

Gifford Community Council

Minutes

of the meeting of Wednesday, 22 June 2011,
held in the Main Hall of the Village Hall at 7.30pm to discuss the recent changes to the bus services affecting Gifford, Humbie, East and West Saltoun, and Bolton, and the possibility of the provision of a demand responsive service.

1. Welcome: John O'Connor (JOC) Chair, welcomed those present: Elizabeth Whiteford (EW) Treasurer, Margaret Maslowski (MMas) (taking notes), ELC Councillors Barry Turner, Sheena Richardson, and Tom Trotter, David Kerr (ELC officer), Neil McNaught of First Bus, and about 35 members of the public including representatives from Bolton etc., and introduced the visitors.

2. Apologies: Margaret McDougall, John Wrinn, Alastair McClung, Andrew Gilmour, and ELC Cllr Ludovic Broun Lindsay.

3. A lengthy discussion on the changes to the bus services took place as follows:

David Kerr explained how we had got to the present position. The 123 service was operated with a subsidy from ELC. In December 2010 operators were asked to tender for the various services. In January 2011, once tenders had been examined, recommendations to award contracts were made. All tenders were assessed on the same basis. Some services were altered. Services for work were kept, but services for socialising were curtailed. Contracts were awarded operators, with a starting date of 16 May 2011.

The 123 service tendered by Prentice could not be accepted on grounds of costs, and was awarded to First Bus. Some mistakes in that timetable were made, in that one journey in each direction, was unintentionally included. This had to be corrected, and the corrected timetable started on 29 May 2011, and also included a change to allow school children to use the bus on the Haddington/Pencaitland journey.

It was complained, that travellers had not been informed of the changes to the timetable: it was explained, that this was because there was not enough time to do so. The complainant said, that there should have been a notice in the local press, even if the whole timetable booklet, (which now was incorrect, in that it did show the altered service times), was not re-issued.

The Winton to Elphinstone service is being stopped, as it is too expensive. Bus and driver are being hired as an extra service to link Elphinstone and Tranent. The Traffic Commissioners have to approve any changes to services.

It was complained, that only one bus per day calls at the Cockles Cottages. This is because services are instead being routed via Bolton, where more people live.

Neil McNaught of First Bus reported, that they are no longer turning the buses at Duncanlaw, as the farmer has withdrawn his consent. They are now looking for a safe place to turn to comply with safety regulations, but assured us that the service will continue.

David Kerr stated, that they are trying to provide a better service to Bolton, and that they are trying to provide the maximum service to the maximum number of people within the financial constraints. He said that ELC in 2010 had asked all Community Councils to advise what services they required, and some had replied. It was complained, that not many requirements had been met.

It was complained, that services were not at convenient times and did not suit night-shift workers.

It was complained, that there was erratic driving: Neil McNaught of First Bus stated, that he would speak to all drivers about this.

It was complained, that school children were standing on buses. It was stated that this was contrary to regulations for school buses, but not for ordinary “service” buses. ELC Councillor Sheena Richardson stated, that if children are travelling to a school outside their normal catchment area, then it was the responsibility of parents to ensure their safe travelling.

It was complained, that buses sometimes did not operate, and on other occasions were very late. Neither David Kerr nor Neil McNaught were aware of this. The Chairman said, that such occurrences should be reported either to David Kerr at ELC or to First Bus or to both.

Neil Kerr’s contact details are: 01620 827660, or by e-mail to d.kerr@eastlothian.gov.uk, or the ELC complaints call centre on 01875824305 (on our Notice Board), or the ELC general number 01620827827.

First Bus’s contact details are: 08708727271 (on the back of their timetable booklet) or by e-mail to Contact.Scotlandeast@firstgroup.com (on the inside of the front page of their timetable booklet).

It was complained, that there were instances of driver rudeness. These should also be reported to David or Neil using the above contact details.

It was complained, that damaged bus passes were causing problems, as drivers were confiscating them. It was stated, that **replacement bus passes** could be obtained either by phoning ELC on 01620827827 or by filling in an appropriate form at the local library in Haddington.

It was complained, that the last bus from Haddington to Gifford at around 8 pm was of little use for socialising or for teenagers.

Mrs. Syme had suggested that fewer buses to Glenkinchie were required, and that instead more could then be provided elsewhere. She had earlier handed to Councillor Tom Trotter, a petition (copied at the end of these Minutes) signed by about 320 people, which included many complaints about the recently changed bus services. She again emphasised these complaints. (She had also, before the meeting, handed a copy of the petition to the meeting chairman, who had then drawn it to the attention of Councillor Barry Turner.)

It was complained, that the route via the hump-back bridge at Barleymill, West Saltoun was unsuitable especially in winter, as buses “bottom-out” on it, and that there had never previously been a service on that route.

It was complained, that the long way round journey from Haddington to Gifford via Pencaitland cost £2.40, while the direct route, taking half an hour less, cost £1.40. The chairman asked, that a reduction in this £2.40 cost be discussed between ELC and First Bus.

A Bolton representative stated that Bolton was happy with their improved service, which was, she said, needed as the village had recently increased in size, and would increase further. She also complimented First Bus on their replying to e-mails.

At this point discussion turned to the matter of the possibility of the provision of a “demand responsive service”, and Councillor Barry Turner spoke about this, saying that he knew of such a service operating in Lincolnshire, and elsewhere in England.

He said, that we have to consider, whether the now existing service was meeting the needs of the population. If communities think, that it is not then they can obtain their own Community Transport, using volunteers. There are grants available for this, and it works in other communities: they have a local call centre organising it. ELC had tried a similar service in 2001- the “Gaberlunzie” service, but this was changed to a regular timed service, with people being picked up at points, away from the main route. This was later ended because of lack of use. A Taxicard system could be started, and this would be cheaper than 3 people in a large bus. There is no legal obligation on Councils to provide a local subsidised transport system. “Leader” European Fund help could be sought, and the Community Transport Association could be approached regarding any local transport scheme. He said, that further thought would be given to whether a demand responsive service (one which responds to demand, rather than simply running whether it was required or not) could be provided, with a view to making proposals, on which Community Councils would be consulted.

David Kerr said, that he would be trying to improve services from Monday to Friday, and that he would produce proposed revised timetables for the 123 Service, and would e-mail these to Community Councils for comment. On being asked how long a time would elapse before this was done, Neil McNaught of First Bus said, that the proposals would have to stay within the contracted costs, and that the Traffic Commissioners would have to approve the changes, and that that could take 90 days.

It was agreed, that any proposals e-mailed to Gifford Community Council would be put on its Notice Board as soon as possible after receipt.

The Chairman then cordially thanked the visiting speakers and ELC Councillors, and closed the meeting.

Website www.giffordonline.co.uk is expected to show these Minutes, and future Minutes. Click on the “Village page” link above a nice photograph of Gifford Main Street. It also shows all our Minutes for 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010, those for February, March, April, and May 2011, our Mission Statement, our Constitution, and the **dates of our regular meetings** in 2011.

Petition handed over by Mrs Nerine Syme

Dear

Re:- Petition regarding changes to 123 bus service.

For 18 years we have based our lives around a very reliable 123 bus run, which until recently run by a small local firm, Prentice which was a vital link to and from Haddington, Gifford, Tranent ect.

The cuts and new changes to the 123 run now greatly impact on our lives affecting where we live and how we live. It affects :-

a) Links to and from Haddington and Tranent -

We now need to take two buses to get to and from Tranent and after certain hours at night this is very difficult, if not impossible as buses are either few and far in between or none existent.

b) Shiftworkers :-

Shiftworkers/Nightshift workers need a link to Tranent at night – the current First bus times makes this impossible due to the fact that there is no connection from Haddington to Tranent (18.04) or Pencaitland to Tranent (17.52) as we now have to work 1) double shifts 2) uses taxis which is not affordable 3) leave home up to four and a half hours before a shift begins for a journey which would normally take only 15 minutes by car. The 21.00 link to Tranent was a vital link!!

c) NO LATE BUSES! :-

1)As (b) above 2) This restricts us from having a social life! We **NEED** late buses to Tranent.

d) Costs/fares :-

Because we now have to take two buses, crossing into different zones, the fares are extortionate. We have seen our fares set with the previous service at £1.60 for an average single journey to Tranent (£3.20 there and back), increasing to £5 (£10.00 there and back) with the current service going to Tranent - as we now have to take two buses ie. From village to Haddington then Haddington to Tranent; therefore a difference of £3.40 single (£6.80) for a service that has been cut and is very unreliable. We, “the forgotten” in East Lothian seem to be subsidizing the well supplied areas and as it would seem, paying for the cost of competition in these zones between two bus companies.

e) Pensioners :-

New route now excludes Acredales and Seggarsdean in Haddington affecting approx 12 pensioners plus 4 others. It also excludes 2-3 pensioners in New Winton all who regularly use the bus. These new changes robs them of their independence and social life as some of them uses walking sticks and the service was close to their "doorstep"

f) Appointments :-

The reduced service limits appointment times i.e. doctors, dental, hospital. First bus is unreliable as it breaks down, is often late (up to fifteen minutes) and therefore missing possible connecting buses.

g) Confusing :-

1) Bus drivers who are polite and apologetic, sometimes themselves are confused, as due to their shift patterns they are "new to the route" and route done in "wrong way around."
2)New recent changes not reflected on bus tables.

h) School :-

We are VERY pleased that this has now been amended to accommodate pupils however the one and only time that the bus does not actually go through Glenkinchie is at the end of a school day at 16:00 when there is a very clear need for this.