



Our Ref: SW

Environment and Sustainability

Passenger Transport Unit

Woodhill House

Westburn Road

Aberdeen

AB16 5GB

www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Please ask for: Susan Watt

Direct Dial: 01467 537845

Email: susan.m.watt@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

16th May 2023

If you have difficulty reading this document, please contact Susan Watt on 01467 537845

Dear Sir/Madam

Kincardine & Mearns Area Bus Forum

I write to inform you that the next meeting of the K&M Area Bus Forum will be held on **Monday 29th May 2023 between 7.30pm and 9.00pm in the Council Chambers in Viewmount, Arduthie Road, Stonehaven.**

I enclose an Agenda along with relevant background information. Copies of the latest minutes can be obtained on our website, and paper copies will be available at the upcoming meeting. If you are currently receiving postal correspondence and would like to change to email, please let us know.

We would also be grateful if you could **respond to this invitation by email, if you are able to attend**, as this will allow us to plan the venue layout accordingly, whilst reducing the likelihood of overcrowding. If you have no email facility, please call the Passenger Transport Unit (see below).

Should you require transport to/from the meeting, please contact the Passenger Transport Unit on 01467 538138 by noon on Wednesday 24th May 2023 or alternatively you can email us at public.transport@aberdeenshire.gov.uk by no later than 24th May 2023.

Yours faithfully

Susan Watt
Principal Officer
Local Bus Services

KINCARDINE AND MEARN'S AREA BUS FORUM

**Viewmount Council Chambers,
Stonehaven
Monday 29 May 2023
7.30 pm - 9.00 pm**

AGENDA

1. Welcome and Introduction
2. Minutes of Meeting on 5th October 2022
3. Matters arising from the Minutes (if applicable)
4. Stagecoach Bluebird: Update
5. Aberdeenshire Council: Update
6. Public Transport Infrastructure/Information
7. Physical Accessibility Matters
8. Bus Service Discussion
 - *Laurencekirk Services*
 - *Mearns Coast Services*
 - *Newtonhill and Portlethen Services*
 - *Stonehaven Services*
 - *Other Services*
9. A.O.B.
9. Next Meeting: Autumn/Winter 2023 (date to be advised)

KINCARDINE AND MEARN'S AREA BUS FORUM

MINUTES OF MEETING ON WEDNESDAY 5th OCTOBER 2022

COUNCIL CHAMBERS, VIEWMOUNT, STONEHAVEN

In Attendance

Councillor W. Agnew (Aberdeenshire Council) (Chair)

Councillor S. Dickinson (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor J. Goodhall (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor C. Victor (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor M. Sullivan (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor K. Stelfox (Aberdeenshire Council)

Councillor A. Evison (Aberdeenshire Council)

Neil Stewart (Principal Officer, Aberdeenshire Council)

Susan Watt (Senior Transport Officer, Aberdeenshire Council)

Norman Scott (Stagecoach Bluebird)

Paul Dyche (Stagecoach Bluebird)

Peter Flockhart (Newtonhill, Muchalls and Cammachmore Community Council)

Ainslie Thomson (Bus User)

Apologies

Ian Bennett

Sheena Adam

1. Welcome and Introduction

Councillor Agnew welcomed everyone to the meeting and introductions were given.

2. Minutes of Meeting on 31st October 2019

The minutes were approved.

3. Matters arising from the Minutes

- In response to the request for Service 8A/8C (Stonehaven Town Service) timings to be amended to improve connections on Barclay Street, Paul Dyche confirmed that currently the service operates on a 30-minute headway, providing connections where possible at Barclay Street, with buses heading north and south, and any revisions would affect the scheduling of the whole timetable, so there are no plans to revise the service.
- In response to the request for Service 8A/8C (Stonehaven Town Service) to serve Stonehaven Community Hospital, Paul Dyche confirmed that, due to insufficient time within the current timetable, and the implications of rescheduling, there are no plans to revise the timetable.
- It is currently not commercially viable to retard the 2155 hours ex Aberdeen – Portlethen (Monday to Saturday).



- Neil Stewart confirmed that a Stonehaven Traffic Management Review is being undertaken, which included public consultation up until April 2022. Councillor Agnew passed an update to Neil, this allowing him to confirm that feedback supported additional parking on Barclay Street, with the bus stops relocated to Allardice Street.
- In response to the request for Service 7B (Stonehaven – Newtonhill – Portlethen – Aberdeen) to be speeded up by omitting some places currently served, Paul Dyche confirmed that each area requires to be covered by this service, so there are no plans to do this.
- In response to the request to commence the operation of Service 8A/8C (Stonehaven Town Service) earlier on Saturday mornings, Paul Dyche confirmed that there are currently no plans to revise the service, but the situation would continue to be monitored.

4. Stagecoach Bluebird Update

Paul Dyche confirmed that whilst bus service revisions will be implemented on the 31 October 2022 in the Donside, Kemnay and Inverurie areas, following a service review, there are no plans to undertake a review of commercial services covering the Kincardine and Mearns Area this year.

5. Aberdeenshire Council Update

Neil Stewart provided the following update:

- Early in the Covid 19 pandemic, a small number of services in the Kincardine and Mearns Area were suspended, then a review of supported services to contain spending within the allocated Budget for 2021/22 led to further withdrawals. However, later in 2021, a revised Budget meant we were able to reinstate all the journeys concerned.
- Following discussions with Stagecoach Bluebird, the company agreed to provide additional early morning journeys from Auchenblae at 0606 hrs and 0717 hrs to Laurencekirk on Council supported Service 26 (Stonehaven – Laurencekirk/Luthermuir) to connect with rail services. No additional funding was required from the Council, therefore usage of the journeys, which were introduced on 22 August 2022, will be monitored by the company.
- The Budget for financial year 2022/23 is all but fully committed, which means that cuts to existing supported service provision would need to be considered if there is a need to reinstate any journeys withdrawn from the commercial network.
- The Under 22 Entitlement Scheme has been rolled out and the number of cards being issued continues to increase. The Council appreciates that this has led to increased and changing demands throughout Aberdeenshire, most of which can be absorbed by the commercial network, but this is being monitored.

6. Public Transport Infrastructure / Information

- Claim that the information displayed in the timetable cases in Newtonhill is incorrect, with the example of St Michael's Road outside the Primary School.

This led to further claims that the information at both Stonehaven (Barclay Street) and Portlethen (Asda) is also incorrect.

Neil Stewart expressed his surprise as such information is provided by electronic registrations submitted by operators, so it should be up to date. He confirmed that this would be investigated as a matter of urgency.

(Post meeting update: it was confirmed that the sites listed have been investigated and information updated where required).

- Further claim that the Real Time electronic display units are not working on Barclay Street (Stonehaven) and Muirend Road, Asda (Portlethen).

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated at the same time and rectified.

(Post meeting update: it was confirmed that the electronic display units have been investigated and are working correctly)

- It was raised that the bus shelters located in Newtonhill have been targeted by graffiti.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would also be investigated and rectified.

(Post meeting: it was confirmed that graffiti has been removed from the bus shelters)

- Request for the replacement of the shelter which had to be removed from the A92 at Dunnottar Castle, following extensive damage.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this is currently being progressed.

(Post meeting: it was confirmed that two new shelters will be installed at both the northbound and southbound locations over the summer months.)

7. Physical Accessibility Matters

Neil Stewart confirmed that this section is added to provide an opportunity for disabled people and others with mobility concerns to raise and discuss any physical and other accessibility barriers to using bus services.

- On-going concerns were raised regarding the coaches allocated to Service X7 (Aberdeen – Stonehaven – Perth), relating to those with restricted mobility experiencing difficulties in accessing the stairways to the upstairs seating, if there are no seats available downstairs.

Paul Dyche confirmed that minor improvements had been undertaken, these being restricted by the structure of the interior of the vehicles.

- Request for the displays in timetable cases at bus stops/shelters to be printed in a larger font and for them to be at a lower level where possible. No specific locations were highlighted.

Neil Stewart confirmed that larger font is not possible as the system is standardised, but he would forward the comments to colleagues.

(Post meeting: it was confirmed that all timetables are printed in the standardised font. Timetable information can be provided at a lower level in cases where there is sufficient space and locations were asked to be provided, for this to be investigated.

- Request for a footpath to be installed on the A92 at Hillside, next to the flyer over (southbound) to allow accessibility for those boarding and alighting from the bus stop.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be investigated.

(Post meeting: it was confirmed that due to the bus stop located on the A92, it will be investigated by Transport Scotland on whether a footpath can be constructed. It was highlighted that the process can take a long period of time.)

8. Laurencekirk Services

- Request for service enhancements between Laurencekirk and Stonehaven, serving surrounding villages and connecting with services at Stonehaven. There was reference to increased demand from those entitled to Under 22s bus passes.

Neil Stewart confirmed that the existing supported Service 26 (Laurencekirk – Stonehaven), which serves Fordoun, Auchenblae and Drumlithie, connects with commercial bus services at Stonehaven (Barclay Street). He added that supported Service 9 (Laurencekirk – Montrose) can also provide an opportunity for onward travel to the south.

(Post Meeting: it is acknowledged that neither service operates in the evenings or on Sundays, and Service 26 also does not operate on Saturdays. The situation will continue to be monitored, bearing in mind the reference to funding under Item 4).

9. Mearns Coast Services

- Request for reinstatement of the evening journeys withdrawn from Service X7 with effect from 3 October 2022, with reference to the fact that the last northbound bus on Mondays to Saturdays is now 1805 hours ex Perth - Aberdeen (via Montrose 2014 hrs and Stonehaven 2027 hrs).

Paul Dyche confirmed that this was a commercial decision by Stagecoach East Scotland, so would relay this to that operator.

(For information, there is a 2052 hrs departure from Stonehaven to Aberdeen (Service 7B), operated by Stagecoach Bluebird).

- Concerns were expressed over the reliability of Service X7, with journeys being cancelled at short notice. There was reference to the weekday a.m. peak northbound journey departing Arbroath at 06:35 hours (via St Cyrus 0714 hrs; Inverbervie 0729 hrs and Stonehaven 0750 hrs) and the impact on workers and students, as well as the last southbound journey from Aberdeen departing at 2250 hours Monday to Saturday (2150

hrs Sunday), potentially leaving people with no means of alternative transport, stranded in Aberdeen.

Due to matters out with their control, Stagecoach East Scotland could not send a representative on the night.

(Post meeting: Stagecoach East Scotland met with the Council and explained the difficulties they have been experiencing with the recruitment and retention of drivers, as well as driver sickness. A number of drivers left the company during, and shortly after, the worst of the pandemic, and no recruitment could take place during that period. The company has since increased the rates of pay, introduced more family friendly shifts, and held a vigorous recruitment campaign. 35 new drivers are currently undergoing training which takes 3 months, but those who decide to leave their jobs can do so at one week's notice. Service X7 has suffered more than most as fewer drivers are trained on this long distance route.

In the meantime, senior management at the company have confirmed that operation of the above two journeys would be prioritised i.e., the a.m. peak journey to Aberdeen and the last timetabled bus south from the city.)

- Thanks were expressed to Jim Bowe (Principal Officer, Information & Infrastructure) for the work undertaken to access the bus stops on the A92 at Johnshaven and for his liaison with the Community Council in working towards a solution to the issue.

10. Newtonhill and Portlethen Services

- Request for Stagecoach Bluebird to consider the provision of a return journey between Chapelton and Newtonhill Primary School on a commercial basis. This follows the Council's decision to withdraw the contracted return journey on the basis that there is a safe walking route to/from school for children, if accompanied by a responsible adult, and they live within 2 miles walking distance from the school. It was stated that as many as 30 children would likely travel on such a service, with potential revenue to be accrued from the use of Under 22s bus passes.

Paul Dyche confirmed that he would relay this request to senior management but advised that parents/carers would need to supervise their children if such a service were provided.

- Request for Service X7 (Perth – Stonehaven – Aberdeen) to serve Portlethen (Asda) bus stop and a query as to why the service operates the length of Union Street.

Paul Dyche confirmed that the additional time required to serve Portlethen would create timing issues with the service and that there is demand to/from various bus stops on Union Street.

(Post meeting, Stagecoach East Scotland have confirmed that they will review the number of bus stops served on Union Street but there are no plans to serve Portlethen. Stagecoach Bluebird have already confirmed that they currently have no plans to serve Portlethen on their component of service X7 between Aberdeen and Stonehaven).

- Concerns were raised that, at times, the 0735 hours ex Portlethen - Aberdeen is operated by a minibus, resulting in some passengers not being uplifted due to insufficient seating capacity. It was stated that a minibus operated on Monday 3 October 2022.

Paul Dyche confirmed that arrangements would be made for no minibuses to be scheduled again on this journey.

- Query as to how many minibuses are based at Stagecoach's Stonehaven depot and whether there are plans to introduce electric or hydrogen buses on the corridor.

Paul Dyche confirmed that 8 minibuses are based at the depot. He also confirmed that the company has recently invested in 13 new electric buses for allocation within Aberdeen City. He added that further electric vehicles are already on order, though he could not confirm where they would be allocated.

- Claim that Berrymuir Road (Portlethen) is misspelt on the Service 7 vehicles' destination screens.

Paul Dyche confirmed that this would be investigated.

- Thanks were expressed to both Stagecoach companies for their operation of services during a testing time for their drivers when there were road works in Newtonhill whilst Caledonia Water Alliance undertook mains upgrades.

11. Stonehaven Services

- Request for additional journeys to operate between Stonehaven and Portlethen to provide a link for those travelling for work, shopping, dentist, etc.

Paul Dyche confirmed that Service 8 (Stonehaven – Portlethen) provides 3 inter-peak return journeys from Stonehaven to Portlethen (Monday to Saturday) but acknowledged that this would not fulfil all the travel requests.

(For information, Service 7B (Aberdeen – Chapelton/Stonehaven) links Stonehaven and Portlethen in the early mornings and during the evenings: Monday to Saturday).

- Request for Service 7 (Portlethen – Aberdeen) to be re-routed within Aberdeen to serve Wellington Road and Cove.

Paul Dyche confirmed that journeys which had previously served Wellington Road were withdrawn due to limited passenger numbers, whilst agreeing to record this request.

12. A.O.B

- Query as to who sets the fares for bus services on the Stonehaven – Newtonhill - Portlethen corridor. It was highlighted that there are discrepancies in the fares structure in terms of distance travelled e.g., more expensive per mile between Aberdeen and either Portlethen or Newtonhill, than from Aberdeen to Stonehaven.



There was a further comment from the floor that there are similar discrepancies on the Mearns coast.

Paul Dyche confirmed that the bus company sets the fares on these services, and he would report this to senior management.

Neil Stewart advised that there are usually commercial considerations per operating corridor, rather than a standard charge per mile.

- Query as to whether Stagecoach receives reimbursement from the Scottish Government of the full fare equivalent for passengers travelling with concession cards.

Susan Watt confirmed that, for the use of entitlement cards by those aged 60 and those with a disability, operators currently receive reimbursement of 55.9% of the adult single fare. In the case of Under-22 entitlement cards, reimbursement is 81.2% of the adult single fare for those aged 16 years and over, and 43.6% of the adult single fare for those under 16 years of age.

(For information: Transport Scotland is responsible for compensating bus operators for carrying these passengers. It has the objective that bus operators should be financially “no better off and no worse off” because of their participation in the scheme).

- Request for consideration to be given to the next Bus Forum meeting being a hybrid event, using *Teams* or *Zoom*, for those unable to attend.

Neil Stewart confirmed that this would be considered.

- Thanks were expressed from the floor to Neil Stewart for all his help and hard work over the years, both at Bus Forums and in his daily job, following his announcement that he would be retiring in November 2022.

13. **Next Meeting**

Neil Stewart confirmed that the next meeting would be in spring

Supported “fixed route” bus service revisions

Appendix 1

Following a Council review of supported “fixed route” bus services due to a reduction in the 2023/2024 revenue budget, the support for the services/journeys listed in the table below will be withdrawn from 12 June 2023. All existing supported “fixed route” bus services were ranked using a Performance Management Framework model (PMF model) to identify the poorest performing services/journeys. The PMF model ranks bus services against a set of agreed assessment criteria, including average subsidy per passenger; average number of passengers per journey; the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) ranking within catchment area of the service; primary trip purpose; car ownership within catchment area of service; and the percentage of population with restricted mobility within catchment area.

Service	Route	Journeys with council support withdrawn
5A	Echt - Westhill	0645 hrs ex Echt - Westhill and 1844 hrs ex Westhill - Echt (Monday to Friday).
6A	Westhill -Aberdeen	0605 hrs ex Westhill - Aberdeen (Saturday).
7A	Stonehaven – Aberdeen	0438 hrs ex Stonehaven – Aberdeen (Monday to Friday).
8A/8C	Stonehaven Town Service	Saturday hourly journeys.
35	Aberdeen – Turriff	2230 hrs ex Aberdeen – Turriff (Sunday).
51	Fraserburgh/ New Pitsligo – Ellon	Monday to Friday peak and interpeak service.
61A	Hatton Village – Cruden Bay – Peterhead	0537 hrs ex Hatton Mill – Peterhead (Monday to Friday).
64	Blackdog - Aberdeen	Monday and Thursday interpeak service.
66	Peterhead - Mintlaw - Stuartfield	2000 hrs ex Peterhead - Stuartfield (Monday to Friday).

Service	Route	Journeys with council support withdrawn
69	Fraserburgh - Inverallochy - St Combs	2205 hrs ex Fraserburgh – St Combs and 2225 hrs ex St Combs - Fraserburgh (Saturday).
69/69B	Peterhead - St Fergus - Fraserburgh	2017 hrs and 2237 hrs ex Peterhead – Fraserburgh and 2115 hrs and 2320 hrs ex Fraserburgh – Peterhead (Saturday).
74	Fraserburgh – Rosehearty	1915 hrs, 2030 hrs and 2140 hrs ex Fraserburgh – Rosehearty and 1928 hrs, 2043 hrs and 2153 hrs ex Rosehearty – Fraserburgh (Saturday).
81	Peterhead - Boddam	0518 hrs ex Peterhead – Boddam and 2323 hrs ex Boddam - Peterhead (Monday to Friday).
82	Peterhead Town Service (Meethill Circular)	0903 hours ex Chapel Street (Saturday).
82	Peterhead - Boddam	Sunday service.
201	Aberdeen – Aboyne - Braemar	Ballater and Braemar Sunday service.
231	Alford – Huntly	Interpeak return Saturday service.
270	New Pitsligo - Fraserburgh Circular	Saturday service.
272	Fraserburgh – Banff	Monday to Friday interpeak service.
405	Banff - Fordyce - Cullen	Wednesday and Friday interpeak service.

Aberdeenshire Council - Passenger Transport Unit (PTU) Contact List

Please find contact details below of teams within the PTU.

A2B DIAL-A-BUS SERVICES

Queries relating to *A2B dial-a-bus* services including Central Buchan A2B and Council-operated A2B services, please contact:

a2bdialabus@aberdeenshire.gov.uk 01467 535333

CLIENT TRANSPORT

Queries regarding Additional Support Needs (ASN) School Transport, Adult Social Care Transport and Mainstream School Transport, please contact:

ASN Transport asn.transport@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Adult Social Care socialcare.transport@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Mainstream School Transport school.transport@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

01467 533335 (Option 1 ASN, Option 3 Social Care, Option 4 Mainstream)

FARES AND TICKETING

Queries relating to bus fares:

public.transport@aberdeenshire.gov.uk 01467 536600

Queries relating to GrassHOPPER multi-operator bus tickets:

<https://www.grasshopperpass.com/> grasshopper@aberdeenshire.gov.uk 01467 536600

INFORMATION AND INFRASTRUCTURE

Queries relating to bus stop infrastructure, such as new stop/shelters requests, reporting problems with current stops/shelters infrastructure and real-time facilities, please contact:

public.transport@aberdeenshire.gov.uk 01467 539525



SUPPORTED LOCAL BUS SERVICES

Queries relating to council supported local bus services/journeys, please contact:

public.transport@aberdeenshire.gov.uk 01467 538138

Please note that any queries/concerns should be raised at the time of the issue, providing journey time and date.

THInC

For advice on transport to get to/from health or social care appointments:

travel@thinc-hub.org 01467 536111

Other Contact details:

Aberdeen City (PTU): PublicTransport@aberdeencity.gov.uk

Bus passes: entitlementcard@aberdeenshire.gov.uk 03456 081208



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The Data Protection Officer can be contacted at Town House, 34 Low Street, Banff, AB45 1AM. Email: dataprotection@aberdeenshire.gov.uk

Your information is being collected to use for the following purposes:

- To be notified of Area Bus Forum meetings
- To receive information regarding public transport proposals and developments
- To receive background papers for meetings

The Legal Basis for collecting the information is:

Consent	X
Performance of a contract	
Legal obligation	
Vital interests	
Task carried out in the public interest	

Please tick all that apply

Where the Legal Basis for processing is either Performance of a contract or Legal obligation, please note the following consequences of failure to provide the information:

Not Applicable

Your information will be shared with the following recipients or categories of recipient:

Not Applicable

Your information will be transferred to and stored in the following countries and the following safeguards are in place:

Not Applicable

The retention period for the data is:

7 years

The following automated decision-making, including profiling, will be undertaken:

Not Applicable

Please note that you have the following rights:

- to withdraw consent at any time, where the legal basis specified above is consent;
- to lodge a complaint with the Information Commissioner's Office;
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- to data portability, where the Legal basis specified above is i) consent or ii) performance of a contract;
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