



Appendix G – Draft Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)

Initial information

1. Title

Public Bus and Community Transport Transformation

2. This is a:

New policy, project, strategy, project or service

3. This is:

Both internal (employees only) and external (residents, communities, partners)

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

The Public and Community Transport Programme is a key council-wide transformation programme designed to address increasing transport demand, rising specialist transport costs, and growing pressures on public and community transport provision across Dorset.

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 support greater independence and benefit a wide range of residents who currently experience transport barriers, including older people, disabled people, carers, young people, care experienced people, people on lower incomes, rural communities and those without access to a private vehicle. Evidence from the Full Business Case indicates that these groups are most likely to be affected by limited transport choice and transport-related exclusion.

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. The Full Business Case (see appendix A) proposes a phased approach to delivery, recognising transport as a strategic enabler of wider transformation across Adult Social Care, Children's Services and health services.

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 been 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 for adults who use council-funded day opportunities.

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 routes duplicated and other areas not well served.

Cabinet's decisions in January 2026, identified the need for a more joined-up approach. This led to the development of a detailed Business Case, which sets out an investment package to improve transport and travel across Dorset.

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 of Dorset residents.

Evidence gathering and engagement

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

The Full Business Case (see appendix A) provides the primary evidence base containing the key reference material, superseding the Outline Business Case.

This includes quantitative data on transport provision, usage and cost.

Key datasets used:

- bus network coverage and service levels
- community transport provision
- demand for specialist transport, mainly focussed on 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 which provides insight into how demand is changing and the sustainability of the current system over time. Demand for specialist transport is increasing, particularly for children and young people with SEND and adults who attend council-supported day opportunities. At the same time, Community Transport providers are reporting growing demand for healthcare journeys, while public transport use is recovering but remains below pre-pandemic levels. Together, these trends are placing increasing pressure on specialist and community-based transport services and highlight the need for a more joined-up transport system.

Demographic and population data, including the Census and [Dorset Insights](#), 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 undertaken in 2024 by the council with residents and local groups and other engagement exercises including as part of developing the Local Transport Plan 2026 to 2041, 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, including Somerset and Wiltshire, 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. The sources of data and information used are listed in Appendix C of the “Bus and Community Transport” cabinet report.

Together, this evidence provides a comprehensive picture of the current system, the needs of different groups and the potential impacts of change by providing a comprehensive understanding of how the current transport system operates, how different groups experience transport-related barriers, and the potential impact that a more integrated transport system could have on access, independence and participation across Dorset. 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.

Additional information produced by the DfT and Age UK also helped inform how this proposal will likely impact on people with protected characteristics.

7. What did this tell you?

The evidence confirms that access to transport is uneven across Dorset, particularly in rural areas. Residents in larger towns generally have access to more frequent public transport services and a wider range of travel options, while many rural communities have limited bus services and are more dependent on private cars, lifts from others, Community Transport provision, or specialist transport services.

Department for Transport National Travel Survey data shows that people without access to a car are more reliant on public transport and are more likely to experience transport-related exclusion. This particularly affects young people, older people, disabled people, carers, care experienced people and lower-income households.

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. Transport improvements may generate greater benefits for these groups.

Increasing demand 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.

From the information sources reviewed developing the full business case (see appendix A) 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, missed appointments, and difficulty accessing essential services, particularly in rural communities.

The information provided by sources used for the full business case (see appendix A) identifies opportunities for improvement. 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 collated from multiple sources specified in the full business case (see appendix A) indicates that while the current system meets our residents 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?

Consultation and engagement has taken place with:

Internal

- Transport Planning
- Dorset Travel
- Adult Social Care
- Children's Services
- Transformation Office

External

- Community transport providers
- Bus operators
- Health partners
- Residents
- Local Transport Plan consultation respondents
- Big Conversation participants
- Community organisations
- Other Local Transport Authorities

Work to develop the Full Business Case (see appendix A) 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 by service area leads as the programme develops 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 service delivery changes to better understand how different protected characteristic groups may be affected.

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.

Is an EQIA required?

An EqlA 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 Full Business Case (see appendix A) 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. The impacts will be captured through a monitoring and evaluation framework as set out in the Full Business Case (see appendix A).

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

An EqlA screening was undertaken in relation to the outline business case.

This EqlA has been developed to inform the development of the Full Business Case (see appendix A). It will be reviewed regularly at transformation, mobilisation and implementation programme stages as this is a cross service full council programme, to ensure that equality considerations are fully integrated into the development of the final proposals and any subsequent implementation. There will be further engagement planned as part of the mobilisation and implementation stages.

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: Young	Positive (potentially)	Young people are less likely to have a driver's licence or own a personal vehicle due to age and/or financial constraints. Transport accessibility therefore has a direct influence on participation in education, apprenticeships, employment, training and volunteering.
Elderly	Positive (potentially)	Data produced by the Department for Transport National Travel Survey and Age UK shows driving licence holding declines considerably amongst the oldest age groups, increasing reliance on public, community and demand-responsive transport services. Older people in rural areas may therefore be disproportionately

Impacts on who or what?	Choose impact	How
		affected by changes to transport provision. Older people can also be at greater risk of social isolation where suitable transport options are unavailable. Bringing together bus services, community transport, and specialist transport provision into a more coordinated transport system has the potential to improve accessibility, increase transport availability, and provide more flexible travel opportunities. This may particularly benefit older people living in rural areas, those who no longer drive, and those with mobility limitations that make conventional fixed-route public transport difficult to use. Improved integration of services and vehicles could also help maintain access to essential services, healthcare, shopping, and social networks, supporting independence and reducing the risk of social exclusion among older residents.
Disability	Positive (potentially)	The proposal is expected to have an overall positive impact on disabled people by improving coordination between transport providers, providing more journey opportunities with improved coverage and greater transport flexibility. It is intended that this proposal will expand access to essential services, healthcare, employment, education, shopping, social networks, supporting independence and reducing the

Impacts on who or what?	Choose impact	How
		risk of social exclusion for those who are unable to drive or who experience barriers when using conventional public transport. To maximise benefits and avoid unintended adverse impacts, robust procurement standards need to be in place to ensure the use and availability of accessible vehicles. As demand-responsive services may create booking complexity and digital platforms may disadvantage some users inclusive booking arrangements, accessible information, and non-digital access routes should be incorporated into service design and delivery. Care should be taken to ensure that transport coordination enhances rather than replaces accessible transport provision. Flexible and shared transport services should also be designed to accommodate the needs of those travelling with mobility aids, wheelchairs, or specialist equipment where required. It should be noted shared transport may increase journey times. [gov.uk], [drivingmob...ity.org.uk]
Care Experience	Positive (potentially)	The proposal is expected to have a positive impact on people with care experience by improving access to transport services and increasing the availability of flexible travel options. As care-experienced people may be more likely to

Impacts on who or what?	Choose impact	How
		experience socioeconomic disadvantage and have limited access to private vehicles, improved coordination of transport services could enhance access to employment, education, healthcare, and social opportunities. Services should remain affordable, accessible, and available through both digital and non-digital channels.
Gender reassignment and Gender Identity	Neutral (with positive benefits)	The proposal is not expected to have a direct differential impact on people with the gender reassignment protected characteristic. The benefits associated with improved transport coordination, flexibility, and accessibility are expected to apply broadly across the population, including transgender and non-binary people. There is potential for positive impacts through improved access to services and opportunities. To ensure equal benefit, any associated digital platforms and customer-facing services should be designed inclusively and support the needs and privacy of all users.
Marriage or civil partnership	Neutral	The proposal is not expected to have a differential impact on people who are married or in a civil partnership. The benefits associated with improved transport integration, flexibility, and accessibility are expected to be experienced

Impacts on who or what?	Choose impact	How
		equally across the population regardless of marital or civil partnership status. No specific positive or negative impacts have been identified for this protected characteristic.
Pregnancy and maternity	Positive (potentially)	The proposal is expected to have a positive impact by improving access to transport services and increasing flexibility in how journeys are made. Better coordination between transport providers may support access to healthcare, employment, childcare, education, and social networks, helping to reduce transport-related barriers experienced during pregnancy and early parenthood. Transport services should remain accessible, reliable, and capable of accommodating the needs of people travelling with infants, young children, and pushchairs.
Race and Ethnicity	Positive (potentially)	The proposal is expected to have a positive impact on people from different racial and ethnic backgrounds by improving coordination between transport services and increasing the availability of flexible travel options. As some ethnic minority groups are more likely to rely on public transport and may have lower levels of access to private vehicles, improved transport integration has the potential to enhance access to employment, education, healthcare, and other essential services.

Impacts on who or what?	Choose impact	How
		To avoid unintended adverse impacts, service design should ensure that information, booking processes, and customer support are accessible and inclusive for diverse communities.
Religion and belief	Neutral (with positive benefits)	The proposal is not expected to have a direct differential impact on people with the Religion or Belief protected characteristic. The benefits associated with improved transport integration, flexibility, and accessibility are expected to be experienced across the population regardless of faith or belief. There is potential for positive impacts through improved access to places of worship, faith-based activities, community facilities, and wider services. No specific negative impacts have been identified.
Sex (consider men and women)	Positive (potentially)	Women are more likely to rely on public and community transport, particularly in older age groups and where caring responsibilities influence travel patterns. Improved coordination and flexibility of transport services could enhance access to employment, healthcare, education, childcare, and other essential services. Service design should consider issues of personal safety, accessibility, and digital inclusion.

Impacts on who or what?	Choose impact	How
Sexual orientation	Neutral (with positive benefits)	The benefits associated with improved integration of transport services, increased flexibility, and enhanced accessibility are expected to apply equally across the population regardless of sexual orientation. There is potential for positive impacts through improved access to employment, healthcare, education, social opportunities, and support networks. No specific negative impacts have been identified.
People with caring responsibilities	Positive (potentially)	People with caring responsibilities, including those providing unpaid care for children, older relatives, disabled people, or other dependants, often have complex travel patterns and may make multiple linked journeys to access employment, education, healthcare, childcare, shopping, and caring activities. Bringing together buses, community transport, and specialist transport services into a more coordinated system, with a greater emphasis on flexible and shared transport options, has the potential to improve accessibility, connectivity, and journey flexibility. This may particularly benefit carers who need to make trips at different times of day, accompany others to appointments, or travel to locations that are not well served by conventional fixed-route public transport.

Impacts on who or what?	Choose impact	How
		Improved transport integration could reduce some of the time, cost, and logistical challenges associated with caring responsibilities by providing a wider range of travel options and making more efficient use of transport services and resources. The use of technology to improve journey planning, booking, scheduling, and real-time information may also help carers manage complex travel arrangements more easily and efficiently. Care should be taken to ensure that transport coordination enhances rather than replaces accessible transport provision. Flexible and shared transport services should also be designed to accommodate the needs of carers travelling with dependants, mobility aids, wheelchairs, or specialist equipment where required.
Rural isolation	Positive (potentially)	Transport accessibility therefore has a direct influence on participation in education, apprenticeships, employment, training and volunteering. By coordinating buses, community transport, and specialist transport services and increasing the availability of flexible and shared transport options, the proposal has the potential to improve connectivity, accessibility, and access to essential services in rural areas.

Impacts on who or what?	Choose impact	How
		This may help reduce transport-related barriers, support social inclusion, and improve access to employment, education, healthcare, and community activities. Services should remain accessible and affordable, with alternatives available for those unable to access digital channels.
Socio-economic deprivation	Positive (potentially)	People experiencing socio-economic deprivation are less likely to have access to a private vehicle and are more reliant on public and shared transport. Better coordination of transport services and increased flexibility could improve access to employment, education, healthcare, and other essential services, helping to reduce transport disadvantage. Services should remain affordable, accessible, and available through both digital and non-digital channels.
Single parents	Positive (potentially)	Single parents often have complex travel needs and may rely on public or shared transport to access employment, childcare, education, healthcare, and daily services. Better coordination of transport services and increased flexibility could improve accessibility, reduce travel barriers, and support participation in work and community life.
Armed forces communities	Positive (potentially)	Improved coordination of transport services and greater flexibility may enhance access to employment, education, healthcare, support services,

Impacts on who or what?	Choose impact	How
		and community facilities for serving personnel, veterans, reservists, and military families, particularly in rural or isolated locations.

Please provide a summary of the impacts:

The proposal is expected to have broadly positive impacts across protected and vulnerable groups by improving access to employment, education, healthcare, community activities and support networks. The greatest benefits are expected to be experienced by older people, disabled people, young people, rural communities and those without access to a private vehicle. The programme also supports wider outcomes relating to independence, social inclusion, preparation for adulthood and healthy ageing. However, there remains a risk that greater use of shared or Demand Responsive Transport could create additional complexity for some users if accessibility standards, journey planning support and non-digital access channels are not maintained or improved.

No significant adverse impacts have been identified at this strategic stage. However, there remains a risk of adverse impacts arising during implementation, particularly in relation to accessibility, affordability, digital exclusion and service design. These risks will be managed through the mitigation measures and monitoring arrangements set out in this EqlA.

It should be noted that this initial EqlA is not intended to cover the separate workstreams and schemes that are developed from this initial proposal. It does not replace the requirement for individual projects, service changes or implementation workstreams to undertake their own proportionate equality impact assessments where more detailed decisions or changes are proposed, to ensure continued consideration of impacts on persons with protected characteristics.

Action Plan

Summarise any actions required as a result of this EqIA.

Issue	Action to be taken	Person(s) responsible	Date to be completed by
The impact could become adverse if: - Existing specialist transport services are reduced or withdrawn without suitable accessible alternatives. - Shared transport options do not provide sufficient accessibility features. - Digital-only booking systems are introduced. - Journey flexibility results in longer waiting times or more complex journeys. - No longer affordable.	To avoid unintended adverse impacts, service design and delivery should: - Include accessible vehicles. - Provide non-digital access routes as well as encourage digital inclusion. - Support the needs and privacy of all users. - Offer information, booking processes, and customer support that are accessible and inclusive for diverse communities and abilities alongside technology-based solutions. - Consider issues of personal safety. - Ensure transport services remain accessible, affordable, and easy to use.	Initially this will sit with the Strategic and Policy Team Manager (Transport Planning) and the Programme Board, then the responsibility will lie elsewhere within Dorset Council (yet to be determined) as the proposal moves through planning to implementation phases.	Prior to mobilisation and implementation programme phases.
Unintentional adverse impacts	Agree KPIs and regularly monitor to ensure anticipated positive impacts are achieved	Initially this will sit with the Strategic and Policy Team Manager (Transport	Quarterly

Issue	Action to be taken	Person(s) responsible	Date to be completed by
		Planning) and the Programme Board, then the responsibility will lie elsewhere within Dorset Council (yet to be determined) as the proposal moves through planning to transformation to implementation phases.	
Unintentional adverse impacts	Regularly review EqIA to ensure relevancy and that it meets any revisions to legislation, other equalities guidance, and/or Dorset Council policies.	Initially this will sit with the Strategic and Policy Team Manager (Transport Planning) and the Programme Board, then the responsibility will lie elsewhere within Dorset Council (yet to be determined) as the proposal moves through planning to transformation to implementation phases.	Review annually and/or at strategic points in the programme.

Issue	Action to be taken	Person(s) responsible	Date to be completed by
Unintentional adverse impacts	Monitor feedback through surveys and other engagement activities	Initially this will sit with the Strategic and Policy Team Manager (Transport Planning) and the Programme Board, then the responsibility will lie elsewhere within Dorset Council (yet to be determined) as the proposal moves through planning to transformation to implementation phases.	Monitor on a quarterly basis initially and as the programme progresses assess if this is adequate.

Sign Off

Officer completing this EqlA: Kelly Flynn

Officers involved in completing the EqlA: Owen Clark, Oliver Stone-Houghton

Date of completion: 22/09/2026

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EqlA review date: 01/04/2027

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](#)