

# NORTHUMBERLAND

## Northumberland County Council

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### **Consultation on a Proposal around a New Partnership for Bus Information between Northumberland Parish and Town Councils**

Northumberland County Council is looking to work in partnership with town and parish council's to improve the provision of up to date, accurate information regarding bus times at a local level. In part this is being driven by further budget cuts but it is also a realisation that this important information should not be wholly the property of NCC and by having broader ownership at a local level residents will be far better informed in a more timely manner about their bus services and any changes to them that may happen. This in turn could help increase bus use and help sustain this important local service that is experiencing seriously declining passenger numbers.

#### **Current situation**

Currently we have over 1,800 timetables in the County. We have a contract with NEXUS to register and produce timetables for Northumberland Services. Previously this was done by one officer in the Council which left the Council very vulnerable, we now have a small team at our disposal so holidays, sickness etc can all be managed without disruption to the service.

Currently timetables are printed on bespoke sized waterproof paper. They cost around £4 each, and can change on a fairly frequent basis often at the whim of the operator. Any changes are dealt with by two officers who drive around the County changing timetables. This takes about 60% of two officers jobs and they can change significant routes from boundary with Newcastle right up to Berwick. The service standards for changing are 10 days and sometimes it is difficult to meet this when a number of changes happen all over the county at the same time. This is a situation we recognise has to change.

#### **Rationalisation of Bus Stops**

We are aware that there a large number of timetables in places that people will not see as these stops are rarely used. We plan to reduce the number of timetables posted by a significant number to around 600 that are serviced. Those bus stops with cases that have had timetables removed will display a generic information that gives them a website (Nexus Live Travel Map) and a telephone number to be able to get information on that stop. In most villages this will mean the retention of 2 -3 pairs of stops.

We are also taking to bus providers and corralling them into changing timetable on set dates within the year. In most areas this will be one to two time a year, however in some areas this may be 3 - 4 times a year if they have summer and winter timetables that change at different times to school services.

#### **Proposed new approach**

We would plan to carry out two phases, Phase 1 would be working with out smaller town and parish council's. Phase 2 will be discussions with the larger town and parish council's about how this could be done more effectively in an urban area with greater numbers of stops.

## **Phase 1**

We would look to provide A4 PDF's of Timetables to Clerks of Town and Parish Council's by email for them to arrange for display in local timetable cases. In addition they will then also have the ability to produce timetables for a range of other local places such as shop, hall, surgery, pub and village notice board. In most areas this will be for 2 -4 bus stops and will be one to two times a year. Suggest this would take 10 - 15 minutes. As these timetables are smaller this does leave some space within timetable cases and this space can then be customised for use at the local level. We have had a number of suggestions around tourism information and activity being made available. Again that is for the local community to decide upon and is all part of giving local communities the ownership of this information. Training, keys for cases etc will all be provided.

We have been working with Longframlington on developing this approach and they have been very positive. Wooler and Felton are also keen to try things out as "early adopters" and feedback what works and what doesn't.

## **Phase 2**

We would want to have initial discussions around how we could make this approach work at a local level in the larger towns in Northumberland. For instance; is this something that the NCC team continue to do, or is it something that local council have an appetite to take control of when they are responsible for bus shelters etc and perhaps this could be fitted in around routine checks and cleaning? Again would welcome views on this.

### **In summary:**

#### Advantages to NCC

- Helping with budget restraints
- Much more efficient changes to timetabling
- Rationalisation of bus stop information

#### Advantages to Communities

- T&PC's informed immediately of changes to bus timetables rather than second hand at a later date
- Wider ownership and knowledge within the community of times and changes
- Flexible as to where changes are publicised
- Opportunity to publicise timetables around the community
  - Bus stop
  - Village Hall
  - Surgery
  - School
  - Tourist sites
- Ability to use space on Bus Stop information board for community events and notices

We will be working with NALC to run sessions with groups of interested parish or town council, to answer any queries and demonstrate how to open cases, provide keys and demonstrate the use of an excellent new web based tool the Nexus Live Travel Map. If you are interested in being another pilot/front runner we would love to hear from you.

**We would welcome comments and any expressions of interest in training sessions/piloting activity from Town and Parish Council's to this proposal by Please send to Kirsten Francis [kirsten.francis@northumberland.gov.uk](mailto:kirsten.francis@northumberland.gov.uk), tel 01670624741.**