers are aware that The Highland Council has a lower level of finance available for the purchase of transport services. This will be reinforced in the mini-competition (that is, invitation to tender) documentation.  The policy will be implemented by Community Services and Care & Learning Directorates. |
| 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. | A similar retendering exercise was undertaken in Sutherland during 2015. Insight gathered from official publications during that process are considered applicable to this process, including:-   * Residents of remote rural areas 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. * Transport provision is important for older peoples’ ability to access shopping services, social activities and medical appointments. * Lack of transport can affect young people’s ability to access employment and further education. It can also inhibit socialising and access to leisure opportunities. * Young mothers may find poor transport services imposing isolation upon them. * Many parts of the Highland area are classified through the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation as being in access deprived zones: 71 out of 292 data zones in Highland are ranked within the 5% most access deprived in Scotland, with 122 data zones in the 15% most access deprived.   Additionally, within the Highland Council document ‘Highland First’ there is a commitment to work with public transport providers to improve the integration of services across Highland. This is an aspect of concern which also arose through the consultation activity, and will form part of the thinking towards route specifications development. |
| 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? | Highland communities have contributed their thoughts through the survey and 15 public meetings, and this input is being used by the Council’s Transport Unit to assist with the development of route specifications.  There have been 582 responses to the survey either directly through the questionnaire or by separate submissions (emails and letters). Of the 582 respondents it has been possible to determine the geographic area of most relevance for 376 respondents. Geographic coverage can be considered comprehensive:  Table 1   |  |  | | --- | --- | | Area | Number | | Badenoch & Strathspey | 18 | | Caithness | 66 | | Easter Ross & Black Isle | 84 | | Inverness & Nairn | 107 | | Lochaber | 50 | | Skye | 25 | | Wester Ross & Lochalsh | 26 | | Total | 376 |   50 of 341 respondents (15%) indicated that they have a disability (i.e. a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long­term adverse effect upon their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities). The Highland census percentage for people with a limiting health problem or disability is 18%; therefore the transport programme’s survey may be slightly under-represented in this regard, although Sutherland (which has a higher than the Highland average proportion of the population with a long-term health condition) was not part of the survey.  The survey respondents covered a wide range of ages, although with an older age responding profile than the Highland Census age distribution.  Table 2   |  |  |  |  |  |  | | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | |  | Age Categories | | | | | | 16-44 | 45-64 | 65-74 | 75+ | Total | | Survey Respondents (based on 339 respondents providing this data) | 33% | 42% | 16% | 8% | 100% (339) | | Highland  Census 2011 | 41% | 36% | 12% | 10% | 100% (182,824) |   The survey respondents were predominantly female (64%) whilst the Highland female gender proportion is 51%.  With the high level of response to the survey, with the input forthcoming from public meetings and with the experience of the Council’s Transport Unit there will be a good understanding of the potential impact of any proposed changes to transport services on different groups of people. |
| 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? | Consultation comprised various components:-   * 8 briefing events at locations around the Highlands for suppliers to make them aware of the financial context the next round of tendering would be conducted under. Also to explain the procurement process and to encourage competition by urging suppliers to consider applying for routes and types of service delivery they might not previously have considered. * A round of meetings with Ward Councillors at locations throughout the Highlands to advise them of proposed public consultation plans and to receive their views/concerns about transport service issues in their areas. * 15 public meetings at locations across the Highlands. At each there was a short presentation, a period for questions and then breaking into smaller groups to address specific questions. Meetings were attended by a varying mix of people – individual members of the public, Community Council representatives, transport providers, Ward Councillors, and community groups (for instance Access Panel representatives and Enable, an organisation which supports people with learning disabilities). * A survey questionnaire which was available online and in various locations such as Service Points, local libraries and community centres.   The consultation has sought to gather information on:-   * What current bus services are being used for, whether any of the services should be adapted to better suit needs, or whether there are any services which people feel are not needed? * What people would consider the impact of their suggestions to be on themselves, their household and their community? * Gaps in current service provision that would bring benefit if new provision could be created. * Factors discouraging use of public bus services and the impact this has.   The Council’s Transport Unit participated at each of the supplier, Councillor and public meetings. Survey analysis by geographic areas (as defined in Table 1 above) has been undertaken and is supported by reports on each of the public meetings. These have highlighted the areas of concern raised by participants and have been an important source of reference during the Transport Unit’s development of route specification options to put to potential suppliers through the mini-competition documents (i.e. the invitation to tender process). |
| Having considered the information gathered (including involvement and consultation) how would you assess the likely impact of the policy? | The Highland tendering process (excluding Sutherland) will seek to reduce the level of expenditure on school transport and public bus services by 16%. School transport is a statutory obligation and so pupils will continue to be taken to and from school. Should efficiencies be secured in the provision of home-to-school transport (for instance where it may be possible to combine routes, operate with smaller vehicles or combine school and public services) this may reduce the potential need to reduce public bus services (to secure the level of savings being sought).  As there is no statutory obligation on Highland Council to provide public transport services, this is where the impact would most probably occur. Mitigating this position is that Highland Council considers it important to support, where financially possible, the provision of bus services which fill gaps in commercially supplied provision.  The precise degree of impact on current users cannot be pre-determined as the range of services which will be purchased with the reduced budget will be determined by three principal factors:   * The prices quoted by potential suppliers of those services. * Decisions taken by the Tender Board which is scheduled to meet on 25th July 2016. Decisions will be taken by the Tender Board concerning their approval to offer contracts for the delivery of home-to-school transport requirements, and their approval to make recommendations to Community Services Committee concerning the public transport routes. * Decisions which will be taken by Community Services Committee on 18th August 2016 concerning the public bus service recommendations which they will consider.   It can be stated with some certainty, however, that any reduction in or withdrawal of services has the potential to increase the difficulty people will experience in accessing services (such as work, health and social needs) within the Highlands, and of travelling out of and back to the area. |
| Identify which groups covered by the protected characteristics are affected. Briefly explain why and include both negative and positive impacts. | There is potential to affect the following groups: age; disability; pregnancy and maternity.  In relation to school transport, the retendering proposal is concerned only with mainstream transport and will not, therefore, impact on Additional Support Needs (ASN) pupils. Transport requirements for ASN pupils will continue to be focused on the needs of the child.  Feedback from consultees suggested a range of likely equality impacts, highlighting various aspects which the retendering should seek to address to ensure effective bus services, such as:  Caithness  Feedback has suggested that the accessibility of some vehicles is an issue and needs to be considered alongside the reliability, timing and frequency of services. Accessibility covered the need to avoid using buses which have high step entrances and to ensure buses are wheelchair friendly. It was stated that older people would use services if buses were more accessible.  A variant on the accessibility issue is the rural area stopping points – the terrain can be difficult to negotiate for passengers.  The consultation has enabled calls for improved service provision. Examples are: creating a link from Tesco in Wick to the new high school pool and library which is considered to be not easily accessible for those with limited transport and mobility problems. Also a call for a public bus service to link Thurso to the Rural Studies Centre operated by North Highland College at Dale Farm.  Skye  Feedback suggests that remote communities with elderly residents have an essential requirement for public transport. A development of that point was made in that as the population becomes increasingly elderly there will, over time, be more people who will be unable or reluctant to drive, requiring more frequent bus services to the main centres of Broadford and Portree.  There is also concern that there should be appropriate services to reach the new Broadford Hospital when it opens. Expanding student numbers at Sabhal Mòr Ostaig also need transport support.  For a range of bus users accessibility is an issue - service delivery standards need to allow time for those with less than perfect mobility to get on and off without feeling rushed. Need to consider how to communicate accessibility information on the buses – for example, use audio, and notices on windows.  The dark, unlit pavements in Sleat are considered a difficulty for discouraging a range of possible bus users.  Bus service information needs to be in various formats and shouldn’t be too focussed on online delivery – the elderly and vulnerable have needs which are not being taken into account.  Wester Ross and Lochalsh  In exploring whether the Glenelg-Kyle service could operate on fewer days per week it was noted that there could be an impact on those seeking to reach the over 50’s swim sessions held at the pool in Kyle.  Concern was expressed at the Poolewe meeting about the impact of falling school rolls on local bus services provision, and how this might impact the population which has an increasingly older profile.    Lochaber  Working age people consider they are not well served when they have to work on a Sunday and need to return to Corpach from Fort William on Sunday evenings. Timetable changes could have a positive effect.  A benefit would arise if timings of services between Arisaig and Fort William would better allow students and those working to gain better access to/from their destinations. The services from the west to Fort William are considered important for employment purposes.  Concern that parents travelling with young children have difficulty collapsing buggies before climbing aboard and negotiating high steps, a problem compounded during bad weather. Better specification of what buses can be used when would be helpful.  Other aspects of accessibility which are often overlooked are those with visual impairments, amputees and walking impaired – vehicles need to be accessible in many ways.  Where there are aging populations a public bus service is important. The Strontian public meeting highlighted this plus the need to also ensure that both younger and older people can get to Fort William for a range of needs.  Badenoch & Strathspey  There is a need to protect services which allow young people to use the recreational facilities available in Aviemore to benefit their health and fitness.  The elderly need the regular local bus from Dalfaber to Aviemore village.  A combination of factors is important to encourage use of buses: timetable layouts which are not complicated; accessible vehicles; and more bus shelter provision.  Youngsters need to socialise at weekend evenings in Inverness – buses leave Inverness quite early to return to Aviemore. Young people are being disenfranchised. In fact, this affects all who wish to go out to social facilities, return services need to be later.  Easter Ross and Black Isle  Whilst the 8am Culbokie-Inverness service is considered an excellent addition there isn’t a corresponding service back at 5pm – this would benefit students if it could be provided.  The school bus service running from Easter Kinkell and Dingwall Academy is considered to be unreliable to the detriment of the pupils, both in terms of safety along the bus route and long waiting times.  Those of working age need better commuting links between Culbokie and Inverness. The range of times of commuting services between Strathpeffer and Dingwall are not considered too helpful at present.  Timing changes would be helpful to parents regarding the Muir of Ord morning service to fit in sending their children off to school then to take a bus to work in Dingwall or Inverness.  Those seeking employment opportunities in Dingwall and living in the Milton area are hampered by poor bus service provision; equally difficult if trying to get to Inverness for work.  Demographic of Conon is older, so single decker, lower steps, or lift-out steps are helpful.  Inverness & Nairn  The Saturday bus from Cannich to Inverness and return journey is a very useful service and should be kept as it provides a valuable service to the youth of the local communities, giving them independence and a chance to socialize with others.  Within Inverness, the 8A service is considered vital to retain as its loss would affect the workers returning home or going on a night shift, as well as respondents considering there being a community safety aspect in terms of walking home to South Kessock or uphill to Kinmylies.  Need to consider serving the families better in the developing Wester Craigs area of Inverness – particularly in evenings and on a Sunday.  There is concern at the poor bus services attending the new UHI campus.  Bus services going north from Kirkhill to Dingwall do not help work commuters – timings are not conducive.  Need to address the limited bus service operating between Ardersier and Nairn. It is restricting employment and social activity.  Fort George is major Highland tourist attraction yet there is no public transport access. Bus stops some 1.5 Km away in Ardersier village. This has particular issue for people with mobility issues who may wish to visit the Fort. It is suggested that during the summer month that every other No 15 bus service during the day is extended to Fort George.  Clear bus timings information at bus stops is important – the lack of it makes it difficult to encourage use. And the location of bus stops and routing is important to ensure there is safe pedestrian access to the bus stops.  There are many people who don’t drive and who are reliant on bus services to access a range of services – these will be affected if bus services reduced. |
| 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 changing the policy? If so, please give your reasons. | Highland Council has a significant funding deficit - £38m for 2016/17 and at least £20m for the following year. At the time the Transport Programme was sanctioned at the Full Council meeting of 18th December 2014 the Council was facing a 4-year deficit of £56m. At this meeting a range of projects, including the Transport Programme, were approved to seek reductions in expenditure whilst maintaining services as comprehensively as possible.  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:   * Identifying equalities groups to invite to participate in the consultation. * Incorporating equality and accessibility issues in the development of the survey questionnaire and public meeting discussion template. * Selecting venues for public meetings that would suit a full range of mobility capabilities.   The aim of the transport services retendering activity is to secure a comprehensive package of routes, serving a wide range of requirements, and accommodating consultation wishes wherever possible whilst ensuring expenditure does not exceed the budget available. |
| If the impact cannot be justified, what action will be taken to remove, mitigate or reduce adverse impact? Please identify the action(s). | The actions to mitigate potential impact are:   * 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. * Seeking tender options from suppliers for the provision of accessible services where these do not currently exist. * Advising all suppliers of the financial constraints upon Highland Council leading into the procurement of transport services. * Encouraging suppliers to compete for routes they might traditionally have shied away from. |
| Please provide details of arrangements to monitor and review the policy and any mitigating actions. | The performance of transport providers in fulfilling home-to-school requirements are monitored by Highland Council’s Local Transport Officers. Issues are referred to the Principal Transport Officer.  Changes which may arise in school transport requirements across the Highlands over the lifetime of the contracts to be issued as part of this policy can be monitored and addressed by:   * Where new pupils enter a locality 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 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.   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.  Further, the Transport Coordination Unit intends to sample the quality of service delivery and these assessments will raise mitigation actions where appropriate. |
| Please state where the EQIA will be published | The EQIA will be published at:  <http://www.highland.gov.uk/transport-programme>  <http://www.highland.gov.uk/downloads/download/404/equality_impact_assessments> |

**Equality Impact Assessment Sign off: For completion by Director or Head of Service**

1. Please check if you are satisfied that the following elements of the EQIA have been considered:

Gathering information  
Consultation and involvement  
Assessing impact for all protected characteristics  
Mitigating actions identified (if required)  
Opportunity to promote equality  
Arrangements to monitor and review  
Publication arrangements

2. a) Are you prepared to sign off the EQIA? YES  NO 

b) If "NO" provide details of why and next steps  
  
  
  
Name: William Gilfillan

Position: Director of Community Services / Date: 23rd March 2016

Transport Project Sponsor

Name: Brian Porter

Position: Head of Resources, Care & Learning Date: 23rd March 2016

Transport Project Board Member