

MEETING	DWYFOR AREA COMMITTEE
DATE	18 MAWRTH, 2013
TITLE	PUBLIC TRANSPORT AND EDUCATION TRANSPORT IN DWYFOR
PURPOSE:	Provide Background to the Retendering Process
REPORT BY	ALED DAVIES, HEAD OF REGULATORY DEPARTMENT
CABINET MEMBER	COUNCILLOR W GARETH ROBERTS

1. The process of retendering Dwyfor's transport services is part of the retendering programme across the whole of Gwynedd, with Meirionnydd completed and Arfon to receive attention before the end of the year.
2. As reported to the Committee in the special meeting on 1 March 2013, not all of the analysis and assessment work has been completed by the date of writing this report, and therefore, the information that can be provided in this report is limited. The report presented to the Special Area Committee contains the necessary background and a copy is attached as Appendix A to this report.
3. Tenders were invited to provide public transport and Education transport in the Dwyfor Area on 15 January 2013. The tenders were returned on 25 February 2013. Since then, staff from the Integrated Transport Unit have been working with staff from the Procurement Unit to analyse and make a full assessment of all the offers received. In compliance with the expected procedure, this assessment takes into account matters including price and quality before forming a recommendation to offer contracts – this means that it is not necessarily the lowest price that wins the tender.
4. In accordance with the promise made by the Cabinet Member when information was presented to Dwyfor Area members at the beginning of the process in the Area Committee meeting held on 17 September 2012, it is intended to present feedback to the Area Committee on the process' results and on the transport route options before final decisions on the contract proposals are taken.
5. It should also be kept in mind that much of the information regarding the tendering processes is sensitive commercial information and as such it cannot be included in the report nor reported fully orally in the meeting on 18 March. One of the main reason is that the contracts will not have been awarded and so the prices and names of the companies on specific bus routes must be kept confidential.
6. The aim is to start new services from the 1st April 2013 onwards.
7. However, attention has been given to the concerns noted by the members about the provision of transport for learners. The precise starting dates for some of the education contracts will depend on the Council's ability to agree contracts with the providers and the degree of change that is likely to happen. For example, changing providers or changing from a bus to a mini bus or taxi is not considered a basic change in provision nor are changes that mean

providing smaller vehicles to meet a larger bus on a main transport route. It is foreseen that the majority of the provision will fall into the category where there will not be considerable change.

8. Once the review of the tender results has been completed, the unit will focus on preparing timetables for the public and informing the schools of any changes, including preparing new bus passes. It is important to emphasise that education transport policy is not being changed as part of this process.

9. The Committee should keep in mind that it is the transport services' retendering process in its entirety that is at issue here, it is not a process of retendering education buses only. The whole of the network will receive attention, including the taxi services and on call services, which will influence the final provision that will be commissioned through the process.

10. At present, £692,292.05 is spent on public transport subsidy in the Dwyfor area; £1,213,824.89 for education transport by bus and £491,747.00 for transporting learners by taxi and by parents. As some services in Dwyfor have not been tendered for over 20 years, it is unavoidable that the numbers of learners have changed. In principle, efficiency savings should be gained and opportunities identified to obtain value for public money from the retendering process. This is key, considering the cuts in public transport grants by the Welsh Government.

11. Retendering is also an opportunity to ensure that the services that are being provided conform with the Council's procurement rules and policies. It is not possible to state with certainty that this has been happening under the present arrangements.

Questions raised by members

12. The main concerns expressed by members are about education transport. Answers to some of the questions are offered in the following paragraphs. It will be more appropriate to respond to others when there is a clearer picture of the process results. I am confident that the majority of these can be dealt with in the Meeting on 18 March 2013.

13. An important step in the retendering process for education transport was to look at the location of each learner's home in relation to the location of the school, and structure the tenders around the learners who have the right to education transport, namely those who are in:

- i) Primary Schools – transport for learners who live 2 miles or more from the school whose catchment area they live in or to the nearest school.
- ii) Secondary School - transport for learners who live 3 miles or more from the school whose catchment area they live in or the nearest school.
- iii) Transport for Learners with additional learning needs or disabilities in accordance with the recommendations of the Special Education Needs Joint Committee.

This was done using the full register of schools given either by the schools or through the SIMS system.

14. Firstly, it must be emphasised that transport is procured in three forms, namely:

- i) A bus for school use only
- ii) Public transport

iii) Mini buses and taxis (8 seater vehicles or less)

15. In the case of transport from Llithfaen to Ysgol Pentreuchaf, it was considered that the best way of providing service for learners would be by ticket from the provider. Unfortunately, the provider refused the offer and therefore a request for prices for a 16 seater bus was published at the beginning of March, as part of a cluster of journeys including college travel. The prices received will be considered as part of the wider assessing process.

16. In the case of transport from Uwchmynydd to Ysgol Crud y Werin and Ysgol Bownnog, the tenders for providing two taxis closed on the 4th March. Transport will be provided for those who live over 2 miles from the Junior School and who have made an application for transport. All of the children of secondary school age who live in the Uwchmynydd area will receive transport through one of the methods noted with a connection to the 318 bus service in Aberdaron to Botwnnog.

17. In the Meeting members expressed the opinion that the rural roads on the Llŷn Peninsula cannot be differentiated and that every one of them is dangerous. The Committee must note that the policy states that transport should be provided when a road is especially dangerous and that the assessment takes into consideration that there is an expectation that children are accompanied by an adult. The assessments are conducted on the basis of specific criteria and on the basis of the present level of traffic. These roads cannot be assessed as a group, they must be assessed on how dangerous they are individually. To assist members to respond to questions and requests they might receive, it is intended to provide a copy of the assessment guidelines for each member in the coming days.

18. With regards de-minimis contracts, it is true to say that they are a means or a tool of procuring service. However, their scope is to provide parts of services rather than services in their entirety. The over use of de-minimis contracts is one of the reasons why the Council cannot state with certainty that the present transport provision gives value for money. Legislation states that we cannot over use de-minimis contracts. Tendering processes enable fair and transparent competition and can provide a simple and clear proof of value for money.

19. It must be remembered that the Council has arrangements, wherever possible, to take advantage of empty seats on the education transport only contracts that are provided. Learners who are not eligible for free transport can take advantage of the empty seats scheme once the results of the retendering process has been reviewed completely. As noted in paragraph 7, the unit will be concentrating on communicating and sharing information with stakeholders and will respond to Empty Seats Scheme applications.

Presentation to the Committee.

20. The oral presentation will try to reassure the committee that the proposed arrangements for providing statutory transport for eligible learners is in accordance with the Council's policies and arrangements.

21. The information presented on public transport will focus on any basic changes to the present provision. It is possible that there will be changes to the services' times and possibly the frequency of services in some cases – but it is also possible that there will not be any change in the present services. Attention will be paid to ensuring a suitable service provision, that is sustainable and gives value for money and offers suitable travelling opportunities to access work and education.

22. Although this cannot be guaranteed at present, the hope is that the results of the assessment work will mean that only a few cases will need detailed attention in the discussions.

23. It is important to note that a healthy response has been received for the tendering process and the Council has received competitive prices and timetables drawn up by companies. This recognises that the companies have understood the need and can use their resources to their full potential.