

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 9 August 2018

Report of the Head of Service Public & Integrated Transport

Part I

Electoral Divisions affected:
Clitheroe; Lancaster Rural
North; Nelson East; Preston
City;

Transport Information Centres - Results of Public Consultation

(Appendix 'A' refers)

Contact for further information:

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Executive Summary

At its meeting on 8 February 2018, Full Council approved the closing of transport information centres at Preston Bus Station, Nelson and Clitheroe Interchanges and Carnforth Railway Station, subject to consultation, with the outcome to the consultation to be presented to Cabinet for final approval. This report presents the outcome of the consultation, including the expressions of interest received from interested parties who may wish to take over the management of some or all of the transport information centres.

An exploratory period is proposed to investigate these expressions of interest. During this period it is also proposed that the transport information centres be kept operational. The outcome of these investigations will be presented to Cabinet in due course.

An equality analysis is attached at Appendix 'A'.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) Authorise officers to investigate the expressions of interest received from interested parties who may wish to take over the management of some or all of the transport information centres.
- (ii) Agree to the service being maintained whilst the expressions of interest are investigated.

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| (iii) Note that a further report on the outcome of the suitability of the expressions of interest will be presented to a future meeting to enable a final decision to be taken on the proposed closure of the information centres. |
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Background and Advice

At its meeting on 8 February 2018, Full Council approved the closing of transport information centres at Preston Bus Station, Nelson and Clitheroe Interchanges and Carnforth Railway Station, subject to consultation, with the outcome to the consultation to be presented to Cabinet for final approval.

An appropriate consultation has now been carried out and this report presents the outcome of the consultation. An analysis of the responses to the consultation is available on the Council's [website](#).

Key findings from the consultation are set out below. As the information centres are highly valued by their users a number of proposals were also received that could be considered to offer the possibility of enabling much or all of the service to continue whilst still delivering the savings to the authority. Expressions of interest included taking over the offices completely.

In view of this, it is proposed to investigate whether there is an opportunity for the service to be provided by an alternative service model at one or more of the information centres.

If these proposals are investigated the exploratory period will involve:

- Engagement with all interested parties.
- The implementation of an application process for the development of a business cases from interested parties.
- An assessment of costed business cases by county council officers
- The submission of findings to Cabinet.

It is proposed that this service be maintained whilst investigations are carried out and that a further report on the outcome will be presented to a future meeting of Cabinet.

Consultations

The consultation asked for views on the proposal to close the council's transport information centres at Preston Bus Station, Nelson Interchange, Clitheroe Interchange and Carnforth Railway Station.

The consultation ran for eight weeks between 5 March 2018 and 29 April 2018. Paper questionnaires were made available at all four transport information centres, as well as Carnforth Library because of Carnforth Railway Station being closed during part of the fieldwork period. Posters were also used at these venues to publicise the consultation.

The consultation questionnaire was also available online at www.lancashire.gov.uk.

At the beginning of the consultation 456 stakeholders who may have interests in the proposals or may be potentially affected were contacted to inform them that the consultation had started and advised them how they could participate.

Announcements regarding the consultation were regularly made during the fieldwork period via Twitter and Facebook and a press release was produced for the media.

In total, 877 completed questionnaires were returned (553 paper questionnaire responses and 324 online questionnaire responses).

Key findings included:

- Nine in ten respondents (90%) strongly disagree with the proposal to close the transport information centres and about a further one in twenty (5%) tend to disagree with the proposal. About one in twenty respondents (5%) 'strongly agree' or 'tend to agree' with the proposal.
- When asked why they agree or disagree with the proposal, respondents explained that the transport information centres act as community hubs that offer a useful/necessary public service (35%) and that not everyone has access to the internet, or is IT literate (21%).
- When asked how the proposal would impact on them, respondents explained that it would be inconvenient (33%) and that they would lose, or have reduced access to, the services provided by the transport information centres (33%).
- When asked how they would find out about public transport services or buy tickets if this proposal happened, about two-fifths of respondents say they don't know (39%), a quarter of respondents say they would visit another information centre or ticket office (25%) and about a quarter say they would buy tickets online through a website, smartphone app or by telephone (24%).
- About two-thirds of respondents (65%) say that, if the proposal happened, it would mean that they travel less often than now. About a quarter of respondents (24%) say that it would mean that they travel about the same as now.
- Three petitions were received during the consultation period. One relating to Carnforth Railway Station Ticket Office and two relating to Clitheroe Interchange Transport Information Centre; Bolton-le-Sands Women's Institute submitted a petition to keep Carnforth Railway Station Ticket Office open that included 35 signatories; The Ribble Valley Labour Party submitted a petition on the proposed closure of Clitheroe Interchange Transport Information Centre that included 685 signatories; a petition opposing the proposed closure of Clitheroe Interchange Transport Information Centre was submitted that included 88 signatories representing 74 local businesses. This petition was also cited by Nigel Evans MP in voicing his written opposition to the closure of Clitheroe Interchange Transport Information Centre.

Implications:

The consultation exercise has revealed considerable objection to the proposal to close the information centres. However the council is in a position where it needs to make substantial budget savings.

This report seeks approval for an exploratory period, for assessment of expressions of interest, and for a further report to be presented. If an exploratory period is approved and the existing service maintained, the proposed budget savings will be delayed. Should a viable business case be made for any or all of the centres a popular service could be continued by third parties whilst ultimately enabling the county council to achieve savings. It is suggested that the consideration of the expressions of interest would be a reasonable action to take.

However, should Cabinet wish to proceed to consider the consultations set out in this report and take a final decision on the closure of the Information Centres at this meeting, it should set out the reasons why it would not wish to consider the expressions of interest.

Closure of the information centres would mean that there would be no face-to-face travel information provision or ticket sales at the four locations and legal processes required and implications as referred to below.

Risk management

Financial

The saving agreed by Full Council in February 2018 totalled £156,000, with £78,000 removed from the budget in 2018/19 and £78,000 in 2019/20. If the recommendation within this report is not agreed, it is anticipated that there will still be a delay to the achievement of the saving due to a number of legal processes that will need to be completed before the transport information centres can be closed. It is therefore likely that this saving would be achieved in 2019/20 and the delay managed within the Public and Integrated Transport budget in 2018/19.

If the recommendation relating to an exploratory period was to be approved then the planned savings will still be delayed. The extent of the delay will depend upon the time taken to assess the expressions of interest and the subsequent decisions made following the assessments. However, initial estimates would indicate that the saving would not be achieved until the 2019/20 financial year and therefore a saving of £117,000 would be achieved in 2019/20 and £39,000 in 2020/21. The delay in achievement of the saving will be managed within the Public and Integrated Transport budget.

Legal

The operation of the transport information centres is supported by a number of legal agreements including; lease of Carnforth station; land lease of Clitheroe interchange; Northern Rail retail agency agreement for the sale of train tickets; utility contracts. These agreements will need to be terminated or transferred.

Equality and Cohesion

An Equality Analysis is attached at Appendix 'A'.

The proposal may make travel by public transport more difficult for older people and for people with disabilities because other sources of information and tickets are less understandable. Older and disabled people are less likely to use digital alternatives to obtain travel information or tickets. Whilst there are no statistics available about usage of the Information Centres by protected characteristics both the response rate to the consultation and some of the consultation responses do suggest a disproportionate adverse impact on these groups should the Travel Information Centres/Interchanges cease.

Personnel

Closing the information centres would mean staff redundancies. Total number of staff affected would be 8.2 full time equivalent. Statutory notice periods would need to be given to staff.

If it is identified that alternative interested parties can take over the management/ ownership of the information centres, this could mitigate against redundancies as staff may transfer to the new employer under Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006.

Property Asset Management

The implications for each transport information centre will need to be further assessed depending on the decision of Cabinet.

Each transport information centre and proposals going forward will need to be looked at in the context of the county councils property interest.

Preston Bus Station – the county council owns the building within which the transport information centre service is provided.

Nelson Interchange – the county council owns the building and the site is a mixture of freehold and leasehold interests from which the transport information centre service is provided.

Carnforth Railway Station – the county council leases the building from a private landlord.

Clitheroe Interchange – the county council owns the building which is on land owned by Ribbles Valley Borough Council.

Procurement

The majority of staff train tickets are currently booked through Carnforth Railway Station booking office. Should a decision be taken to close the booking office and in particular, seek to transfer the services currently provided by Carnforth Connect to

an external provider, provision for any such transfer would need to be reviewed in line with the county council's obligation under European Union Procurement Regulations and its own internal Standing Orders.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
Consultation Responses	2018	Liz McClarty/ (01772) 532423

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A