

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL SUPPORTED BUS SERVICES**SERVICE REDUCTIONS FROM JANUARY 2012**

On the 7 July Kent County Council advised the Districts and Parish Councils that it has decided to withdraw a number of bus service contracts with effect from the 1 January 2012. It is understood that public notices have also been issued for immediate display on the operator's buses. In the Maidstone area the contracts concerned are;-

SERVICE	Annual Cost	Average no. of passengers a day	Subsidy per passenger	Comments
332 Stockbury – Sittingbourne Schooldays.	£20,694.52	23	£6.42	<i>Primarily catering for school children it is expected this will be replaced by a school contract</i>
12RL Tenterden – Headcorn Mondays to Fridays.	£54,431.00	76	£2.86	<i>A rail commuter operation in the peak period – may have station parking implications</i>
79 Penenden Heath – Maidstone Saturday morning.	£2,388.00	3	£9.70	<i>The first three journeys on a Saturday morning between 0742 and 0842. One of them is partially covered by another service</i>
Rural services on Saturdays;- 13 Hollingbourne, Leeds and Otham. 59 Grafty Green, Ulcombe, Kingswood, Chart Sutton and Boughton Monchelsea 28/29 Marden and Chainhurst.	£31,460.00	115	£5.02	<i>This is all of the Saturday journeys on these routes – Monday to Friday no change – leaves nine rural communities without a Saturday service (Note Marden has an alternative service on route 26. This also serves the Yalding and Farleigh areas and is not affected))</i>
155 Chatham – Maidstone via Aylesford and Ringlestone. Monday to Saturday evening service after 1930 hours	£37,904.52	37	£3.25	<i>The 101 service passes nearby Ringlestone stopping at the Petrol Station/Footbridge, but may be difficult for some to access</i>

This follows a decision in the KCC Medium Term Plan to reduce the available budget for bus service support from the 1 April 2011 although efficiencies had enabled this to be postponed until the 31 December 2011. Local (County) Members were asked by KCC whether they wished to contribute funding from their discretionary Member Highway Fund, of which only one had responded.

KCC invite comments by the 2 September, or to hear from anyone representing an organisation which would be in a position to provide replacement transport. It indicates that this is now an opportunity for 'Big Society' to step in and demonstrate the true value of these services to the local community.

KENT COUNTY COUNCIL CRITERIA

The majority of bus services are provided commercially by the operators. Where this is not the case a Council may financially support others to meet 'social needs'. Although KCC has a duty to assess the network, there is no statutory criterion to be followed in assessing whether to provide financial support to specific services (to augment the commercial network), or not. To achieve a consistent approach KCC work to the following Member approved criteria;-

Support will be considered for a bus service that is not commercially viable if it meets one or more of the following equally weighted criteria

- Access to work
- Access to learning
- Access to healthcare
- Access to food shops

The maximum subsidy for an individual service will be no more than £3 per passenger journey, with Members considering whether to support services above this level in certain circumstances.

To assist in the consideration of these priorities, services are ranked for support in the following order of priority:

- Monday to Friday daytime services meeting more than one criterion
- Monday to Friday daytime services meeting one criterion
- Saturday daytime services
- Evening and Sunday services

OTHER IMPLICATIONS etc.

The implications of the announcement were considered at a meeting of the 'East of Maidstone bus service group' of Parish Council's on the 11 July. There was concern that the Saturday services had not previously been under any threat but that this had only happened due to a recent doubling of the cost of the contract (following the operator – Nu Venture – handing the contract back). The group intend to meet with the County Council etc. to discuss some possible options for providing and/or funding a service/s after 1 January 2012.

KCC have indicated that any future withdrawal by operators of commercial services, or cases of contracts being 'handed back' and costs rising may result in other services having to be withdrawn to fund these, or alternatively such services may simply not be replaced.

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