

Gwybodaeth Ychwanegol at y Cyfarfod Llawn Information Further to Plenary

Cyhoeddir ymatebion yn yr iaith y'u darparwyd, gyda chyfieithiad Saesneg o ymatebion yn y Gymraeg.

Responses are published in the language in which they are provided, with a translation into English of responses provided in Welsh.

Gwybodaeth ychwanegol at OAQ(4)0194(LGC) a gyhoeddwyd gan Carl Sargeant, y Gweinidog Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau, ar 20 Tachwedd 2012 Information further to OAQ(4)0194(LGC) issued by Carl Sargeant, the Minister for Local Government and Communities, on 20 November 2012

At/To Ieuan Wyn Jones:

In Plenary on 7 November, you asked me about the governance arrangements in the Isle of Anglesey County Council following my decision in September to begin withdrawing my Commissioners. You suggested that there was a lack of clarity about these matters, and I agreed to write to you.

I do not believe there is any lack of clarity here. I have returned to the Council all of the powers which I withdrew from it in March 2011. The Executive, and not the Commissioners, have decision-making authority across the full range of council functions and services. Officers of the Council are equally accountable to Councillors and not Commissioners for their work.

Three of my Commissioners remain, but largely only to support the Council and advise me on progress. They have no routine decision-making powers, and both my direction to the Council and the terms of the Commissioners' appointment make that completely clear.

The only circumstances in which the Commissioners can exercise powers is if the Council or its committees took a decision which went against the advice of statutory officers—the chief executive, the director of finance or the monitoring officer. In such cases, the Commissioners have power either to confirm, amend or overturn that decision. I trust that that power will never be needed, but it is an essential safeguard while we test the sustainability of the progress the Council made under the Commissioner's control.

This approach reflected clear recommendations I received from the previous Commissioners and the Auditor General for Wales. It has also received strong support from all four group leaders on the Council, who have pledged to work with Commissioners to ensure a complete end to my intervention shortly after next year's elections.

You also asked me about the role of the Education Recovery Board. That was set out in Leighton Andrews' written statement of 3 October. Essentially, it provides support and challenge to the Council in addressing the failings which Estyn identified in its report of last July; and it will report to Ministers accordingly. The Board works alongside the Commissioners but has no formal powers. The Council remains responsible for all strategic and operational matters relating to education. However, Leighton and I expect it to address Estyn's findings promptly and effectively, with the support that the Board and the Commissioners will provide.

I hope this clarifies the issue; but as I said in Plenary, if you would like to discuss this with me and my officials, I would be happy to arrange that.

**Gwybodaeth ychwanegol at OAQ(4)0193(LGC) a gyhoeddwyd gan Carl Sargeant, y
Gweinidog Llywodraeth Leol a Chymunedau, ar 27 Tachwedd 2012
Information further to OAQ(4)0193(LGC) issued by Carl Sargeant, the Minister for
Local Government and Communities, on 27 November 2012**

At/To Elin Jones:

During Oral Assembly Questions on 7 November you asked me about the Welsh Government's plans to examine the feasibility of reopening the railway line between Carmarthen and Aberystwyth. At that time I said I would ask my officials to look into the matter and this letter is my response to that undertaking.

As you are aware, I published my prioritised National Transport Plan (NTP) last December detailing the Welsh Government's core funding priorities for transport until 2015. The prioritisation process did not consider including additional projects to the existing Plan. As the reopening of the line between Carmarthen and Aberystwyth was not included in the original NTP it was therefore not prioritised for delivery in the period to 2015.

The Welsh Government has a strong record of reopening railway lines having successfully reinstated the Vale of Glamorgan line in 2005 and the Ebbw Vale line in 2008.

In considering potential lines for reopening a key factor is the amount and condition of the original trackbed that remains, as this is a major determinant of the overall project cost. The Welsh Government has undertaken a preliminary site visit of the former Carmarthen to Aberystwyth railway. This found that a significant portion of the trackbed has been built on, while other sections are no longer visible. This indicates that little of the trackbed is suitable for modern rail operations unless a significant amount of investment is made. Consequently, the Welsh Government does not believe it merits the expense of further detailed studies.

I note that this conclusion is in line with that of both of the regional transport consortia with an interest in the proposed route, SWITCH and TraCC, in their respective submissions to the petition that you referred to in your question.

It is also important to note that since 2004 the Welsh Government has been instrumental in delivering a package of measures to improve transport links on the Aberystwyth, Lampeter to Carmarthen corridor. This has included the introduction of an hourly bus service on weekdays and better connections between bus and trains at Aberystwyth and Carmarthen and through ticketing on the route.

In March 2010, Welsh Ministers announced proposals to further improve bus services on this key route, including the introduction of faster journey times between key centres.

Arriva Buses Wales have subsequently introduced a new commercial bus service on this route, without any public subsidy from either the Welsh Government or the local authorities. The Welsh Government will continue to work closely with Arriva Buses Wales and the local authorities to further improve this new commercial bus service, as part of a Quality Bus Partnership Scheme.

I trust that this answers your query.