

**SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - TUESDAY, 4 JUNE 2019**

**MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1  
HELD IN COUNCIL CHAMBER, CIVIC OFFICES ANGEL STREET BRIDGEND CF31 4WB ON  
TUESDAY, 4 JUNE 2019 AT 14:30**

Present

Councillor CA Webster – Chairperson

TH Beedle	JPD Blundell	NA Burnett	RJ Collins
SK Dendy	J Gebbie	M Jones	B Sedgebeer
RME Stirman	JH Tildesley MBE	LM Walters	KJ Watts
AJ Williams			

Apologies for Absence

PA Davies and A Williams

Officers:

Sarah Daniel	Democratic Services Officer - Scrutiny
Laura Griffiths	Principal Solicitor
Andrew Rees	Democratic Services Manager
Kevin Stephens	Democratic Services Assistant

65. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor R Stirman declared a prejudicial interest in agenda item 3 – Call-In of Cabinet Decision: Rationalisation of Supported Bus Services 2019/2020 as she had pre-determined the matter. Councillor Stirman took no further part and withdrew from the meeting.

66. CALL-IN OF CABINET DECISION: RATIONALISATION OF SUPPORTED BUS SERVICES 2019/2020

The Group Manager Legal and Democratic Services advised the Committee that a proposed decision of Cabinet to rationalise supported bus services had been Called-in by 4 Members. She stated that all Members are entitled to a view, however pre-determination is a breach of the Code of Conduct.

A member of the Committee placed on record that it was her belief that Councillor Webster should not chair the meeting as she is one of the Members who had called-in the decision and that she should relinquish the chair for the meeting. The Group Manager Legal and Democratic Services advised that it was a matter for Members to decide whether they had pre-determined the matter. The Chairperson stated that she had not pre-determined but confirmed that she had called-in the matter.

The Chairperson invited members of the public and members of Council who had registered to speak in advance to address the Committee.

The Committee was addressed by Mr Gordon Adamson who stated that he had no other means of getting into Bridgend and to supermarkets and he would feel cut off, especially on Sundays. He also expressed concern at the loss of connecting services in order to be able to travel to Cardiff and Swansea. He would like to see the frequency of buses increased and expressed concern at the condition of buses. The Committee was then addressed by Mrs Chris Lloyd who stated that bus services are a lifeline for the elderly in order to attend medical appointments, they were also a lifeline for younger people in

order to get to college and gain access to job opportunities and to get a good start in life. The loss of bus services would jeopardise those opportunities. Mrs Morfydd O'Keefe informed the Committee that she had responsibility for her husband and grandson and that she uses bus services each day. She stated that many members of the communities of Llangynwyd and Maesteg Park rely on bus services in order to travel to Bridgend. Mr Rowland Pittard informed the Committee that there should be equality for all tax payers having access to bus transport. He expressed concern that one bus service had been diverted away from Penyfaï which had impacted on the community. He stated there was no coordinated transport plan and Active Travel in Bridgend with that of the needs of people and for moving around the Borough, coupled with high taxi fares and the lack of availability of taxis in the daytime.

Councillor A Hussain spoke on behalf of the residents of Penyfaï expressing concern at the walking routes in the village being poor and poor accessibility to rail services. The village is served by one bus route, with previous routes having been diverted away from the village and has been ignored in Active Travel developments. He stated that residents in the village have become isolated due to the lack of bus services and that a bus service is a lifeline for the village. He requested the Committee hold Cabinet to account and visit sites in order to gather information from residents. Councillor R Penhale-Thomas addressed the Committee on the issue of the number 37 service through Maesteg Park which is used by elderly and young residents alike in an area where there is lower car ownership. The number 37 service is a primary service to Maesteg Park to Llangynwyd to connect to other services. The location of Maesteg Park is on top of a very steep hill which is extremely difficult to reach without transport. Pedestrian walkways from the Town Centre would require significant negotiation even for the fittest of people as they are of a typically steep gradient. Key statistics from the census data 2011 Maesteg Park falls in three hyper local census areas one of these areas 40% of households report have no access to a car on average 75 % of areas reported three or more dimensions of poverty neither one or these areas have one of four have their daily activities limited a little or lot as a result of their health disability 10% report their health to be bad or very bad although the data may be considered outdated by some 8 years after 9 years of austerity and the advent of draconian welfare reform policies the situation in Maesteg Park would have improved there are real people behind these figures facing individual battles on a daily basis be that through seeking employment and having to deal with low pay and poverty suffering poor mental health or facing ill physical health this combined is testimony to the amount of the value the local community place is on this bus service and it was no overestimation to consider it a genuine lifeline. He could not emphasise strongly enough that the geography and topography location and economic health and social factors play in the Maesteg Park area in particular make it a very unique place where the bus service is a genuine thread to community life under the Authority's Corporate Plan. The Council faces diminishing resources with its impact being on communities with the greatest need. He stated that the principles of joined up thinking or strategic thinking seems to have bypassed the process completely and the underpinning principles of the City Deal will improve connectivity going forward. He believed that decision is counterproductive and risks completely disconnecting people and communities to often and in our communities like Maesteg Park and he urged the Committee to keep true to the Corporate Principles.

The Chairperson read out a statement which had been submitted by Councillor J Radcliffe on behalf of the Tondu and Aberkenfig Community Association. The residents of Tondu and Aberkenfig believed that the sums of money proposed to be saved by the Council by the removal of bus subsidies would not be great, when expressed as a percentage of the overall budget compared to the income it would generate through Council Tax from the number of new homes being built across the County Borough. The residents also believed that the headline savings suggested in the Cabinet report, the potential costs arising from a reduction in departure costs from the central bus station,

the costs of demolition of redundant bus shelters, and potential reductions to the Bus Services Support Grant were unknown. The demolition of the bus station, after a previous decision to invest in its construction could not be exempt from a failure in town planning. Pressures on social care would be created through the increased loneliness and isolation amongst a growing population dependent on bus use. The costs in terms of educational and child development that could arise through making Sarn, Health Centre for the wider 'Valley Gateway area', inaccessible to parents and children relying on public transport. There could be more general Health and Social Care costs that result in a failure to improve environmental public transport and discouraged and reduce car use. Social economic costs of reducing access to Bridgend Town Centre from bus routes that serve valleys communities. Wider costs could arise from preventing access to job centres in both Bridgend and Maesteg. Educational and cultural services including Aberkenfig library, Halo Recreation Centre/Awen Library. Access to libraries is a necessity with the enrolling of Universal Credit, with many vulnerable people not having digital access and the probability of increased sanctions with failure to comply with benefit stipulations. The residents believed that many of these reasons illustrate the extent to which bus routes are an essential public service from a caring local authority for people on lower incomes or with disabilities. Bus services are relied on by around quarter of all women, a third of older people, and nearly four out of ten people on low income. The proposed reductions to services disproportionately hurt the Valley areas north of the M4. With the proposed extra rail services to Maesteg not materialising, and no investment in the Valley from the City Deal, it was difficult to see how the Authority can convince the electorate of yet another cut to services serving its poorest parts. The implications of the proposed cut to route 67 fail to mention the extent to which Tyn-YCoed Surgery in Sarn provides health services to Aberkenfig, Tondu and Pen y Fai. The New Street surgery in Aberkenfig is a small practice that is struggling to meet demands, so often residents from these areas go to Sarn. It has been over a decade since a new GP surgery was promised as part of the Pentre Felin housing development. The proposed new surgery eventually became a retail park. Specifically, Tyn y Coed surgery operates a regular baby clinic, which parents in the Aberkenfig and Tondu area use. The importance of health visitors offering an accessible service to parents of small children as part of a child's development cannot be over-stated. Yet the authority wishes to remove access to this facility via route 67 for the poorest parents in the Aberkenfig and surrounding wards. Should the removal route 67 proceed without making reasonable alternative arrangements for parents on low incomes to access this baby clinic, this would go against the Well-Being of Future Generations Act and would negatively impact access to the dental surgery in Sarn, the Bridgend Life Savers Credit Union, and until a replacement is found the nearest Post Office to Aberkenfig.

The residents expressed concern that no equalities impact assessment had been carried out. The wider proposals will also reduce access to the Princess Of Wales Hospital and Glanrhyd Hospitals.

Outline planning permission was granted for an extra 450 homes in the Pentre Felin Area of Tondu, on the basis there would be minimal impact on the traffic flows because the design of the estate was being made in accordance with active travel principles, and that access to good public transport networks would happen and encourage people out of their cars. Since that planning decision, conformation has been received that the rail investment would not happen, but now have the proposal to remove key bus routes from the area. The proposal notes that previously a withdrawal of a subsidy did not result in closures of 5 of the 6 routes, which implies that the authority thinks the same will happen again. Yet the report to Cabinet that states that further reductions in the Council's budget for supported bus services could have an effect on the commercially operated bus services, as supported bus services help make the commercial bus network viable. There would be a cumulative impact on the entire network of successive decisions to remove subsidies. It was possible the bus service can absorb one round of cuts but was

unlikely they can absorb several, and unlikely that it will be the 8 services that would be affected. The £3M intended for the area under the Cardiff Capital Region City Deal will be spent on the Park and Ride facility at Pyle as part of “the development of an integrated transport hub that serves the local community and the nearby settlements of Porthcawl, Kenfig Hill, Cefn Cribwr and Cornelly, with nothing for the Llynfi Valley.

The Chief Executive thanked the speakers for their participation in the meeting. He informed the Committee of the pressures faced by the Council in delivering the Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) in that the Council had already saved £70m and is required to save a further £36m over the course of the MTFS. He stated that the Council is not proposing to remove bus routes, but proposing to remove the subsidy for bus services. The removal of subsidy had been made to some previously, with those routes mostly continuing to be run by the bus operators. He informed the Committee that other local authorities in Wales had already removed subsidies to bus services.

The Committee questioned the availability of grant funding or match funding to support Bridgend Community Transport. The Head of Operations – Community Services informed the Committee that the Council did not fund Bridgend Community Transport. The Group Manager Highways stated that that Community Transport is funded by the Welsh Government through Bus Services Support Grant (BSSG). Engagement was awaited from Welsh Government in relation to match funding the BSSG allocation.

The Committee expressed concern at the proposed decision taken by Cabinet when the full position was not understood and questioned the impact on bus services, were the subsidy removed. The Cabinet Member Communities stated that it was not known what bus operators would do if the subsidy is removed. He also stated that Community Transport is a separate entity and is a non for profit organisation. The Group Manager Highways confirmed that the position of bus operators in the event of the removal of subsidy was unknown at present.

A member of the Committee commented that the Council was in the position of having to save money and was aware that some routes which receive subsidy have very few passengers travelling early in the morning and late at night.

The Committee questioned whether restrictions are placed on the use of community transport. The Group Manager Highways commented that community transport are adapted and the drivers are volunteers. He stated that community transport could assist when the proposed impact of the removal of bus subsidy was known. The Head of Operations – Community Services commented that community transport is subject to permits and licensing.

Members expressed concern at the current 48 hours’ notice being required to book community transport and could this be changed if there was a need for urgent use. The Group Manager Highways commented that the Council does not control the use of community transport, but does work with it.

A member of the Committee believed that the call-in of the proposed decision by Cabinet was not an appropriate use of public money and that an opportunity should have been taken by Members to make suggestions on the proposed removal of bus subsidies when the budget process was being considered by the Budget Research and Evaluation Panel and at Council. The Council needed to be realistic and protect communities and make smarter use of its resources. The number 73 service which previously had the subsidy removed remained. The cost of the call-in was questioned. The Group Manager Legal and Democratic Services advised Members that the Committee could only focus on the 3 reasons for the call-in of the decision.

A member of the Committee stated that the subsidy to many routes had been removed, yet the service remained and concern was expressed that bus companies were taking public money in good faith. The proposed decision of Cabinet related to cutting subsidies and not bus services. The Chief Executive commented that the aim of bus companies is to maximise profits and it would be a decision of those companies on whether to retain those routes it operated following the removal of subsidy. He stated that most bus companies had continued to run bus services despite the previous removal of subsidy.

A member of the Committee expressed concern that the removal of subsidy on route 61 would impact on residents being able to attend the Portway Surgery in Porthcawl and the route could disappear. The Cabinet Member Communities commented that it was unknown as to what bus operators would do if the subsidy was removed. He stated that the report presented to Cabinet was the reality of the budget cuts facing the authority. He also stated that the cuts in budget made to the Communities Directorate were disproportionate to those made to other Directorates, due to the nature of its services being non-statutory. Further cuts of £2M would have to be made to this Directorate in the next year and the Council has to live within its budget and the Council had to make cuts to its services and that £148K of cuts would have to be found elsewhere if it did not remove subsidies to bus services. He stated that discussions would take place with bus companies on the removal of subsidy.

A member of the Committee commented that the Council has a responsibility to the public and Cabinet need to take account of the public and the need to spend money wisely. There was no evidence of what the bus companies can afford and there was a need explore this and whether the services could be put out to tender and whether bus companies were charging too much. The Group Manager Highways informed the Committee that routes are already tendered and subsidised. Operators would have to consider a number of factors in the event of bus subsidies being removed. A member of the Committee requested clarification of the timetabling arrangements and whether they could be changed. The Group Manager Highways stated that the Council develops the timetable and is sent out to operators, many of which are historic and based on passengers travelling to places of education and work. The Public Transport Officer informed the Committee that the timetables had been developed with the operators with the oldest being 2005 and the newest timetable in 2009. The Head of Operations – Community Services informed the Committee that 10% of savings were being looked at due to the level of savings being required to be made to the budget.

A member of the Committee questioned whether the routes identified for the removal of subsidy are economical to run. The Chief Executive informed the Committee that all bus routes are subject to tender and that when subsidies have previously been removed, the services have continued, which called into question whether those subsidies were needed. The Cabinet Member Communities informed the Committee that bus operators had been requested to provide passenger numbers but had declined to do so due to reasons of commercial sensitivity. A member of the Committee stated that 5 of the 6 previously subsidised routes were retained commercially with modifications or reductions in frequencies. A member of the Committee informed the Committee that First Cymru are part of the First Group with pre-tax profits in their millions which could be attributable in part due to public subsidy and there was a need to appeal to First Cymru to provide services at least profit as the people who will lose out are their customers. A member of the Committee commented on the reality of the budget cuts having to be made by the Council and if cuts were not made to bus subsidies, cuts would have to be made to other services. The Cabinet Member Communities commented that £2M of cuts were needed to be found in the Communities Directorate and if they were not found they would have to be found in other areas of the Council. In looking for £150k of cuts by removing bus subsidies, the Council could no longer sustain those subsidies due to

austerity measures which the Council faced. He stated that the proposals had been the subject to budget consultation with the public, the Budget Research and Evaluation Panel process and by Council and there had been no concerns expressed of alternative proposals put forward. A member of Council clarified that she had expressed those concerns at the number of services whose status was marked as red when the Council considered the Medium Term Financial Strategy. The Cabinet Member Communities acknowledged that those concerns had been made at Council when it considered the MTFS. He commented that if the cuts were not implemented this year, they would have to be found in the following year and he understood the hardship would have on citizens.

A member of the Committee considered that the proposed decision of Cabinet needed further explanation and believed that the decision made is justified and the decision of Cabinet could be supported and that the arguments of what the Council would otherwise have to do in making cuts to services elsewhere had been made. A member of the Committee considered that the call-in of the decision had given residents the opportunity to be involved in the democratic process and was more comfortable with the decision made by Cabinet. A member of the Committee requested that bus services be looked at taking into consideration new developments which are being planned and that bus routes could be made to be more profitable if timetables were revisited so that people could commute to work by bus. The Head of Operations – Community Services stated that engagement would take place with bus operators on revisiting timetables, but the authority would not be going back out to tender. He stated that the Public Transport team do engage with bus operators on the development of new estates.

A member of the Committee commented that concerns of the public and responses had been listened to and that the decision of Cabinet could be supported.

The Chairperson questioned whether cross border services could be affected as a result of the new health board boundary. The Head of Operations – Community Services stated that this issue had not been considered, but confirmed that the Welsh Government funds cross border routes.

A member of the Committee asked whether any representations had been received from other Directorates as the removal of subsidy would impact on access to health care and schools. The Cabinet Member Communities commented that concerns had been expressed by other areas of the Council and that proposed effects and knock on effect had been considered as a whole. He stated that budget cuts could not be sustained whilst keeping those services running. The Chief Executive reassured that all cuts were made on the basis of a one Council approach and that cuts had been made disproportionately to the Communities Directorate. A member of the Committee commented that the Social Services and Wellbeing and Education and Family Support Directorates need to understand the demand for services in the Communities Directorate and understand the impact on Council decisions. The Chief Executive explained that a long term approach is taken to the budget process and that of the budget of £25M to the Communities Directorate, £12m of it is usable. He informed the Committee that savings in the order of 65% were required to be made in the next 4 years and the Council would no longer be able to deliver services in the way it currently delivers services.

A member of the Committee questioned how the Council can manage the impact on residents of the potential loss in bus services as residents are reliant on bus services for getting to work and accessing hospitals. The Cabinet Member Communities commented that 5 out of 6 routes which previously had the subsidy continued to run. He stated that dialogue between officers and the bus operators continues. It was not known at present what the bus operators would do. The Head of Operations – Community

Services stated that what makes routes viable is their usage. The Cabinet Member Communities commented that information from operators as to bus usage was scarce.

A member of the Committee commented that the proposal is to withdraw subsidy and whether a social enterprise would operate routes for the benefit of the public.

A member of the Committee considered that the first bullet point in the report to Cabinet to be vague. The Head of Operations – Community Services commented that officers were content with that recommendation which had been made to Cabinet. The Cabinet Member Communities commented that a decision on the removal of subsidy had been made by Council when it set the budget and Cabinet was being requested to take confirmatory action.

The Chairperson thanked the officers and members of the public for their contributions.

## **Conclusions**

Members of the Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee heard from members of the public on how the potential removal of the bus subsidies could have a potential impact on them. Members heard the following from the public speakers:

- Equality issues – many elderly people rely on bus services to get around as this gives them independence. Many also use the services to tend to their caring commitments of relatives
- Concerns around lack safe walking routes
- Large percentage of people in rural communities do not have access to a car and therefore rely on the bus services to visit family and travel to and from work.
- Potential impact on mental health and wellbeing from increased isolation
- Some people heavily rely on bus services and consider them to be a lifeline to their independence
- Risks around disconnecting people from their wider communities

Members raised the following concerns:

- Potential loss of WG Funding and match funding if BCBC remove the subsidies
- Community transport links
- Concerns over public money being used to subsidise private company profits
- Concerns that the bus timetables had not been revised or updated, in some cases in over 14 years, therefore it was difficult to understand if the routes were viable, especially given the large amount of new houses in BCBC over the last 5 years.
- More work needs to be done with the bus companies to ensure the best possible times and routes are worked out to ensure maximum usage and income.
- Members and the public would not be able to fully understand the cut to the subsidies as there was no telling at this time whether a removal of the subsidy meant a removal of the service as this was down to the bus company whether the service would still be a viable option for them.

The Committee heard the following from officers:

- Cabinet member stated that if we do not make this cut, the funding gap will need to be found from elsewhere within the MTFs and any potential alternative could prove just as unpopular, if not more.
- BCBC were not removing the bus services. BCBC are proposing to remove the subsidy paid to the private bus companies that operate the routes. It would be a matter for the private bus companies to determine if the routes were still viable without the subsidy from BCBC
- A 65% reduction of the Communities budget needed to be realised over the next 4 years so if the proposal to remove the subsidy did not go ahead this year it was highly likely that it would be removed in the coming years.

**SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1 - TUESDAY, 4 JUNE 2019**

Following consideration of the evidence presented to them by Officers and members of the public, Members of the Committee did not wish to refer the matter back to Cabinet and therefore, the decision of the Cabinet would take effect from the date of the Scrutiny committee of the 4th June 2019.

The meeting closed at 16:30