

**Minutes of Public Meeting Regarding Bus Service Cuts**  
**Monday 27 January 2020**  
**7.30pm, Contin Hall**

**Present:** Norma Ross, Chair of Contin Community Council; Ian Cockburn, Councillor; Lisa Daines, Secretary of Contin Community Council; 75 members of the public including Trish Pettie from Strathpeffer Community Centre and Kenny MacLean, Chair of Garve Community Council.

**Apologies** were received from three further members of the public, Strathpeffer Community Council and Marion MacDonald of Foundation Scotland.

**Minutes**

NR welcomed everyone to this public meeting hosted by Contin Community Council. Tonight's meeting was called in order to keep everyone informed of an issue that is clearly very important to the community. There were notable numbers of attendees from Jamestown, Strathpeffer and Garve. A survey was handed around for an idea of how many use the bus and when.

NR explained that Highland Council does not subsidise the bus service.

The Community Council have so far:

- Contacted the Ross- shire Journal. They are very supportive and are keeping in contact with us by phone and email and are publishing articles for us;
- Contacted both our MSPs, Maree Todd and Gail Ross, who have both written to Stagecoach;
- Contacted Ian Blackford MP and he has asked Cllr. Ian Cockburn to represent his views to Stagecoach. A meeting was held on 22 January;
- Contacted Foundation Scotland for some advice as they are aware of such issues affecting rural communities.

Dr Dawn Westwood has written to the MD of Stagecoach expressing serious concerns about patients being able to access medical services.

Mrs Ritchie from Strathpeffer Primary School has written asking how nurse children can access sessions if there are no buses running during the session changeovers in the middle of the day and also how unwell children could be collected during the day if parents do not have access to a car.

We have accepted kind offers of letters of complaint to Stagecoach from Strathpeffer Community Council, Strathpeffer Community Centre, Strathpeffer Primary School PTA and Nursery, Strathpeffer Pavilion, and the Red Poppy. There may be more. Trish Pettie is steaming ahead with this aspect as local businesses could well be affected.

The outcomes of these communications are disappointing. Stagecoach has failed to answer any of the questions asked, instead simply quoting their data about the numbers of people using the bus service.

- We feel the data is incorrect as the ticket machine recording it is often not working;
- They are adamant that the consultations were advertised on the buses;
- They are not prepared to listen to any of our arguments;
- It is a privately owned company with shareholders and making a profit is the bottom line. That is really what they have based their replies on;

NR then handed over to Cllr. Ian Cockburn for an update on his meeting with Stagecoach and for ideas for a way forward.

Councillor Cockburn thanked everyone for attending and noted that he was heartened to see attendees from the surrounding communities. Ian explained that he had met with the MD of Stagecoach on Wednesday 22<sup>nd</sup> January and that, basically, Stagecoach had already made their minds up; they had completed a consultation, given proper notice and lodged the new timetables with the Traffic Commission. Ian reiterated that Stagecoach is a private company and, therefore, we have little leverage to change the decision. Buses are de-regulated and it would take years for any legislation to come through parliament. Ian has asked for costs to keep the service running until Easter to give the community more time to adjust. We await their decision.

Ian suggested that the next step for a long-term solution is to consider a community bus service. This would entail applying for funding through, for example, Foundation Scotland and the Ward Discretionary Fund for a feasibility study to be done by a transport professional. This could include Garve, Marybank, Contin, Jamestown, and Strathpeffer. This could provide a small, possibly electric, bus to link these communities with the other buses and provide a service in the evening. He reported that such schemes have been successful in communities in the Borders, Moray, and Sutherland.

Members of the public suggested the following meantime:

1. To write again to the Traffic Commission on the basis that there was inadequate consultation and incorrect data;
2. Going to the national press / Watchdog / making a big fuss locally;
3. Approaching local bus companies to take over the route;
4. To write again to the MSPs.

There was discussion about asking taxis who are driving through on the rural school pick up or on other runs to assist, but after discussion, this was decided against, as was asking the school bus companies to assist.

NR rounded up the meeting by agreeing to undertake points 1, 3 and 4 presently.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm.