

Minister welcomes extension of Free School Meal payments to cover Halloween break

Education Minister Peter Weir has welcomed the Executive's decision to extend Free School Meal payments to cover the Halloween break.

Council receives an update on infrastructure projects for Mid Ulster District Council 2020

Mid Ulster District Council members have been updated on works in the area by the Department for Infrastructure during 2019/20 and the Department's schemes being undertaken in 2020/21.

Blether Bus – an update



Residents will be aware that the so-called "Blether Bus" that replaced the 204 bus service the council axed last year and covers a number of streets in the West End that would otherwise have no bus service – streets like Invergowrie Drive, Newhall Gardens and Glamis Drive – was suspended at the start of the COVID-19 health emergency.

The service assists older residents who find it difficult to walk the distances – often uphill – to the main service buses.

I recently noticed that Aberdeenshire Council has, with proper safety arrangements including social distancing, announced a restart to its Dial a Bus service that has similar aims. To quote that council :

“We preparing to re-introduce a number of #A2B #dial-a-bus services operated by our fleet of minibuses in a controlled and phased manner.”

I raised this with the City Council and have been advised :

“The Dial A Bus model of operation requires users to pre-book their journeys and this allows the operators to manage the number of passengers using the service at any one time – and the timings of those journeys. From speaking with colleagues from other local authorities I think most minibus services are limited to two passengers on the vehicle at any one time. The Blether Bus model is much closer to a bus service and there is no pre-booking option so we cannot manage journeys in this way.

We will continue to liaise with colleagues at Fleet about vehicle and minibus availability and appropriate protocols that need to be in place before we can safely restart the Blether Bus services.”

I have responded :

“ ... surely some out the box thinking is required so what about temporarily converting the Blether Bus to something around the Dial a Bus model? I have constituents in streets like Newhall Gardens who simply cannot manage the hill up to Perth Road.”

[Murphy responds to Treasury Spending Review announcement](#)

Finance Minister, Conor Murphy has expressed his disappointment that the Spending Review will only be for a one year period.

[Ministers Poots and Swann Launch Rural Support's New Winter Programme](#)

Agriculture Minister Edwin Poots and Health Minister Robin Swann have jointly launched Rural Support's new Winter Programme 2020.