



Report of the Cabinet Member for Environment & Infrastructure

Scrutiny Programme Committee - 14 November 2023

Bus Services Update

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| 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, Director of Place |
| Report Author | Barrie Gilbert, Team Leader – Passenger Transport |
| Legal Officer Finance Officer Access to Services Officer | Debbie Smith Paul Roach Rhian Millar |

1.0 Background

- 1.1 The Bus Services Scrutiny Working Group met on 7th July 2021 and 14th March 2022.
- 1.2 One of the recommendations to the Scrutiny Programme Committee was that a follow up meeting of the Working Group be held 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 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 local bus operators and vehicle manufacturers. It has also identified a potential depot site within the County, 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, introduced in 1986, 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 a degree of 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 varies between 60% and 75% on individual services. These suppressed levels are also being reported across Wales. 'On bus' and concessionary pass holder revenue shortfalls were therefore covered between August 2020 and July 2023 (inc) by the Welsh Government's Bus Emergency Scheme (BES), which sought to match pre-Covid levels.

BES was replaced from 25th July 2023 by the Bus Transition Fund (BTF), though the level of funding made available for the 2023/2024 Financial Year has reduced. Bus operators have therefore been required to examine their commercial networks and asked to make economies so that their funding requests match the actual funding available. In Swansea, most of the commercial network is operated by First Cymru. The company reduced the frequencies of most of its services from 29th October 2023 saving a number of vehicles and drivers. However, the

Council has worked with the company over several months to try to ensure that most areas retain a basic bus service.

Under the BTF, the Council, like all others across Wales, is now required to tender contracts for all of services that will continue to require funding from 1st April 2024. This will include the services which are not commercially viable but are deemed to be socially necessary, and for which the Council has traditionally provided funding.

Whilst the Welsh Government has agreed to provide an early indication of the budget for 2024/25 to assist with the tendering process, the available funding is unlikely to increase.

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 has already led to:

1. a new bus stop being established closer to the railway station for services arriving from Gorseinon and heading towards Waunarlwydd, and
2. a new bus stop located closer to Gowerton surgery, which will be served by the bus service from North Gower in due course.

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, £100,000 funding from the Economic Recovery Fund (ERF) enabled 19 shelters to be replaced in 2022/2023, and a further tranche of £100,000 allowed a similar number to be replaced during 2023. A third tranche of £100,000 funding is allowing for the replacement of a further tranche and a programme of repairs and minor refurbishments in early 2024.

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. These would either complement the Council's existing stock or replace Council-owned shelters, which, subject to their condition, could then be re-located to provide benefits at new locations.

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 awaited from Welsh Government on its budget for funding local bus services for the 2024/2025 Financial Year. Therefore, the effect that this will have on the new network of services is not yet known.

5.0 Integrated Assessment Implications

5.1 This is an information only report, with no implications, and therefore an IIA is not required.