

Cabinet – 19th November 2024

Public Participation – Questions from the public

1. Question from David Redgewell Southwest Transport Network, Dorset catch the bus campaign

With the Dorset bus service improvement plan and the need to improve bus and coach services.

With the start of the school term

The Charmouth Primary school. School bus contract was awarded from Go ahead group South coast buses Damory coaches to ECT group of London Dorset community transport company.

But with no provision to provide the linked service 71 Lyme Regis Town service funded by Lyme Regis Town Council.

With a 16 seater bus by DCT why was this Tender not discussed with Lyme Regis Town Council and the stakeholders and passengers groups or at the public Transport forum of West Dorset Transport action Group.

and also With the Tupe arrangement RMT bus drivers were not transferred to Dorset community transport company.

So as the Lyme Regis Town Council want to continue this service especially passengers who have difficulties climbing the hills in Lyme Regis and those with reduced mobility and partly sighted passengers.

What discussions are now taking place with Lyme Regis Town Council and ECT GROUP Dorset community transport company to provide a bus for the Lyme Regis Town service for community of Lyme Regis.

Response by Cllr Jon Andrews

The Lyme Regis town bus service (71) was arranged between the bus operator, Damory and Lyme Regis Town Council, making use of the fact that a bus was in the area following the school run. The town service was not managed or funded by Dorset Council.

Dorset Council had a contract with Damory to operate the school bus to Charmouth Primary school. The Council had to end this contract because the vehicle was no longer suitable for its needs and Damory could not offer a suitable alternative. The number of children needing transport to the primary school was 11. Dorset Council was paying for a 32-seater bus which was far too big for its needs. The larger bus was not always suitable for picking up children who live in remote parts of the area, meaning the Council had to fund additional taxis to pick up them up, despite there being spare seats on the bus.

From September 2024, the Council therefore started a new contract for the Charmouth Primary school bus using a 16-seater minibus. This is a more appropriate size for the number of pupils and to access remote narrow lanes.

We had discussions with the Deputy Town Clerk from the Town Council and Councillor Belinda Bawden on 5th June 2024, when we realised that we had to retender the route. We kept them updated throughout the process and informed him of the winning bidder as soon as we knew, so that they could start negotiations. Unfortunately, the winning operator was unable to take on the Town service.

TUPE transfers are arranged between the operators themselves because the Council does not employ the drivers directly. Under the terms of our procurement framework, the Council has a responsibility to facilitate a TUPE transfer if the incumbent operator believes that TUPE applies. In this case, when the route was retendered, Damory did not declare that TUPE would apply and the Council did not receive a request to facilitate a TUPE transfer.

We understand that the town council is considering options for the town service and we have given details of potential grant funding that may be available to support a new service if they wish to make an application.

NB the questions and statements received in relation to the Wareham Level Crossing were not dealt with due to the item being withdrawn from the agenda.