



Report of the Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure

Scrutiny Programme Committee - 14 March 2023

Bus Services Update

Purpose	To provide Councillors with an update on issues raised in the previous meetings of the Working Group in July 2021 and March 2022
Content	This report includes updates on the issues raised by Councillors in the previous meetings of the Working Group
Councillors are being asked to	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider the information provided • Make recommendations to Cabinet Member as necessary
Lead Councillor(s)	Councillor Andrew Stevens, Cabinet Member for Environment and Infrastructure
Lead Officer(s)	Mark Wade, Interim Director of Place
Report Author	Barrie Gilbert, Team Leader – Passenger Transport
Legal Officer Finance Officer Access to Services Officer	Debbie Smith Peter Keys Rhian Millar

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Bus Services Scrutiny Working Group met on 7th July 2021 and 14th March 2022. Following the 2021 meeting the Convener wrote to the then Cabinet Member for Environment Enhancement and Infrastructure Management providing feedback, outlining the Group's conclusions and making a number of recommendations. The Cabinet Member responded to these in a letter dated 17 August 2021.

- 1.2 One of the recommendations to the Scrutiny Programme Committee was that a follow up meeting of the Working Group be held in six months to see what changes / improvements had been made.

2.0 Updates

2.1 Cleaner fuel buses

The Welsh Government, through Transport for Wales, is investigating the possibility of implementing a network of hydrogen fuelled buses to operate services on strategic corridors. The initiative is progressing well and Swansea Council is working with both Transport for Wales and other Local Authorities in the region to consider the feasibility of a pilot scheme in the Swansea Bay area. Transport for Wales has already had discussions with bus operators and vehicle manufacturers, and has identified a potential depot site, which would be shared by all bus operators using such vehicles.

2.2 Bus service network and Bus Emergency Scheme (BES)

The current legislative framework which underpins the provision of local bus services was outlined in the report presented to the Committee in March 2022. The Welsh Government has since consulted on new legislation which would lead to the current deregulated model of providing services being replaced by a franchised model. It is anticipated that the new legislation and model will be introduced in 2025 at the earliest.

The report also highlighted the financial assistance that the Welsh Government has provided the Bus Industry both during and subsequent to the Covid pandemic.

Whilst there has been a progressive recovery of passenger numbers post-Covid, bus operators locally are reporting that there is still some resistance to using bus services again. Fare paying passenger numbers are still only about 80% of those carried pre-Covid, and for concessionary pass holders, it is only about 60% (the latter is also being reported across Wales). 'On bus' and concessionary pass holder revenue shortfalls have therefore been covered by the Welsh Government's funding, which has sought to match pre-Covid levels.

The current funding package; Bus Emergency Support 3 (BES 3) is due to continue beyond March 2023. However, recent announcements by the Welsh Government are that the funding level for the new financial year may decrease. This situation is being monitored and the impact of any reductions will be assessed once funding levels have been confirmed by Welsh Government.

2.3 Bus and Rail links

Work is progressing to establish a transport hub at Gowerton following a successful funding bid to Welsh Government. This will establish a new bus stop closer to the railway station for services arriving from Gorseinon and heading towards Waunarlwydd. The project will also see the establishment of a new bus stop closer to Gowerton surgery for the bus service to and from North Gower.

2.4 Bus Shelters

The Council owns approximately 350 bus shelters of various designs and a large number are many years old. The budget to maintain these is only £15,000 per annum, and in the last decade, there has been very little capital investment to replace the oldest shelters and those in the worst condition. However, funding from the Economic Recovery Fund (ERF) has enabled 19 shelters to be replaced in 2022/2023, and a further tranche of funding should allow a similar number to be replaced during 2023.

In 2022, the Council let a new contract for the supply of bus shelters fitted with advertising panels. The shelters are owned and maintained by the successful tenderer, who receives advertising income to offset the costs. The contract has led to 112 shelters owned by the previous supplier being replaced by brand new facilities. Discussions are ongoing with the new supplier to consider supplying shelters at new locations across the County.

3.0 Legal Implications

3.1 There are no legal implications from this report

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 There are no direct financial implications from this report. However, confirmation is still awaited from Welsh Government on its BES 3 Budget for the 2023/2024 Financial Year and the effect that this will have on the Council's network of socially necessary local bus services is therefore not yet known.

5.0 Integrated Assessment Implications

5.1 This is an information only report, with no implications, therefore no IIA required.