

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR – COMMUNITIES

15 MAY 2018

REPORT TO CABINET

RATIONALISATION OF SUPPORTED BUS SERVICES 2018/2019

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To report to Cabinet the outcome of a public consultation exercise with regard to a proposal to reduce the amount of Council subsidy for bus services by a sum of £188,000 as agreed in the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS), and determine whether on the basis of the consultation exercise and the comments made by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee, any changes should be made to the original proposal.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Plan / Other Corporate Priority

- 2.1 The proposal links to the Corporate Improvement Plan 2016-20 (Reviewed 2017-18) Priority Three - Smarter use of resources with alignment to the MTFS.

3. Background

- 3.1 Bridgend County Borough Council (BCBC) and Welsh Government support the provision of regional and local bus services by subsidising routes that are not commercially viable. These services serve routes that enable residents who live along them to access employment, education, health care and social activities.
- 3.2 BCBC's core budget for supported bus services was £318,000 in 2017/18.
- 3.3 The allocation provided to BCBC by Welsh Government through the Bus Services Support Grant (BSSG) was £381,193 in 2017/18, of which a suggested base amount of £85,029 should be spent on funding Community Transport with the remainder, £296,164, to be spent on the region's core strategic bus network.
- 3.4 Reduction in base funding and continued financial austerity has meant the Council has had to review the services it delivers against its declared priorities. In the case of BCBC subsidies for bus services, while undoubtedly the subsidy makes a significant contribution to ensuring some bus services continue to operate when they may otherwise not do so, this area of expenditure has been identified as one that is not a statutory function to deliver and a savings target of £188,000 was identified for the financial year 2018/19 which leaves in the order of £130,000 for remaining local authority subsidised services. Consequently a report was submitted to Cabinet on 3rd October 2017 detailing proposals for the rationalisation of supported bus services across the County Borough to meet the proposed budget reduction, based on established criteria to provide a relative value for each service and to make the necessary saving. Cabinet approved that a public consultation should be carried out together with a full Equality Impact Assessment, before a further report be made to

Cabinet outlining the results of the consultation and before the proposals outlined in the report were considered and a final decision made on the proposals.

3.5 In regard of Welsh Government BSSG an indicative amount of £386,825 has been received for 2018/19. The Council is currently awaiting an official award letter from Welsh Government, which will include the grant terms and conditions.

3.6 The following table identifies the bus routes which it is proposed will have their Council financial subsidy removed and therefore formed the basis of the consultation. The routes are listed in descending order of priority (those at the top of the list are closest to having their subsidy retained based on the original scoring exercise and methodology that informed the 3rd October 2017 Cabinet report), but all those listed would need to be cut to achieve the £188,000 saving identified in that Cabinet report and in the MTF5.

Service No.	Operator	Route	Fully Funded or *Partly Funded?	Comments/Implications	Type of Service
			*Some journeys or sections of the route are operated commercially by the operator.		
51	EASYWAY	Bridgend to Oaklands Road, Daytime. (Monday to Saturday)	Fully Funded	Provides Access to Bridgend Library / Rec Centre. No alternative bus services, apart from accessing the main road (Park Street - X1, X2, X4 & 172 Services). However the distance is not excessive (0.2 miles).	Local
803	EASYWAY	Danygraig to Porthcawl, Daytime. (Monday to Saturday)	Fully Funded	Provides Access Portway Surgery Alternative bus services available (X2 and 172 Services) except for Danygraig residents, who will have no alternative bus service, apart from accessing the main road (Bridgend Road) which is quite a distance to travel (0.55 miles). This contract is mostly council funded and a small part is commercial. There is likelihood that if funding was removed, then it is possible that the commercial section of the route would not be commercially viable.	Local
61	PEYTON TRAVEL	Nottage to Porthcawl (Circular), Daytime. (Monday to Saturday)	Fully Funded	Provides Access to South Road Surgery and Portway Surgery. The contract has been retendered due to the 14-15 MTF5 and new contractor took over in July 15. No alternative bus services for local residents in Nottage and Western Porthcawl. However, an alternative service is available on West Road and South Road (63B Service). However, this is quite a distance for some residents living to the west of Nottage and Porthcawl West (0.8 miles). The route of this service is planned to be extended to Newton Nottage Road, when a new surgery opens.	Local
81	EASYWAY	Bridgend to Pen-y-Fai via Brackla & Coity Morning & Afternoon. (Monday to Friday)	*Partly Funded	Provides Access to Princess of Wales Hospital, as well as Quarella Road/Wildmill Residents. Commercially operated journeys in this timetable are available on this service, but only between 09:15 and 14:40 (Monday to Friday). Outside these times Pen-y-fai will have the 67 Service (if retained). Other services available for Brackla (62, 64, 66 & 404 Services). However residents living on the Princess Way corridor will need to access Brackla triangle (0.82 miles). Coity has an alternative service (73 Service but this service is also under review).	Local
68/69	FIRST CYMRU	Bridgend to Cefn Glas, Early morning and Evening. (Monday to Saturday)	*Partly Funded	Provides access to Bridgend Town Centre No alternative bus services, apart from accessing the main road (Park Street - X1, X2, X4 & 172 Services). However, this is quite a distance for residents living in the northern part of Cefn Glas (0.78 miles). Commercially operated journeys are available on this service throughout the day.	Local
52	EASYWAY	Bridgend to Broadlands, Daytime. (Monday to Saturday)	Fully Funded	Provides Access to Bridgend Library / Rec Centre No alternative bus services for Broadlands Estate residents, apart from walking to the main road (Park Street) for an alternative service (X1, X2, X4 & 172 Services). However, this is quite a distance for some residents living in the Southern part of the Broadlands Estate (0.8 miles).	Local
63B	FIRST CYMRU	Bridgend to Porthcawl, Early morning and Evening Mon- Sat)	*Partly Funded	1) Serves areas of major planned population and employment growth. 2) Links to Princess of Wales Hospital, providing health care services. 3) Links key regional settlements. 4) Improves access to employment. 5) Serves areas of major planned population and employment growth. 6) Linking transport and regional hub in Bridgend for connectivity to the regional network. 7) Improves access to the regional shopping centre (McArthur Glen – Pines). 8) Links key regional settlements (Cardiff, Neath Port Talbot, Swansea & Vale of Glamorgan). 9) Enhance business case for the METRO. No alternative bus service. Commercially operated journeys are available on this service throughout the day.	Regional
62	FIRST CYMRU	Bridgend to Pencoed - 2 No. Evening Journey's - (Monday to Saturday)	*Partly Funded	Provides transport link for residents visiting the Princess of Wales Hospital, via Bridgend Town Centre. Alternative evening bus service from Pencoed Monument (404 Service). However, this is quite a distance for residents living in the western area over the level crossing of Pencoed (0.84 miles). Commercially operated journeys are available on this service throughout the day.	Local
73	EASYWAY	Pyle to Fforddygyfraith, (Tue & Fri only)	Fully Funded	Provides access to Princess of Wales Hospital Alternative services available for Pyle residents (63, 63B, X1 & X4 Services), Cefn Cribbwr residents (63 & 63B Service) and Coity (81 Service), but this service is also under review). Fforddygyfraith residents will have no alternative service, apart from accessing the main roads (Cefn Road 1.1 miles – Service No. 63/63B or Maesteg Road A4063 1.7 miles – Service No. 70 & 71).	Local

4. Current Situation / Proposal

4.1 A consultation on the proposed service reductions was implemented to gather views and opinions on the potential impact of the reductions in order to meet a proposed budget reduction of £188,000 in 2018/19, as part of the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

4.2 The consultation document is appended to this report, but some of the main headline information is as follows.

- Consultation survey forms were available to complete online and paper copies were available at 12 libraries across the county borough of Bridgend.
- Advertisements were placed on the Council's corporate Twitter account throughout the consultation, with the information being seen 26,441 times.
- A series of Facebook adverts were placed during the consultation period to raise awareness and encourage citizens to share their views on the proposals. The adverts were seen 32,700 times, generating 835 clicks through the consultation webpages.
- A total of 974 responses were received (599 online submissions and 375 paper versions). During the consultation period, there were 124 interactions on our social media channels and 32 comments were received by e-mail, including one letter.
- A petition with 180 signatures was also received from the Porthcawl area.

4.3 Responses to the consultation identified the following:

- Of those who responded 89% of respondents felt that the subsidised bus routes should continue. 8% felt that the subsidy should not continue and only 2% responded 'don't know', 1% did not respond to this question.
- 654 respondents aged 55 and over told us that they believed that subsidised bus routes should continue. There were in total 695 people in this age category (55+). Therefore 94% of this group felt that the subsidised bus routes should continue.
- When asked whether respondents agreed with the methods used to identify the routes under consideration 31% responded 'no' and 35% stated 'don't know', with 25% responded 'yes' to this question. Of those who responded, 30% of residents who responded 'no' did not give a reason for their response.
- Respondents were asked which services were used, including use of multiple routes. Some responses included routes not currently part of the subsidised bus consultation so these are listed as not relevant.

- Of the responses, the routes most commonly used were 63b Porthcawl to Bridgend via Nottage (17%) and 68/69 Cefn Glas Circular (15%). It should be noted that of this service it is only early morning and late evening services impacted. With the day time services currently being operated on a commercial basis.
- The number of responders that had access to a vehicle was identified as 523.
- Also of the responders only 339 were aware of community transport.
- How often do you use the bus service(s) responses indicate that 38% of responders use the bus more than twice a week, with 20% of all responders using the bus every day. With the most common routes to travel from were:
 - Bridgend (35%)
 - Porthcawl (29%)
 - Cefn Glas (9%)

With the most common destinations of travel being:

- Bridgend (38%)
- Porthcawl (21%)
- Cardiff (8%)
- Cefn Glas (4%)

- 4.4 From the consultation it is clear that the majority of respondents considered that the loss of local bus services is of concern to the communities. However, in order to meet a reduction in budget the methodology used did offer a means to identify the greatest benefit for the remaining budget of £130,000. There was no clear view from respondents on whether the methodology used was the appropriate one, as a range of concerns were made with an overriding concern being the accessibility of alternative arrangements. The methodology does offer a consideration on which services may offer the greatest utilisation for the remaining funding whilst understanding that there will be an impact if services were withdrawn. However, this may be mitigated in some circumstances by the use of community transport or indeed by those persons with access to their own vehicles. Bridgend Community Transport currently offers accessible transport solutions for charitable and voluntary groups, and individuals, through a range of services including the provision of fully accessible minibuses for community groups, dial a ride, community car and wheels to work service for individuals. However, not all of their operations permit the use of concessionary passes and persons wishing to use the service have to register as members of the scheme. Additionally, historically when the Council has previously withdrawn bus subsidies for some services the commercial operator has sometimes determined that they will continue to provide the service regardless, but of course this is unknown until such time as that decision is made, and that is not the situation in every case and cannot be taken into consideration when making the decision.

- 4.5 At this time therefore it is unknown if the commercial element of bus services will still continue to operate on the partly funded routes, or indeed if they would extend the commercial element into the currently subsidised services.
- 4.6 Also it is unknown if the current Community Transport operator would be able to replace any or all of the proposed bus routes identified for withdrawal. However, Officers will continue to work and liaise with the Community Transport operator, to focus on the areas of Bridgend which have reduced local bus services and seek to ensure that the community transport service provided is as effective as possible.
- 4.7 The consultation response was shared with members from Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their consideration. They have advised that the following are the matters they would like Cabinet to consider:
- Members were of the understanding that the increase in Council Tax from 4.2% to 4.5% would be used to offset cuts to the supported bus services.
 - The Committee highlighted that cuts to the service would have a negative impact on:
 - Town traders and on current profitable routes, due to less people having access to them.
 - The Borough's elderly residents, not only as an added expense to residents living on a pension, as some cuts to routes would result in a taxi being required but if some routes were to no longer continue, it would mean a considerable increase to walking distances to another stop.
 - The reduction to supported bus services could affect residents' ability to access community facilities such as Community Cafes and also citizen's health and wellbeing due to increased isolation and loneliness, which could result in a surge of the amount of care packages required by Social Services. The Committee queried whether this would result in Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate paying towards the subsidy as a preventative measure.
 - Similar to the point made above, the Committee state that the cuts to the provision would affect citizens' ability to access hospital appointments and visiting in Bridgend and Port Talbot and suggest that ABMU pay towards the subsidy.
 - Members advised that cuts to some routes may have cost implications on the school transport budget as buses are temporarily removed from the service to fulfil their school contract.
 - The Committee state that as a planning condition of the new surgery in Porthcawl - which will cover 13,000 residents - ABMU are required to pay towards the subsidy of a bus service to and from the new surgery. Members are therefore concerned if the subsidy is withdrawn by BCBC the money will be lost.
 - Members suggested that the free concessionary bus pass that is currently free to all men and women at the age of 60 and above in the County Borough be means tested to enable possible savings and allow the money to be re-allocated to supported bus services.

4.8 In consideration of the items raised by the Overview and Scrutiny members it is considered that:

- It is difficult to accurately quantify the impact the proposals could have as typically persons may compensate for the changes and find alternative means to access services such as catching the later commercial services or accessing parallel routes (where available) or have access to community or other transport.
- The potential for Social Services and Wellbeing Directorate and the Abertawe Bro Morgannwg Health Board (ABMU) contributing towards the subsidy as a preventative measure for isolation or access to hospital appointments. This matter would have to be discussed with those departments to examine the scope of any current provision provided by those directorates and consider if it could be expanded to provide such intervention.
- In regard of impact on other provision such as school transport this is unlikely to be impacted upon as contracts are separately procured for the provision of home to school transport and the routes where it is proposed that bus subsidies are removed are not regarded as ones that would be used for this purpose ordinarily.
- It is acknowledged that there is an agreement between the operator of service 61 and ABMU to extend the current service to operate to the new surgery in Porthcawl. The agreement is for it to commence and terminate at John Street in Porthcawl on a circular route. It is unknown if the operator would continue to operate the currently subsidised route to and from Nottage.
- The free concessionary travel scheme is funded by Welsh Government and any amendments to the current scheme would need to be made by Welsh Government considered on an all Wales basis such as any proposal to means test its eligibility criteria.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework & Procedure Rules

5.1 There is no effect upon Policy Framework or Procedure Rules

6. Equalities Impact Assessment

6.1 A full Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached for member consideration.

7. Financial Implications

7.1 A reduction in the amount of bus subsidy will have a small financial implication upon Bridgend Bus Station if the total number of services operated by commercial operators reduces. This is because the Council has implemented departure charges at Bridgend Bus Station for bus services using the bus station.

The departure charges were introduced in light of the budget reduction for Bridgend Bus Station of £40,000 for 2015/2016 MTFs proposals. Therefore, if the proposed contracted local bus services supported by BCBC through its own funding were

withdrawn, then this will reduce the annual income for Bridgend Bus Station by an estimated maximum of £4,100 as a result of less usage of the bus station by buses.

- 7.2 If the full level of saving of £188,000 approved in the MTFS, as a result of the proposal to remove bus subsidies for the identified routes, is not met, it will need to be met from elsewhere, either from additional savings elsewhere in the Communities Directorate or offset by allocating funding from the small unallocated budget as a result increasing the Council Tax from 4.2% to 4.5%.

8. Recommendation

- 8.1 It is recommended that Cabinet considers the content of the consultation report and Equality Impact Assessment, together with the comments made by the Corporate Overview and Scrutiny Committee,
- 8.2 determines whether it wishes to make any changes to the original proposal to cut bus subsidies to the routes identified in paragraph 4.9, and if so approves that unallocated funding set aside from the additional increase in Council Tax is used to offset any reduction in the approved saving in the MTFS of £188,000.

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Background documents:
Equalities Impact Screening Form
Cabinet Report 3rd October 2017 - Rationalisation of Supported Bus Services 2018/2019