

# **NEATH PORT TALBOT COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL**

## **Streetscene & Engineering Scrutiny Committee**

20<sup>th</sup> July 2018

### **Report of the Head of Engineering and Transport**

David W. Griffiths

#### **Matter for Information**

**Wards Affected:** All

#### **Overview of Subsidised and Local Bus Services in NPT**

#### **Purpose of the Report**

1. To provide Members with background information on Commercial and Subsidised Local bus services in Neath Port Talbot.

#### **Executive Summary**

2. There are six commercial bus companies who operate in the County; First Cymru, South Wales Transport (Neath), Select Buses, Ridgway, 1<sup>st</sup> Call and New Adventure Travel. We also have two Welsh Government Traws Cymru services; DANSA Community Transport also operate three demand responsive routes. National Express services call into both Neath and Port Talbot.
3. The Council subsidise 15 bus routes on 10 contracts which are funded via the Bus Service Support Grant (BSSG) from Welsh Government. Without this support some communities would have no bus services.
4. BSSG is a £25m Welsh Government Grant scheme to support local bus services. The grant has two arms; the first is worth £8m, this is currently given to Local Authorities (LA) to subsidise bus routes which are not commercially viable. The second is the former Fuel Duty Rebate scheme; this portion of the grant reimburses bus operators for every kilometre the bus is in service and is worth circa £17m. Currently the reimbursement rate in South West Wales 14.5p per km.

5. Only four bus operators referred to above receive BSSG subsidy for providing bus services which are not commercially viable. The value of these contracts is circa £312k.
6. Welsh Government (WG) are currently reviewing the criteria for the requirement of LA's to access BSSG. If WG insist the grant is match funded it would put subsidised bus services in NPTCBC at risk unless new funding is identified.

## **Background**

7. There are six commercial bus operators providing bus services in the NPT area. In addition, WG's Traws Cymru services along with National Express and DANSA Community Transport on a commercial basis. First Cymru is the largest operator in the area with bus services operating out of its Port Talbot, Swansea and Maesteg depots. South Wales Transport (Neath) Ltd is the next largest and operates out of Llansamlet, Swansea. Ridgways and Select Coach and bus have depots within the County, while NAT and 1<sup>st</sup> Call both only have one service each operating in the county.
8. The Council currently subsidise 15 bus routes through 10 tendered contracts via WG's BSSG. Four of the six commercial bus companies have contracts with NPTCBC to provide these services. A list of the contract and routes are attached in Appendix A.
9. Patronage on local buses has been falling in recent years, this has led to bus companies realigning their services to enable them to maximise their income from their resources. For NPT this has seen the Bay Campus being the first area in Wales to have a 24-hour/seven-day a week bus service, albeit into Swansea.
10. In 2011, the Council's budget to subsidised bus services that were not commercially viable was circa £738k. This was made up of £319,506k from revenue and £418,580k from the Local Transport Support Grant (LTSG). The LTSG was the predecessor to BSSG. The current WG grant (BSSG) for subsidising local bus services is circa £312k.
11. In 2012, WG reduced the BSSG budget available to support Local buses by 26%. NPT had to reduce its budget by circa £100k. Over the following years, the revenue support to subsidise local bus service was systematically reduced to meet the Council's savings target.

12. The result of reducing passenger numbers combined with the reduction in funding available to support local bus services has seen a significant reduction in bus services operating in the NPT area. Bus operators are far more proactive in scrutinising and rationalising their routes now than they were in the past.
13. Some of the areas that have seen a reduction in bus services or indeed lost bus services altogether are:-
  - Forest Hill (service withdrawn)
  - Baglan Old Road (service withdrawn)
  - Swansea to Neath vis Briton Ferry (no through service)
  - Cilfrew (now operated by CT - no Saturday service)
  - Glyncoed-Blaengwynfi (services combined - now two hourly)
  - Glynneath (reduced service by two companies)
  - Pencaerua (reduced service)
  - Longford (reduced service)
  - Cimla (reduced service)
  - Westernmore (reduced service)
  - Ystalyfera (reduced service Mon, Wed, Fri only)
  - Llandarcy, Leiros Park, Fairyland (reduced service Tue, Thu, Sat only)
  - Sunday services (reduced by five routes)
  - Evening services (services withdrawn apart from one)
  - Hospital services (withdrawn; lack of patronage)
14. WG have said that going forward the BSSG will have to be matched funded from the Council's revenue budget. Currently there are no bus services subsidised from the Council's revenue budget. If this route is perused by WG it will have a significant impact on bus services in NPT unless additional funding is found.
15. There are circa 37,000 concessionary cards in circulation in NPT; this is broken down into 32,000 over 60's concessionary cards and 5,000 disabled cards.
16. During 2017, bus services subsidised by the Council saw 102,202 concessionary fare journeys and 36,234 fare paying passengers being transported.

17. It should also be noted there are proposed changes to the Concessionary Card scheme. A summary of the consultation can be found on the link under background papers.

### **Financial Impact**

18. Depending on WG review of how BSSG is going to be funded going forward, there could be a significant impact on subsidised bus services in NPT.
19. A further report will be forthcoming once there is more clarity from WG.

### **Equality Impact Assessment**

20. There are no equality impacts associated with this report.

### **Workforce Impact**

21. There are no workforce impacts associated with this report.

### **Legal Impact**

22. There are no legal impacts associated with this report.

### **Risk Management**

23. There are no risk management issues associated with this report.

### **Consultation**

24. There is no requirement under the Constitution for external consultation on this item.

### **Appendices**

25. Appendix A - List of subsidised bus services

### **List of Background Papers**

26. <https://beta.gov.wales/mandatory-concessionary-fares-scheme-wales>

### **Officer Contact**

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## Appendix A

<b>Contract Number</b>	<b>Operator</b>	<b>Service Number</b>	<b>Route Description</b>
NPT/001	First Cymru	83	Pontrhydyfen to Blaengwynfi via Glyncoirwg <b>Mon to Sat, Daytime</b>
NPT/003	SWT(n)	256	Pontardawe to Rhos <b>Mon to Sat, Daytime</b>
NPT/004	First Cymru	X51	Alltycham Estate <b>Mon to Sat, Daytime</b>
NPT/005	Ridgways	66	Goytre to Port Talbot <b>Mon to Sat, Daytime</b>
NPT/006	First Cymru	59	Efail Fach to Tonmawr <b>Mon to Sat, Daytime</b>
NPT/007	SWT(n)	150	Leiros Park to Neath Victoria Gardens Tues, Thurs and Sat, Daytime
		153	Fairyland Estate to Neath Victoria Gardens Tues, Thurs and Sat, Daytime
		155	Llandarcy Village to Neath Victoria Gardens <b>Tues, Thurs and Sat, Daytime</b>
		121	Ystradgynlais to Cilmaengwyn <b>Mon, Wed and Fri, Daytime</b>
NPT/008	First Cymru	59	Neath Victoria Gardens to Pontrhydyfen <b>Mon to Sat, Evening</b>
NPT/009	First Cymru	X58	Seven Sisters to Banwen(main route) Mon to Sat, Daytime
			Onllwyn to Coelbren(additional route) <b>Mon to Sat, Daytime</b>
NPT/010	NAT	59	Banwen to Neath Victoria Gardens Sundays and Bank Holidays
		55	Min yr Awel to Neath Victoria Gardens <b>Sundays and Bank Holidays</b>
NPT/011	First Cymru	59	Pontrhydyfen to Neath Victoria Gardens Sundays and Bank Holidays
		56	Pontardawe to Neath Victoria Gardens <b>Sundays and Bank Holidays</b>