

Minutes of the Meeting of the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at the Council Chamber, Neuadd Cyngor Ceredigion, Penmorfa, Aberaeron and remotely on Wednesday, 5 April 2023

Present: Councillor Gwyn Wigley Evans (Chairman), Councillors Marc Davies (Vice-Chair), Gethin Davies, Meirion Davies, Rhodri Evans, Chris James, Maldwyn Lewis, Sian Maehrlein, Ann Bowen Morgan, John Roberts and Carl Worrall.

Also in attendance: Councillors Keith Henson (Cabinet Member), Hugh Hughes, Gareth Lloyd, Wyn Thomas (Cabinet Member) and Professor Stuart Cole CBE.

Officers in attendance: Phil Jones, Corporate Manager, Highways Services; Gerwyn Jones, Corporate Manager, Environmental Services; Chris Wilson, Traffic, Safety and Development Manager; Katy Spain, Service Manager- Transport Services; Nia Barker, Transport Officer; Lowri Edwards, Corporate Lead Officer: Democratic Services; Lisa Evans, Standards and Scrutiny Officer; Neris Morgans, Democratic Services Officer and Dwynwen Jones, Overview and Scrutiny Officer.

(10.00am- 12.54pm)

1 Apologies

No apologies were received.

2 Disclosures of personal interest (including whipping declarations) Members are reminded of their personal responsibility to declare any personal and prejudicial interest in respect of matters contained in this agenda in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 2000, the Council's Constitution and the Members Code of Conduct. In addition, Members must declare any prohibited party whip which the Member has been given in relation to the meeting as per the Local Government (Wales) Measure 2011.

- i. Councillor Chris James declared a personal interest under item 4.
- ii. Lisa Evans, Standards and Scrutiny Officer declared a personal and prejudicial interest in relation to item 4, in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Local Government Employees and withdrew from the meeting whilst the matter was being discussed.

3 Active travel update April 2023 and use of former railway lines for cycling / walking

Councillor Keith Henson (Cabinet Member for Highways and Environmental Services and Carbon Management) explained that the purpose of the report was to give an update on the developments since the previous report/discussion. A meeting had been held with Lee Waters MS, Deputy Minister for Climate Change on the 1st of December 2022 to provide an overview of Active Travel in Ceredigion. At present, there were only three Welsh Government-designated Active Travel Settlements in Ceredigion under the Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 (namely Aberystwyth, Cardigan and Lampeter) and therefore, there was an aspiration to expand on this. Thanks were extended to the service for progressing with the work to improve the accessibility of Active Travel and safety for the county.

Phil Jones, Corporate Manager: Highways Services explained that The Active Travel (Wales) Act 2013 places a duty on local authorities to plan for, improve, and promote routes for walking and cycling for everyday journeys. The authority was grateful to WG for the funding to improve the Active Travel network but having an improved plan for the next 3-5 years would be beneficial for all. An overview of the background as included in the report was provided. Given the aspirations to improve the railway links from Carmarthen to Aberystwyth, assurance was given by Elin Jones MS and Ben Lake MP in a recent meeting that these proposals would not be developed for a significant number of years, therefore essentially, it was possible to proceed with expanding Active Travel on those lines.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions which were answered by Officers, Professor Stuart Cole CBE and Councillor Keith Henson. The main points raised were as follows:

- Professor Stuart Cole CBE clarified that although WG had not confirmed whether they planned to develop the railway from Carmarthen to Aberystwyth which would cost approximately £800million, there was insufficient funding and not enough population to run the railway, hence why the T1 TrawsCymru was in place. In his opinion, it was very unlikely the railway would be developed in the next 30-40 years.
- Raising concerns with WG/ UK Government around the lack of or uncertainty with funding streams was important. In addition, further relaxation of the restrictions would benefit the whole county, not only the 3 towns named as Active Travel Settlements and it would also enable local authorities to plan resources better and deliver locally.
- Support was given to the utilisation of Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) powers, which may be required to acquire land for walking and cycling routes. Although it was considered a complex and lengthy process, the use of CPO in conjunction with discussions was considered important for delivering plans in the county. Work was done in the background to progress this including with Rhiw Goch Hill, Aberaeron.
- It was noted that not all routes would attract Active Travel Fund (ATF) and so other funding streams were being explored. Feedback following an unsuccessful grant application for *Cylch y Cardi* Trail Phase 1 Levelling Up Fund 2 (LUF2) (Transport) had not yet been received.
- An ATF application has been submitted for 100% funding for the first phase of the proposed IBERS to Waun Fawr active travel path. Work was ongoing to secure land for the preferred route.
- As no plans appeared to be in place to improve the route from Newcastle Emlyn to Llechryd, officers noted they would provide an update to the local member in due course.

Following questions by the Committee Members, it was agreed to note the report.

4 Ceredigion Bus Network

Councillor Keith Henson explained that WG managed a large proportion of the transport system in Wales and at present, the transport industry faced a challenging time. An overview of the contents of the report was provided including the local and wider context.

Gerwyn Jones, Corporate Manager: Environmental Services stated that the report was presented to Cabinet on 14 February 2023. A presentation was provided to the Committee outlining the following:

- Background
- Ceredigion's Current Network / Pre Covid-Network
- Strengths / Weaknesses
- Opportunities / Threats
- Short/ Mid/ Long Term
- Ceredigion's Future Network?
- Considerations
- TrawsCymru/ BwcaBus Branding
- Transport Information
- ULEV Transition

Professor Stuart Cole CBE noted that the situation was similar in many places, and although the solution was different for each local authority, it was similar for rural areas such as Ceredigion and neighbouring authorities. It was reported that Covid-19 had a significant impact on the number of people travelling on public transport, including the TrawsCymru. Following the introduction of BwcaBus in 2008, research had been undertaken on public transport in rural areas, and as a result, TrawsCymru was introduced in 2012, with BwcaBus and local buses feeding into the network. 2.6million passengers had travelled on TrawsCymru in 2019, which was a significant increase from numbers prior to 2012, however, passengers had not yet returned to pre-covid numbers, including the T1 route (Carmarthen-Aberystwyth) which had only returned to 60%. The reliability, frequency and precept of services were deemed key to attracting more passengers, along with accessibility, such as information signs and timetables.

It was reported that although Lee Waters MS, Deputy minister for Climate Change was eager for more people to travel on public transport, there were very clear differences in the availability of services in urban and rural areas. The subsidy for transporting Concessionary Travel Card holders was very small compared to the price of a ticket, but hopefully, WG would not end this arrangement.

Members were provided with the opportunity to ask questions which were answered by Officers, Professor Stuart Cole CBE and Councillor Keith Henson. The main points raised were as follows:

- A procurement process would commence shortly for the routes Ceredigion County Council held responsibility for, with the aim of new contracts being in place by September 2023. Officers warned that the situation would possibly worsen again before any improvements were seen and that there was a challenging time ahead.

- It was noted that the Megabus service which had run from Aberystwyth to London prior to Covid-19 was run by Stagecoach, a commercial company and so there was no requirement on the company to restore the service post Covid-19. Commercial companies ran services based on whether routes made a profit but if there was a demand for the service, it may be worth discussing with the company.
- Concerns were raised with the changes to the 585 service (Aberystwyth- Tregaron- Lampeter) given that the two buses removed from the timetable were suitable for the elderly who depended on the service. Officers explained that although the service was not ideal, had it not been for discussions with the operator of this route, there would currently be no service in place.
- Public transport should be accessible for all, and it was important to ensure the disabled and elderly could access buses without any difficulty.
- Despite WG's vision of increasing the use of public transport, concerns were raised about the lack of funding to achieve this, especially in rural areas, therefore this needed to be raised with WG.
- At present, local authorities undertook the commissioning work for TrawsCymru, but Transport for Wales (TfW) would gradually take on this role. The level of service would depend on WG funding.
- Discussions around ULEV/ hydrogen were ongoing, and consideration was given to the role of electricity and the grid's lack of capacity. Last week, 8 electric buses operated on the T1 TrawsCymru route (Aberystwyth-Carmarthen) with charging facilities located in Carmarthen. Aberystwyth had been identified as a hub by TrawsCymru, and so WG and TfW were exploring options for the future. Although no date had been set by TfW to convert their fleet to ULEV, it was vital to ensure the correct infrastructure was in place. In addition, work was ongoing to hopefully create a transport interchange at Synod Inn, which will possibly include an option to charge vehicles.
- It was highlighted that the environmental argument for using public transport could diminish if all cars were converted to electric or hydrogen. Given this, it was noted that the overall aim environmentally was to reduce the need to travel, which had reduced significantly with Covid-19.
- A motion to discuss Ceredigion's bus network had been put forward for Full Council on 20 April 2023.

Councillor Keith Henson extended his thanks to the Officers present for their work and stated that there were clearly many challenges within the county and further afield. Thanks were also extended to Professor Stuart Cole CBE for his input from a National perspective. Funding and a shift in the public's view to understanding the benefits of travelling on Public Transport regionally was vital but being able to travel locally was also very important. Feedback had been positive since the launch of the T1 TrawsCymru electric buses last week, and in moving forward, WG needed to have discussions with suppliers due to the long order lead times of vehicles. In addition, concerns regarding

the grid's capacity were being raised with National Grid and WG, and very recently, the Significant Code Review had come into force.

The Chair also extended his thanks to all involved and explained that the meeting had been beneficial to gain an understanding of the full picture.

Following questions by the Committee Members, it was agreed to note:

1. The acute and numerous pressures and challenges the transport industry as a whole is experiencing which is exacerbated locally.
2. The subsequent pressure arising on the Council and the Service in seeking to manage the situation, which includes stakeholder expectations and the timelines associated with decisions and actions being implemented.
3. The action taken by the Service to manage the situation and reduce what will still be a significant in-year over-spend in 2022/23.
4. The approach being adopted with a view of delivering services within the budget allocation.

5 To confirm the Minutes of the previous Meeting and to consider any matters arising from those Minutes

It was agreed to confirm the minutes of the meeting held on 21 March 2023.

Matters arising: None.

6 To consider the Overview and Scrutiny Forward Work Programme

It was agreed to note the contents of the Forward Work Programme presented subject to the following:

- Report on tourism in Ceredigion
- Due to no response from National Resources Wales regarding their availability for 22 June 2023, it was suggested that the Officer contact them again.

Confirmed at the Meeting of the Thriving Communities Overview and Scrutiny Committee held on 22 June 2023

Chairman: _____

Date: _____