

Committee: **Executive Committee**
Date of meeting: **14th October 2020**
Report Subject: **Integrated Responsive Transport Pilot**
Portfolio Holder: **Cllr D Davies, Executive Member Regeneration and Economic Development**
Report Submitted by: **Owen Ashton, Service Manager Business & Regeneration**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
19.08.20	20.08.20	29.09.20			08.09.20	14.10.20		

1. Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To seek Members views on the purpose and scope of the Integrated Responsive Transport (IRT) Pilot project and approve the project to progress in Blaenau Gwent.

2. Scope and Background

- 2.1. The Welsh Government has identified Blaenau Gwent as an area that would benefit from a pilot scheme that it is running across three local authority areas in Wales. Alongside Pembrokeshire and Conwy Councils, Blaenau Gwent will benefit from piloting a new type of public transport that will introduce hybrid service/ bookable journeys that interconnect with rail and other commercial routes and will form part of Transport for Wales' 'Fflecsi' service.
- 2.2. The IRT 'Fflecsi' pilot service will be able to run outside the usual running times of the commercial services to enable travel to shift work in Blaenau Gwent's industrial estates, will link with the main bus routes, and connect with the rail provision to Cardiff.
- 2.3. The project will pilot a new way of delivering bus services in Blaenau Gwent, working closely with the existing commercial service providers and plugging gaps within these services. The project is also working with Job Centre Plus and will aim to improve access to employment for those without access to a car. During times in the day when the demand for IRT service is lower, the buses may be available for journeys for shopping trips or other community provision. There is also scope for the project to support provision for school transport where this is needed – this will help support the viability of the project longer-term.

- 2.4. Two buses will be procured as part of the project and will initially operate in the Ebbw Fach and Ebbw Fawr valleys, this pilot route is supported by transport data. As a result of Covid-19, what were once deemed commercially viable routes for operators are increasingly seen as 'un-commercial'. The precise timings and coverage of the service is therefore still being detailed in consultation with commercial and other operators.
- 2.5. The project will be overseen by a Programme Board made up of BGCBC officers along with representatives from Transport for Wales, Welsh Government, the Community Transport Association and Job Centre Plus (JCP).
- 2.6. The pilot project will provide an opportunity to test the demand for particular routes and services, and will aim to provide a greater level of flexibility and certainty for users. It is hoped that the project will develop routes to such an extent that their patronage creates a sustainable and integrated transport provision, which can evolve with the change in needs and patterns of travel as the area recovers post-Covid-19.
- 2.7. The project will also tie in to the overall transport strategy for Blaenau Gwent, by providing data to improve our understanding of travel patterns and where appropriate, integrate innovative technologies to enable us to enhance and adapt transport services to serve the current and future needs of residents.

3. Options for Recommendation

- 3.1. The Regeneration Scrutiny Committee supported Option 1 at its meeting on 8th September 2020.
- 3.2. **Option 1 – progress with the pilot project to introduce IRT to BG**
That we progress with the pilot project and introduce IRT to Blaenau Gwent
- 3.3. **Option 2 – to not progress with the IRT pilot**
That we do not undertake the pilot project in BG.

Preferred Option

Option 1 – to proceed with the pilot project for BG.

4. Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan

- 4.1. This pilot project supports the achievement of the Council's Corporate Plan 2020-22 Outcome Statements:
 - Protect and enhance our environment and infrastructure to benefit our communities
 - Support a fairer sustainable economy and community
 - To enable people to maximise their independence, develop solutions and take an active role in their communities

5. **Implications Against Each Option**

5.1. ***Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)***

Funding of £286,938 has already been secured from WG to cover the purchase of the two buses and the project development costs. The project delivery costs will be fully funded over two years by the Welsh Government, once the cost model and profile has been finalised – this is currently being worked up. The estimated project start date is October 2020. During and following completion of the project, an evaluation exercise will be undertaken to establish whether to continue the project.

5.2. ***Risk including Mitigating Actions***

Blaenau Gwent County Borough Council has limited experience of running a public transport service. It is therefore proposed that an operator is procured to run the project on the Council's behalf and that a dedicated officer is funded to oversee the pilot – this will be fully funded by Welsh Government for the duration of the project.

5.3. ***Legal***

Prior to procuring the project, a contract will be drawn up in consultation with colleagues in Procurement and Legal, establishing the requirements of the service to be provided. This contract will form the basis of the Council's legal agreement with the successful operator.

5.4. ***Human Resources***

As noted above, the Council will procure an operator to run the project on its behalf. There will be a need for a dedicated officer to oversee the project – this post will likely be part-time and will be fully funded through the project.

6. **Supporting Evidence**

6.1. ***Performance Information and Data***

N/A

6.2. ***Expected outcome for the public***

The project will pilot an Integrated Responsive Transport approach in Blaenau Gwent, aimed at improving access to employment and services and plug gaps within the existing transport service provision. By working with a range of partners, it is hoped that the project can establish a sustainable and attractive public transport offer for local residents.

6.3. ***Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)***

The project presents an opportunity to address some of the challenges facing residents in accessing employment and services via public transport. The project will work with a range of partners to establish a longer-term solution as we move towards a low carbon economy and a post Covid-19 economy.

6.4. ***Collaboration / partnership working***

The success of the project is predicated on successful collaboration and partnership working with a range of partners and stakeholders. By working

closely with Transport for Wales, the project will draw on a wide range of experience across Wales and the rest of the UK and by working with JCP the project can target services where they are most needed. Similarly, there is a need for us to work collaboratively with current operators and residents to encourage people to use the services as ultimately, the project's success will depend on whether or not it is used.

6.5. ***Integration (across service areas)***

The project will provide opportunities to support services across the Council. As has been mentioned, there is scope to allow the project to support school transport and, once the core timetable is established, there may also be scope to support other services such as Social Services.

7. **Monitoring Arrangements**

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation will be integrated into the project including gateway reviews at key stages. The project is currently establishing baseline data which will be used to assess the success of the project as part of its evaluation on project completion.

Background Documents /Electronic Links

None