146 BUS SERVICE PUBLIC MEETING MINUTES

DATE: 9TH AUGUST 2016

TIME: 6PM-7.30PM

VENUE: WHITE HORSE INN, OVERTON

**PRESENT: APOLOGIES:**

RICHARD HOBSON – PRESENTING KEN SKATES AM

EMMA OULTON – PRESENTING CLLR DAVID A BITHELL

JENNY MILLER – MINUTE TAKING CLLR LLOYD KENYON

MP SUSAN ELAN JONES CLLR DANA DAVIES

CLLR RODNEY SKELLAND CLLR JOAN LOWE

MABON AP GWYNFOR- PLAID CYMRU CLLR JOHN PRITCHARD

CARRIE HARPER – PLAID CYMRU CLLR PAUL BLACKWELL

JOHN HURST – SESSWICK CC JIM WILD – ERBISTOCK CC

PENE COLES – OVERTON CC IAN LUCAS MP

SYRIL BREMMER – RUABON CC CLLR ANDREW BAILEY

SEAN MERRY – BANGOR ON DEE CC CLLR PAUL ROGERS

**PUBLIC AUDIENCE:** APPROXIMATELY 150 PEOPLE, INCLUDING THOSE DOWNSTAIRS IN THE PUB AREA WHO COULD NOT FIT IN THE ROOM.

MANY MEMBERS OF PUBLIC HAVE BEEN IN TOUCH TO SAY THAT THEY WERE UNABLE TO ATTEND THE MEETING IN OVERTON AS THERE WERE NO BUSES RUNNING!

**Please note: I have not named every person speaking as it was a public meeting but I have tried to include everything was said at the meeting. Apologies if I have not named you personally.**

AGENDA

See attached Agenda document.

MEETING MINUTES

Em welcomed and thanked everyone for coming to our meeting and read through the agenda quickly.

Richard led with an update of the state of play communication from WCBC council. The 146 bus route and other routes are open to tender at the moment. The tender process closes on Friday 12th August. He refers to an email update provided by Cllr David A Bithell. This update shows all the bus routes that are currently up for tender with WCBC at the moment. <ATTACHED>

Richard pointed out that WCBC knew about the difficulties GHA were experiencing long before they announced their closure to staff, so they did have some time to put in place a contingency plan. WCBC seem to be attempting to deflect the blame over to Welsh Government. Some routes effected by GHA’s closure were covered with immediate effect, yet our 146 route has not ran for nearly 4 weeks now. Its causing a crisis in our community. Why is there no emergency bus cover? Even if it was 1 bus in the morning and 1 in the evening it would allow some people to hold down jobs and appointments.

Cllr Lloyd Kenyon sent his apologies and did not attend the meeting today due to prior commitments with the Shrewsbury Flower Show. Many of the members of the public expressed their disappointment as he is the local councillor for Overton and Penley which are largely effected by the lack of bus service. Cllr Kenyon suggested in an email that he counted only 5 people using the 146 bus service in Hanmer. The public group believe that the service was usually well used and full, although most customers get off the bus in Overton, Bangor on Dee and Penley so it may be quieter by the time the bus goes through the village of Hanmer. People did not feel this is fair assessment of the 146 buses use. Cllr Kenyon suggested in an email that there was “Counsellor Bashing” occurring, however the audience expressed their frustration that he is not being seen to be supporting the community with the issue with Buses and other issues too.

There was only one Cllr present at our meeting from WCBC. Cllr Rodney Skelland made himself known. The public audience expressed disappointment in the lack of attendance of Cllrs. When ITV Wales News asked WCBC for a statement regarding the 146 bus service, they declined to comment.

A lady in the audience described how her elderly 70 year old neighbour had to walk from Cross Lanes into Wrexham emergency Dentist and back as not able to use the bus. This left the pensioner feeling tired and unwell.

Another lady in the audience added she has noticed a mother walking with her young children between Overton and Penley, along roads that have no pavements and have blind bends. It is very dangerous and we fear someone may be killed on these hazardous roads. Due to not having a bus service people are left with no choice but to walk the route, taking a risk.

A gentleman from the public posed the question, “Is the reason for the lack of bus service Political or Financial?” We all agree this is what we need to determine.

Em Oulton described what happened when her former employer dismissed her due to not being able to attend work as there were no buses. Em was unable to confirm when she would be able to get a bus again and resume work. A return taxi fare would have cost £50 and this equates to nearly her daily wage. Em was dismissed on the grounds that she could not reliably commute to and from work.

A man in the audience who explained he suffers from Epilepsy and is unable to drive, so depends on the bus service to travel independently, he said he concerned about where the lack of bus service leaves him. He is not able to leave his village at the moment.

Susan Elan Jones MP addressed the meeting. She made a few points, firstly she was disappointed at the lack of representation from Cllrs and Executives from WCBC. She said the public have a right to ask questions and have them answered. Susan also said that the proposed timetable clearly isn’t going to work, unless users are “First class Sprinters” and can sprint out of work to get the station in time to catch the last bus at 5.15, she mentions there should have been public consultation regarding the major change to time table and this hasn’t happened. Susans final point was that the public need to be given a full explanation as to what is happening and their expectations set as to when their bus service will be resumed. Susan said she will be contacting WCBC to discuss this and push for some answers and actions.

A gentleman from the audience discussed the changes to Local Transport Plan, under Section 109, the Council are obliged to conduct a public consultancy, this has not been fulfilled.

Many people expressed their concerns about the school buses and especially with the changes to transport for 6th formers who are expected to make their own way to school or college. Many 6th formers are dependent on 146 bus to take them to The Maelor School in Penley, but they will be unable to get there if there is no bus service. This could have a detrimental effect on their education and future employability.

The Maelor School, Penley have a private bus contract with Pats coaches to cover their school runs and College Cambria have reported that they are currently looking at providing their own bus system, full details are to be confirmed. 100 Drivers from GHA have been employed by Arriva. Some unused buses are parked in the Maelor school bus park. Why can’t these buses be used to provide an emergency service?

The residents from Whitchurch use the 146 service to go to Colleg Cambria, again they will not be able to finish their course in College if this bus service is now running reliably. Also in Whitchurch, many expectant mothers use the maternity facilities at the Wrexham Maelor Hospital and they have been unable to attend appointments if they rely upon the 146 bus service.

Em discussed the petition that has been circulating and has been signed by approximately 300 people already. We will continue to collect signatures before presenting it to WCBC.

Em presented 2 timetables to the meeting. The first timetable is from before the bus service ceased, showing 11 buses running per day. The second timetable was the proposed timetable reduced to only 4 buses to Wrexham and 3 to Whitchurch per day, with a caveat stating that these times can be amended. The meeting agreed unanimously that reduced timetable was not practical. If people need to get a connection bus to commute into another village, town or city, a much earlier bus will be required to allow for the connection in order to start work at 9am. Also the last bus planned for 5.15pm is unrealistic. A lot of people do not finish work until after 5pm and they will be unable to get the bus home, so a later bus is required. Most people accept that a reduction in the number of buses per day will need to happen, however, the cuts on proposed new timetable are too severe and the times are not practical. Richard said that he has spoken with WCBC and has been told that the 146 bus will also be used to cover the Trevalyn route when it is not running on the Whitchurch 146 service.

A lady from the audience asked what research has been used to devise the new reduced timetable that is proposed for tender? It may have been an old timetable that was used many years ago. It is not fitting for today’s lifestyle and working hours.

A former bus driver was in the audience and commented that the rural routs are not desirable for bus companies unless they are subsidised by the council and are paid upfront. He feels that the council will have difficulty getting a company to service the 146 route now it is not subsided.
Jenny said that it is unfair that bus companies are allowed to cherry pick the most lucrative routes. Also the 146 bus service is far from being a “Rural route” as it links 2 large towns together (Whitchurch and Wrexham).

Richard explained that he had looked into the possibility of purchasing a bus for the 146 route. He was told that he would be prosecuted if he arranged this as an Operator’s License is required, this takes 3 months to complete meaning no service would be available until December. The bus services are being held back by bureaucratic processes and paperwork. The quickest way to gain a bus service is for the council to authorise an existing company to operate on the route whilst the tender contract is going on.

Em discussed her concern about elderly and vulnerable people not being able to attend critical medical appointments both at the Overton and Bangor on Dee GP Surgeries but also at the Maelor Hospital. Em mentioned she personally had to cancel a hospital appointment because she was unable to get there. Em is concerned that the isolation caused by the lack of buses may lead to depression and people being cut off from society.

A lady from the audience expressed her concerns also about the vulnerable and needy and is concerned that WCBC are not displaying a “duty of care” in their handling of this situation. WCBC have a duty of care to ensure that people are not isolated and missing important appointments. The Social Services Department may need to become involved to ensure that vulnerable people are getting access to everything they need.

The lack of buses is impacting local businesses as their customers who are bus users are unable to get to our area. A lady from the audience who works within Support Services mentioned that Health Visitors are struggling to make more home visits as people cannot get to clinic on public transport.

A man from the audience asked for a show of hands in the audience to show how many people hold a bus pass. Approximately 50 people from 150 held bus passes. Now there are no buses in our area and this is failing Pensioners.

There are no pavements on the roads between Penley and Overton Bangor on Dee and Overton etc. Where there are pavements, they are over grown and unusable. Due to lack of buses, people are attempting to walk along these dangerous roads and the meeting all agreed that they fear there would be a fatality. If WCBC are going to allow new properties to be built in the villages, they will also need to ensure that the roadways and public walkways are also updated. We agree that this is not the main issue today but needs to be said.

In Penley there are no resources for children, the park is not fit for purpose and Morris Homes have said they are not going to build a new park on the new housing development, they are yet to donate the funds to the local schools instead. Children in the villages are not able to attend the free swimming and play events offered by WCBC if they not able to get into Wrexham town on the bus. Teenagers in the villages are not able to travel independently on the bus due to the lack of services, and there is no late bus on the proposed new timetable.

A man from the audience suggested the meeting organisers and community councillors need to form an official action committee, who are formally recognised by WCBC. The committee will need to work with the community council, WCBC and liaise with the media. Em, Richard and Jenny are happy to continue working and to establish a formal committee and invite other members to join the new committee.

THE MEDIA

We have had coverage on both ITV and BBC Wales News, The Wrexham Leader and Shropshire Star were both present at the meeting. Once the formal Bus Committee is set up, we will invite the press to provide updates on an ongoing basis.
Jenny will contact the local magazines “Essential” and “The Rainbow Centres Leaflets” and ask them to include an article about the bus service.

MOVING FORWARD

We need to set up an official Bus Committee. Em, Richard and Jenny all agreed to continue working on the committee and invited new members from local areas to join them.  *Anyone who wishes to join the local bus committee just needs to ask.*

The Community Councils and Bus Committee need to set up a meeting, ideally with WCBC to discuss this further.

Ken Skates AM is on annual leave at the moment, Jenny will try and set up a meeting with Ken once he has returned to work.

The public will continue to write to (email) WCBC, councillors, Welsh Assembly Members until this situation is resolved.

Richard will create some flyers to distributed in the villages to explain to non-internet users, what is happening.

Em has agreed to phone non internet users to keep them informed and up to date with issues regarding the bus service.

The Bus Committee and Community Councils will work on a mechanicalness to allow people who need help with lifts into the towns to gain help, and drivers with room in their cars to offer lifts. We hope to act swiftly on this.

We are going to request a refund and reduction in our rate due to lack of services.

We will protest outside the council offices and Guild Hall if a bus service is not reinstated soon.

The Petition needs to be continued to distributed and signed by everyone in all the villages.

WHAT THE PUBLIC NEED TO DO

The new Bus Service Committee are in the process of forming. Anyone who wishes to join the Committee can do so by contact Richard, Em or Jenny.

* Stay in touch with the Bus Committee and let us know if you hear anything regarding bus service.
* Continue to email WCBC and tell them how the lack of bus service is effecting you personally.
* If you can distribute flyers and the Petition, please can you let us know.
* If you able to offer lists into Wrexham or Whitchurch, please can you post on Facebook or liaise directly with neighbours if you think they are struggling to get to town. Please can you let us know about this so we can record the gesture officially.

**Contact details for current committee members: -**

Em Oulton Tel: 07713745109 or Email: elouton89@hotmail.co.uk

Richard Hobson Tel: 07725 831280 or Email: RDH38@hotmail.com

Jenny Miller Tel: 07921 659099 or Email: jennymiller08@hotmail.co.uk

We are also liaising with the Community Councils in the area and any correspondence will be shared with each appropriate Community Council.

Please can everyone let us know if you receive any information relating to the Bus Service issues.