



Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

Initial information

Name of the policy, project, strategy, project or service being assessed:

Public Bus and Community Transport Transformation

2. Is this a (please delete those not required):

New policy, project, strategy, project or service

3. Is this (please delete those not required):

Both internal and external

4. Please provide a brief overview of its aims and objectives:

This programme aims to improve public buses and community transport across Dorset. It responds to growing demand, limited services and increasing costs. The current system is fragmented and difficult for many people to use.

The programme seeks to create a more joined-up transport system. This will help people access services, jobs, education and their communities more easily. It will also support greater independence for residents, particularly older people, disabled people and those living in rural areas.

The main aims are to:

- improve access to transport across the county, especially in rural areas;
- make services easier to use and better connected;
- reduce reliance on high-cost, individual transport where appropriate;
- support independence and reduce social isolation; and
- create a more sustainable and efficient system over time.

The programme will bring together different types of transport, including buses, community transport and specialist services, into a more coordinated system. It will also make better use of available vehicles and resources.

There will be a greater focus on flexible and shared transport options, supported by improved use of technology. This includes better planning of journeys and improved coordination between services.

The programme will also involve working more closely with partners, including health services and local communities, to better understand needs and improve how services are delivered.

Overall, the aim is to create a transport system that is more accessible, inclusive and able to meet changing needs in the future.

5. Please provide the background to this proposal?

This proposal has developed in response to growing pressures on Dorset's transport system. These include rising demand, reduced public transport provision and increasing costs, particularly for specialist transport such as SEND and Adult Social Care.

Bus services have declined, especially in rural areas, with fewer routes and lower frequencies. This has made it harder for people to access jobs, education, healthcare and community activities. At the same time, demand for specialist transport has increased, with more people relying on council-arranged home to school, SEND and adult day opportunities journeys.

The current system is delivered through separate services. Public buses, community transport and specialist services are planned and funded independently. This has led to a system that is not always efficient, with some journeys duplicated and others not well served.

Cabinet's decisions in January 2026, identified the need for a more joined-up approach. This led to the development of the Outline Business Case, which sets out options for improving how transport is planned and delivered.

There is also a wider policy context shaping this work. National transport policy, SEND reforms and Adult Social Care priorities all focus on improving access, supporting independence and delivering services closer to home. Locally, engagement with residents has highlighted transport as a key concern, particularly in rural communities.

The proposal is therefore part of a planned programme of change. It aims to move away from the current model toward a more coordinated approach that better meets current and future needs.

Evidence gathering and engagement

6. What sources of data, evidence or research has been used for this assessment? (e.g national statistics, employee data):

A wide range of data and evidence has been used to inform the development of this proposal and to support the EqlA.

The Outline Business Case provides the primary evidence base. This includes quantitative data on transport provision, usage and cost. Key datasets include bus network coverage and service levels, community transport provision, and demand for specialist transport, including SEND and Adult Social Care. This has enabled a clear understanding of how services are currently used and where gaps in provision exist.

The analysis also draws on financial data, including trends in transport expenditure and cost pressures within specialist transport. This provides insight into how demand is changing and the sustainability of the current system over time.

Demographic and population data has been used to understand current and future demand. This includes information on ageing populations, rural communities and groups more likely to rely on public or supported transport. This is important in identifying groups that may be disproportionately affected by changes and where improved access could have the greatest impact.

The development of the proposal has also been informed by engagement and resident insight. This includes findings from the Big Conversation and other engagement exercises, which consistently identify transport as a key issue, particularly in rural areas and for people without access to a car. This qualitative evidence helps to explain how transport barriers affect people's day-to-day lives.

Benchmarking with other local authorities has also been undertaken, including comparison of transport models and policy approaches. This provides evidence of what has worked elsewhere and highlights opportunities for improvement within Dorset.

The work has also been informed by relevant national and local policy, including SEND reform, Adult Social Care priorities and wider transport strategy. These policies emphasise improving access, supporting independence and delivering more local, integrated services.

Together, this evidence provides a comprehensive picture of the current system, the needs of different groups and the potential impacts of change. It supports a proportionate EqlA by identifying where impacts are likely to arise and where mitigation or further engagement may be required as proposals are developed further.

7. What did this tell you?

The evidence confirms that access to transport is uneven across Dorset, particularly in rural areas. Reduced bus services and limited coverage mean that many residents, especially those without access to a car, face barriers in reaching jobs,

education, healthcare and community activities. This has a disproportionate impact on older people, young people, disabled people and those on lower incomes.

Secondly, the data highlights a growing reliance on specialist transport, particularly for SEND and Adult Social Care. This reflects increasing levels of need but also shows that many journeys are being met through bespoke arrangements rather than through a wider, shared system. This can limit independence for individuals and increases overall costs, reducing the ability to invest in broader services.

The evidence also shows that the current system is fragmented and difficult to navigate, particularly for people who need to use more than one type of transport. Separate services, inconsistent availability and varying eligibility criteria can create complexity and reduce accessibility for users.

Importantly, engagement and insight from residents confirm that transport is a key barrier to participation and wellbeing. Feedback highlights issues such as isolation, limited travel choices and difficulty accessing essential services, particularly in rural communities.

At the same time, the evidence identifies opportunities. The use of technology, more flexible transport models and better coordination between services could improve access and make better use of existing resources. There is also potential to work more closely with partners, including health services, to reduce duplication and improve outcomes.

Overall, the evidence indicates that while the current system meets essential needs, it does not provide equitable or sustainable access for all groups. A more integrated and flexible approach is needed to reduce inequalities, improve independence and ensure that the transport system better supports the needs of Dorset's communities.

8. Who have you engaged and consulted with as part of this assessment?

Work to develop the Outline Business Case has involved officers from across the council, including transport planning, Dorset Travel, Adult Social Care, Children's Services and the Transformation Office. This has ensured that the assessment reflects the needs of different service areas and user groups, particularly those who rely on SEND and Adult Social Care transport.

The programme is also linked to wider engagement work across the council, including the Community Conversations taking place during the summer. These will provide further opportunities to hear directly from residents, community groups and partners.

Further targeted engagement will be carried out as the programme develops, particularly with service users, families and groups representing protected characteristics. This will ensure that the next stage of work is informed by lived experience and that potential impacts are fully understood.

9. Is further information needed to help inform decision making?

Further information will be required to support detailed decision making at the next stage. In particular, additional work will be needed to better understand how different groups may be affected by specific changes to service delivery.

Further engagement will also be required with residents, service users and representative groups, particularly those with protected characteristics. This will provide more detailed insight into lived experience, barriers to travel and the potential impacts of proposed changes.

There is also a need for more detailed operational and delivery information. This includes how an integrated system would function in practice, how services would be coordinated across providers and how technology and data would be used to support delivery.

Finally, more detailed financial modelling will be required to understand the costs, benefits and potential impacts on different parts of the system over time.

This additional information will be developed as part of the Full Business Case. It will ensure that future decisions are based on a clear understanding of impacts, risks and opportunities, and that appropriate mitigation can be put in place where needed.

Is an EQIA required?

An EqIA is required for this programme. The proposal represents a significant strategic change to how transport services are planned and delivered across Dorset, including services that are relied upon by a wide range of residents, many of whom have protected characteristics.

The evidence set out in the Outline Business Case shows that transport has a direct impact on access to services, independence and participation in daily life. Changes to transport provision, particularly where there is a shift toward more shared or flexible models, have the potential to affect groups differently, including older people, disabled people, young people and those living in rural areas.

As such, it is important to ensure that the potential impacts on different groups are fully understood and that appropriate mitigation is identified. An EqIA provides a structured and proportionate way to assess these impacts and to demonstrate that the council is meeting its Public Sector Equality Duty.

At this stage, the EqIA screening only has undertaken, reflecting the strategic nature of the OBC. A detailed EqIA will be developed alongside the Full Business Case. This will be informed by further data, engagement and service design work, ensuring that equality considerations are fully integrated into the development of the final proposals and any subsequent implementation.

Assessing the impact on different groups of people

For each of the protected characteristics groups below, please explain whether your proposal could have a positive, negative, unclear or no impact. Where an impact has been identified, please explain what it is and if unclear or negative please explain what mitigating actions will be taken.

- use the evidence you have gathered to inform your decision making.
- consider impacts on residents, service users and employees separately.
- if your strategy, policy, project or service contains options you may wish to consider providing an assessment for each option.
- see guidance for more information about the different [protected characteristics](#).

Key to impacts

Positive Impact	• the proposal eliminates discrimination, advances equality of opportunity and/or fosters good relations with protected groups.
Negative Impact	• protected characteristic group(s) could be disadvantaged or discriminated against
Neutral Impact	• no change/ no assessed significant impact of protected characteristic groups
Unclear	• not enough data/evidence has been collected to make an informed decision.

Impacts on who or what?	Choose impact	How
Age		
Disability		
Care Experience		
Gender reassignment and Gender Identity		
Marriage or civil partnership		
Pregnancy and maternity		
Race and Ethnicity		
Religion and belief		

Impacts on who or what?	Choose impact	How
Sex (consider men and women)		
Sexual orientation		
People with caring responsibilities		
Rural isolation		
Socio-economic deprivation		
Single parents		
Armed forces communities		

Please provide a summary of the impacts:

Action Plan

Summarise any actions required as a result of this EqlA.

Issue	Action to be taken	Person(s) responsible	Date to be completed by

Sign Off

Officer completing this EqlA:

Officers involved in completing the EqlA:

Date of completion:

Version Number:

EqlA review date:

Equality Lead Sign Off:

Next Steps:

- the EqlA will be reviewed by Communications and Engagement and if in agreement, your EqlA will be signed off.
- if not, we will get in touch to chat further about the EqlA, to get a better understanding.
- EqlA authors are responsible to ensuring any actions in the action plan are implemented.

Please send to [Diversity and Inclusion Officer](#)