

**BUTE DIAL-A-BUS**

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**1. SUMMARY**

To improve bus services in the West Cowal area by releasing the Dial-a-Bus from Bute and transferring clients of Dial-a-Bus to Interloch Transport.

**2. RECOMMENDATION**

That members agree to the withdrawal of the Bute Dial-a-Bus service and the transfer of existing clients to Interloch Transport.

**3. BACKGROUND**

Bute Dial-a-Bus along with Cowal Dial-a-Bus was inherited from Strathclyde Passenger Transport (SPT) in 1996 at the inception of Argyll and Bute Council.

Users of Dial-a-Bus are required to register with the Council to use the service. This is a demand responsive bus service primarily serving elderly and disabled/vulnerable members of the community who are unable to use conventional public transport due to age or infirmity. There are currently twenty nine registered users with only eight of these users having used the service regularly from 1 January 2008.

The service operates two days per week. Tuesday from 1100 until 1400 and Saturday from 1000 until 1600. Clients book the service the day before they wish to travel by calling the Council during designated times. Most journeys are to the local supermarket and Guildford Square to access the shops. Despite the service covering the whole island, journeys are rarely booked outwith Rothesay or to any other part of the island. The service is not well used.

During August 2007 attempts were made to improve passenger numbers and journeys by writing to all registered users reminding them of the journeys they could make and the days and times of availability. Posters were displayed in the Library, Hospital and other local outlets and work on publicising the service was carried out with the local Bute and West Cowal Transport Forum as well as through sheltered housing and elderly care establishments on the island. In addition, the Council's Area Transport Guide for Bute carries information on the Bute Dial-a-Bus and this guide is available at local outlets across the island. This generated some enquiries for further information but to date only two

additional users have registered to use the dial-a-bus. In 2006 and 2007 the figures were four and two respectively.

Passenger numbers during 2008 have been very poor. From 1 January 2008, combining Tuesday and Saturday journeys the highest number of passengers in any one week has been eight. During one week, combining Tuesday and Saturday only one passenger used the service.

The cost of the service to Argyll and Bute Council is £339.03 per week. This equates to a passenger subsidy of £339.03 per passenger when one person used the service and £42.37 when eight passengers used the service. This against the Guideline Criteria of £3.50 per passenger subsidy is not cost effective for the Council.

It is suspected that there are three reasons for the poor patronage. Firstly, the limited times at which the vehicle is available. Secondly, the fact that there have always been reasonably good bus services in the area and thirdly, there are other providers of similar transport to the elderly and disabled on the island.

## **5. PROPOSAL**

In an attempt to improve services across West Cowal, giving a more consistent approach to daily services, it is proposed to remove the Dial-a-Bus service on Bute to free up the vehicle to enable it to be used in the West Cowal area, in particular improving the service between Rothesay Portavadie Dunoon and Rothesay.

It is further proposed to transfer the Council's Dial-a-Bus clients to Interloch Transport Community Transport who have recently, following receipt of their new vehicle, begun to provide transport services in Bute.

Interloch Transport provide a comprehensive transport and assistance service to vulnerable or disabled clients of any age throughout rural Cowal and Dunoon to help relieve social isolation and to enable people to remain independent in their homes for longer. The vehicle to be used on Bute is an eight passenger seat fully disability compliant bus. Clients would utilise the service in a similar way to dial-a-bus by booking the journey a minimum of 24 hours in advance and with the added benefit of a driver/passenger assistant they will receive a higher level of service than with the current arrangements.

Interloch Transport will be offering transport services on Bute on Mondays and Fridays from 1000 until 1500. It is the intention that the Council would cease to register any new clients for Dial-a-Bus but would instead direct them to Interloch Transport to become registered and in turn be able to use the service Interloch Transport provides. The Council's existing twenty nine registered clients would transfer to Interloch Transport and the Council would continue to pay for these registered clients to use the service on two days per week.

## **6. COSTS**

As stated, the Council currently pays £339.03 per week to West Coast Motors for the current dial-a-bus service. There would be savings to the Council if the dial-a-bus clients transferred to Interloch Transport.

A negotiated standing charge rate of £130.00 per week has been agreed for Interloch Transport to take over the dial-a-bus clients. On top of this it has been agreed that the Council would pay the fare for their clients when they used the service. Interloch Transport's standing fare scale is:

Up to five miles - £1.00 each way  
Between five and ten miles - £2.00 each way  
Over 25 miles - £3.50 each way

While clients using the dial-a-bus service currently do not require to pay as they travel using their National Concessionary Travel Card, Interloch Transport being a community operator are not included in the scheme currently and require to charge clients for journeys.

Cost saving to the Council would be up to £209.03 per week which would be re-directed into improving services in the West Cowal area. Payment to Interloch Transport would continue until such time as all existing clients who had been transferred ceased to use the service.

## **7. TIMESCALE**

It is intended to withdraw the Bute Dial-a-Bus service and transfer the clients to Interloch Transport as soon as possible following approval of the recommendation.

## **8. IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 Policy – in keeping with Best Value
- 8.2 Financial – none, as savings would be used to enhance other services.
- 8.3 Personnel - none
- 8.4 Equal Opportunities – existing clients would receive an improved service at no additional cost and new clients would have to make a contribution to Interloch Transport
- 8.5 Legal - none

Further enquiries to Douglas Blades, Public Transport Officer, 01546 604193.

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