

MEETING	DWYFOR ARE COMMITTEE
DATE	17 September 2012
TITLE	Local Bus Services and Learner Transport in Dwyfor
PURPOSE	To Raise Awareness of the Process and the Timetable
REPORT BY	Aled Davies – Head of Regulatory Department
CABINET MEMBER	CLlr. W. Gareth Roberts, Cabinet Member for Environment

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 Gwynedd Council is currently undertaking an overview and review of passenger transport services operated on its behalf. The scope of the review includes transport for learners and local bus services
- 1.2 The work regarding learner travel will focus on providing transport that the Authority has a statutory, or policy, requirement to provide. The intention is to provide these in the most efficient and effective means possible.
- 1.3 When considering local bus services the aim will be to provide appropriate travel opportunities for the following reasonable core needs:
- Commuting
 - Access to services
 - Shopping
 - Socialising
 - Leisure and tourism
- 1.4 Specific attention will also be given to reducing the number of empty seats on vehicles that provide local bus services.

2. CURRENT ARRANGEMENTS

- 2.1 For bus services to work effectively, from the perspective of being financially and environmentally sustainable, it requires a population density or at least a critical mass of passengers who want to travel between two locations, or on the route between them regularly. A move from this principle leads to a situation, where the average number of passengers is low, that requires a substantial amount of subsidy to maintain them.
- 2.2 With the growth in the levels of car ownership, where often households will have more than one car, the viability of local bus services has suffered due to a decline in usage. Factors such as convenience and flexible working opportunities have affected peoples travel patterns and made them less consistent. In turn, this has made it more difficult to design and provide bus networks that fulfil needs in an attractive way. This said bus services can be very important to

those who are dependant on them to make essential journeys with between 75-80% of public transport journeys in Wales being made by bus. It is possible that with increasing motoring costs there will be an increase in the numbers that depend on bus services

- 2.3 In 2010/11 £1,655,062 was spent on subsidies to support the local bus network in Gwynedd. £576,447 of this total was received from the Welsh Government's Local Transport Service Grant. Gwynedd Council's contribution to maintain the bus network was £1,078,615.
- 2.4 In addition to the above, £298,169 was received from the Welsh Government towards supporting the X32 bus service between Aberystwyth and Bangor and the X94 between Barmouth and Wrexham. These currently form part of the TrawsCambria / TrawsCymru network that provide local and longer distance travel opportunities between some key centres.
- 2.5 Wherever possible, local and education travel opportunities are integrated in Gwynedd. In rural areas, this is accepted as a model of good practice in optimising resources , fulfilling the Authority's statutory and policy requirements in terms of learner travel and enhancing the level of travel opportunities available to the wider public.
- 2.6 The local bus service network is operated in two ways – either on a commercial basis by the bus companies who consider there are sufficient numbers of passengers travelling to make them viable, or services that are maintained under contract and through payment of subsidy on behalf of the Council.

The Position in Gwynedd

- 2.7 The network in Gwynedd includes a mix of services that are:
 - a) Fully commercial
Companies identify a local need and market and provide a service with a view of making a profit from the number of passengers conveyed.
 - b) Totally subsidised
Where it is deemed there is no business case to provide a service on a commercial basis the Authority pays a subsidy (x) to maintain provision. Usually the company retains the revenue from tickets (y) with x+y making it viable for them to provide the service. The placing of services on this fixed price basis tends to lead to a better level of service as there is an imperative on the companies to maximise patronage.
 - c) Partially commercial / Partially subsidised
The percentage or number of services or journeys provided on such a basis changes but is a mixture of a) and b) above. An example of such an arrangement is whereby services on a route maybe commercial during the day but subsidised in the evening or on Sundays.
- 2.8 Similar to a number of other counties, the bus network in Gwynedd has evolved rather than being strategically developed as no one has overall control regarding its management or an overarching vision.

- 2.9 The way services are provided can be complex. This is partly because there is an integral operational relationship between their provision, whereby local travel opportunities can be provided at marginal costs during the day by using the same resources which are primarily paid for by meeting statutory learner travel requirements.
- 2.10 Arising from changes in the ways that the Welsh Government support bus services and the industry in Wales and in the context of the financial challenges facing all local authorities, Gwynedd Council has to respond and the aim is to do this in the most positive way possible.
- 2.11 In a challenging period, therefore, the Authority is eager to develop a bus network that is both environmentally and financially sustainable. The objective is to provide a level of service that is useful and attractive to passengers within the resources available to maintain them.
- 2.12 In order to realise this, the Authority has already begun the process of engaging the bus companies in responding to the situation. By working with the companies the hope is it will be possible to recognise efficiencies and make effective use of resources to provide services that are likely to be sustainable in the long term.

3. REVIEWING THE NETWORK

- 3.1 The Authority has already adopted a matrix which evaluates local bus services that receive a subsidy.
- 3.2 The factors considered within the matrix are:
- Cost per passenger
 - The type of area served (regional centre / urban centre / local centre / deprived area / rural communities)
 - Tourist area
 - Numbers (of passengers per journey)
 - Availability of other transport services
 - Time of the day / days of the week service is operated
 - Facilities served
- 3.3 Acting on the results of the matrix's evaluation would be one way of rationalising services in order to respond to the reduction in grants and realise the savings that are required.

4. THE REVIEW PROCESS

- 4.1 The process of reviewing passenger transport services has already happened in the Meirionnydd area. Attention is now being given to the Dwyfor area with the Arfon area review to be undertaken shortly afterwards. The aim is to have the new arrangements operational as follows:
- Dwyfor 4th January 2013
 - Arfon 3rd June 2013

- 4.2 Where it is not possible or appropriate to provide traditional local bus services because of the levels of subsidy required to maintain them and/or the lack of average passenger numbers, the Authority will be eager to raise the profile and use of services already provided by Community Transport providers. It is also intended to work with local communities to identify alternative ways of offering travel opportunities. This can include developing 'on demand' services or projects that increase the numbers that car share or facilitate voluntary driver schemes.
- 4.3 As part of the process we are encouraging communities and service users to contribute to the review and eager to hear suggestions especially in regards the propriety of using the five core travel needs and the aim of reducing empty seats as key considerations in designing the future network.
- 4.4 The consultation process with members, community councils and users of services is ongoing. To date over 400 surveys have been completed by bus users. This also provides and opportunity to monitor the levels of usage on specific journeys and the quality of services provided. The information collected will feed into the process as context for decision making regarding the network and the level of provision for the future.
- 4.5 Following a request by members, three Dwyfor area members have held discussions with the Cabinet Member and officers regarding the process. At their request, a meeting was arranged with the providers of services regarding the process and for members to ask questions to the officers and companies. The members opinion at the end of the meeting was the exercise had been a valuable one in terms of exchanging information, developing and understanding and strengthening the process.
- 4.6 It is anticipated the discussions and negotiations relating to the tender submissions will take place during October / November to ensure a decision is made in time to be operational as of the 4 January 2013.