



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

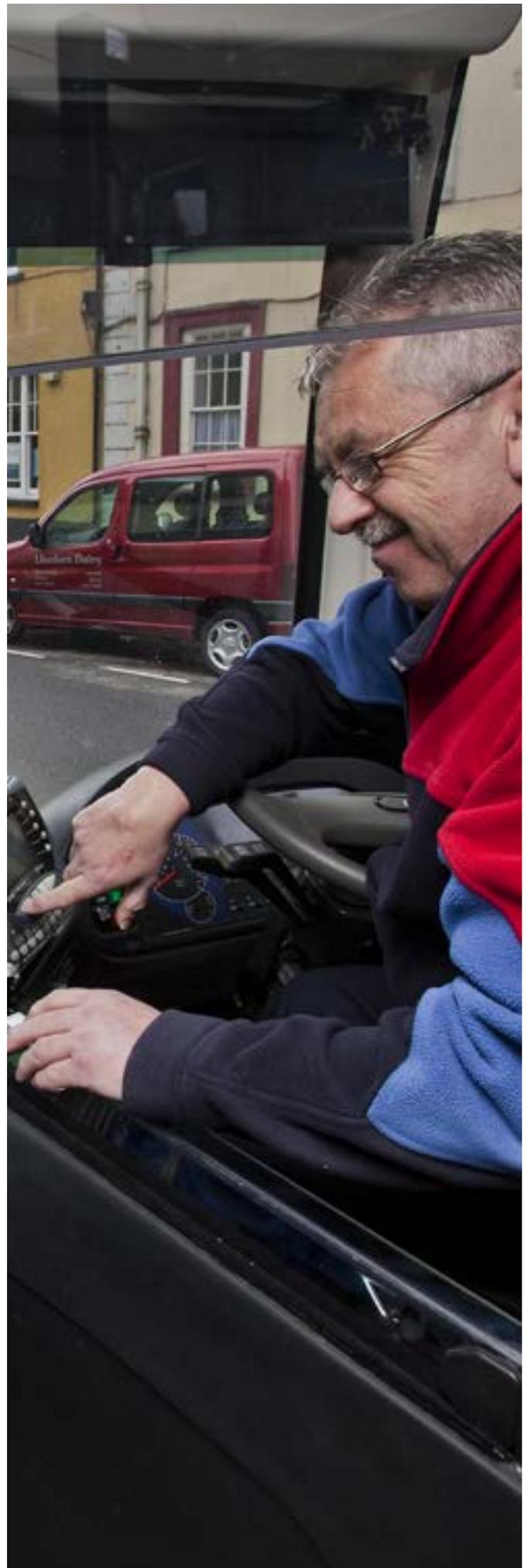
GUIDANCE

VOLUNTARY WELSH BUS QUALITY STANDARD

Second Edition

Introduction

1. Bus Services Support Grant (BSSG) funding for the Voluntary Welsh Bus Quality Standard is allocated to local authorities by the Welsh Government. It is designed to provide financial support to bus operators in Wales towards their costs in operating services that otherwise would not be met, or provided to the required standard.
2. In June 2014, the Bus Policy Advisory Group, comprising representatives drawn from the bus industry, local authorities and passenger groups, submitted recommendations on how the quality of local bus services could be improved whilst at the same time improving their financial viability and longer term sustainability.
3. One of the key recommendations made by the group and accepted by the Minister for Economy, Science and Transport, was that a Welsh Bus Standard be set up. It was proposed that this national Welsh Bus Quality Standard should incentivise and reward operators for achieving and maintaining the required quality standards through grant payments. Operators not achieving the agreed standard would not be entitled to apply for public funding made available from the BSSG.
4. On this basis, operators providing local scheduled bus services will be required to meet the agreed and published core requirements of the Welsh Bus Quality Standard to claim public funding made available through BSSG. Local bus services not meeting the agreed core requirements set out in this guidance are not eligible and may not claim funding available through BSSG.



The Voluntary Welsh Bus Quality Standard

5. In January 2013, and following a bus funding review, the Welsh Government announced that 2013-14 would be a transitional year, during which the bus funding implementation group would identify key quality outcomes for commercial services that would need to be achieved in return for public funding from 1 April 2014.
6. At that time, the desired quality outcomes included:
 - a. Driver training in disability equality and awareness.
 - b. The provision of audible and visual announcements on buses.
 - c. Standardised information displays at all bus stops.
 - d. The application of safe and efficient – economical – driving.
 - e. Networks that take account of the needs of people who wish to use buses to access health, education, training and employment.
 - f. Multi-operator integrated ticketing schemes so that passengers are able to use their tickets on any service, not just some.
 - g. Integration of timetables with other transport modes.
7. The purpose of the Voluntary Welsh Bus Quality Standard (VWBQS) proposed by the Bus Policy Advisory Group is to ensure that:
 - a. the quality of local bus services that passengers can reasonably expect are consistently and universally available throughout Wales; and
 - b. local bus operators are encouraged to improve the quality of the services they provide to passengers.
8. In developing this second edition of the VWBQS, it has been recognised that some desirable quality improvements to local bus services will take time to implement and their introduction may depend on external factors outside the control of local authorities and bus operators, such as the availability of Wi-Fi and smart phone connectivity.
9. Local authorities may continue to specify additional quality requirements beyond the core requirements set out in this guidance. These enhanced requirements are permitted for those quality expectations that are considered more aspirational for the industry on a Wales wide basis, or are requirements designed to meet particular local needs.
10. These enhanced requirements, if achieved by bus operators, can attract a premium payment. The amount of funding available to meet these enhanced standards will be determined by local authorities from within their own funding allocations. BSSG funding can be made available to support locally agreed enhanced requirements on the understanding that all core requirements are being achieved and maintained by bus operators.
11. When deciding the level of funding that is made available to operators, care should be taken not to disproportionately disadvantage smaller operators who may rely on historic levels of public funding to maintain existing services, especially in more rural areas of Wales.

Eligibility

12. As set out in the current BSSG guidance, eligible local bus services will be those as defined under the Welsh Government's mandatory concessionary bus travel scheme. For this purpose, local services are as defined in section 2 of the Transport Act 1985 and registered with the Traffic Commissioner. These can include, for example, a community bus service provided under section 22 of the Transport Act 1985, a flexible bus service, a service using a vehicle with fewer than eight seats, and a taxi bus service, as well as a conventional bus service.
13. Flexible services introduced by the Public Service Vehicles (Registration of Local Services) (Amendment) (England and Wales) Regulations 2004 are also eligible.
14. Coach services that are primarily designed to service longer distance markets that are not eligible for BSSG payments are specifically excluded from this standard.



Voluntary Welsh Bus Quality Standards – Core requirements

15. Eligible local bus services must achieve and maintain the core requirements of the standard to attract payments available through BSSG funding from 1 April 2018.
16. This means that bus operators will ensure:
 - a. vehicles with a capacity exceeding 22 seats are fitted with working destination blinds that are used and that are clearly visible at night, in low light and poor weather conditions providing accurate information about the route destination and key stopping points along the route;
 - b. vehicles are cleaned inside and out in preparation for first service each day;
 - c. audio / visual next stop information equipment is installed and working on vehicles (new or pre-owned) ordered after 1 April 2018 for all operators¹;
 - d. vehicles are fitted with an operational and Welsh Government approved smartcard enabled electronic ticket machine;
 - e. drivers and, where appropriate, other on-board employees are issued with a uniform, and are required to wear it;
 - f. a written customer complaints policy is in place. The policy will include arrangements to acknowledge a complaint within seven days of its receipt by the operator, with a final response issued within 21 days of the complaint being received. The complaint policy will include arrangements about how and to whom passengers are able to make an appeal if they are not satisfied with a bus operator's response;
 - g. a clear and accessible bilingual notice displayed on-board and online advising passengers how and to whom a complaint or an appeal can be made, including contact details and response times;
 - h. provision of timely information about unplanned service changes using accessible communication formats including social media channels and notification to Traveline Cymru.



¹ In accordance with edition one of the VWBOS published 26 March 2016, larger bus operators (50 vehicles or more) have been required to install audio visual next stop announcement systems on vehicles acquired after 26 March 2016

- i. Up to date, bilingual passenger information using accessible communication formats is available on board all vehicles about service frequencies, planned service changes, timetabling and ticketing options;
- j. Participation in PlusBus schemes and other local authority co-ordinated or established network ticketing scheme where they exist;
- k. Drivers have completed Disability and Equality Awareness training as part of their Drivers' CPC module and refresher training is undertaken every five years;
- l. Traveline Cymru, or other travel planning agents as notified by the Welsh Government, are supplied with a full copy of a registration (either paper, PDF or other recognised format and wherever possible an electronic file of the timetable and fares payable) for a new bus service, or variation / cancellation of an existing service at the same time the application is lodged with the Traffic Commissioner's Office and the local authority.
- b. Fitting and operation of on board CCTV systems in areas where there is evidence of persistent criminal activity for example.
- c. Costs associated with the introduction or lower emission vehicles where air quality issues are reported.
- d. Vehicles being equipped with a telematics system to monitor driver / vehicle performance (e.g. Greenroad, Mix etc.).

Additional Local Authority Requirements

- 17. Whilst Welsh Government BSSG funding is provided to support local bus services that would otherwise not be met, or met to the required standard, this does not preclude local authorities reaching local agreements with bus operators in their areas to meet additional quality standards, subject to meeting State Aid requirements locally.
- 18. BSSG funding made available by the Welsh Government is intended to meet these core requirements being met by operators in any local authority area. Any BSSG funding available after core standards have been met may be defrayed towards meeting the cost of locally set enhanced requirements to supplement funding made available by local authorities.
- 19. In consultation with local bus operators, local authorities can consider adding only those quality standards that are considered as being reasonable, proportionate and evidence based, such as but not limited to:
 - a. Having systems in place and maintained to ensure operators participate in local, regional or national real-time information schemes where these exist.

Implementation

- 20. Local bus routes in Wales often operate across more than one local authority boundary. In implementing these standards, it is important that local authorities collaborate with bus operators and neighbouring authorities sharing bus routes in their areas.
- 21. In south east Wales, for example, the current quality standard scheme has been overseen by a multi-organisation project board. In developing proposals for this national standard, the Bus Policy Advisory Group recommends that 'Local (or area) Voluntary Welsh Bus Quality Standard' project board is set up to oversee implementation. Once established, future governance arrangements to administer the scheme will be a matter for the individual appropriate funding authorities.

Management and monitoring

- 22. It is essential that the funding claimed for standards being met are monitored and that the process for doing so is proportionate and reasonable. In determining BSSG payments to bus operators, local authorities will need to receive sufficient supporting evidence that the 'quality standards' have been met and will be maintained, for both core and enhanced requirements, as appropriate.
- 23. Bus Users Cymru has agreed that Bus Compliance Officers will assist local authorities to ensure that reported standards are being met and maintained. If the relevant local authority has reason to believe that an operator has claimed for standards that are not being achieved, then further information and documentation may be requested from that operator. In some cases, it may be necessary to inspect records, depots and/or operations.

24. Information gained from other sources may also be used. Operators will co-operate with any such request as failure to do so may result in payments for BSSG being withdrawn.
25. In terms of governance and accountability, it is proposed that the current regionally-based governance and administration arrangements in place for BSSG will be appropriate for implementing the VWBQS.
26. Local authorities are required to provide to the Welsh Government, as part of their quarterly BSSG claim arrangements, a report detailing the progress that has made implementing the requirements set out in this guidance and compliance achieved against each of the core requirements by each bus operator providing local bus services in their area.

Periodic review

27. The Welsh Government will keep the VWBQS under review to monitor implementation. It remains important to ensure that smaller operators delivering services in more rural and less densely populated areas are not disproportionately affected from the introduction of these standards. On this basis further periodic reviews will be undertaken at intervals not exceeding five years.

Welsh Language

28. The Welsh Government's vision is to see the Welsh language thriving in Wales. To achieve that, our Welsh Language Strategy aims to see an increase in the number of people who both speak and use the language. In addition to the requirements within this VWBQS, the Welsh Government expects that local authorities and bus operators will work in partnership to improve the use of the Welsh Language in the delivery of local bus services.

