

**FOR: COMMUNITY, HOUSING AND HEALTH OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

Date :31st January 2012

Agenda item 8

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**SUBMISSION BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE COMMUNITY TRANSPORT MEMBER
TASK GROUP**

COMMUNITY TRANSPORT - FINAL REPORT

1. Purpose of the report

- 1.1 To provide Members with an update on the progress and final recommendation of the Task Group.

2. PROGRESS TO DATE

- 2.1 The Task Group has met on a further three occasions since the last report in September and has considered a range of issues in relation to opportunities to reduce the level of District Council subsidy in the service (which is budgeted at £32k for 2011/12 plus a further £25k on central support / recharges). This level of subsidy could be reduced through either reducing costs and / or increasing income and therefore the Task Group focused on these areas.

Reducing Costs

- 2.2 The Task Group were advised that the expenditure budget for the service is comprised of salaries, fuel, vehicle maintenance and related supplies and services. The salary cost had been reduced by approximately £8k in 2010 through the deletion of the part time Driver / Administrator post. Members considered the impact of the loss of this post on the service and whether this had an adverse impact on the management of the scheme. Members concluded that this matter would be worthy of further investigation by the Cabinet Member.
- 2.3 Various other options for reducing running costs were considered including:
- converting a vehicle(s) to alternative (and cheaper) fuels (*this proved not technically possible*)
 - undertaking servicing at a local garage instead of at the dealers in Aston which involved a lengthier trip and potentially higher charge (*under consideration including establishing a shared servicing contract for all LDC vehicles outside of Operational Services*)
 - Decommissioning one of the vehicles to make savings in running costs and fuel (*although the buses are of varying ages, they are all roadworthy and expected to have some longevity. A reduction in the fleet would reduce the capacity of the service to expand and may indeed result in turning business away. The potential to use vehicles owned by other organizations on a brokerage basis was considered (as a substitute for a*

decommissioned vehicle) but this would give rise to a higher net cost than retaining a vehicle owned by the District Council

Increasing Income

- 2.4 The Task Group noted that the income achieved by the service has risen steadily since the scheme began in 2004; £26k income was achieved in 2010/11 (slightly less than a peak of £31k in 2009/10). Most of this is received in passenger fares but a proportion is comprised of grant income from the Lichfield City and Burntwood Town Councils (£4k). It was noted that a key factor in expanding the business is the availability of volunteer drivers upon whom the service depends. There are presently twelve drivers.
- 2.5 Various options for increasing income were considered including:
- Applying for additional grant income (*applications are in process with the City and Town Councils*)
 - Applying to Parish Councils for grant income (*this has been pursued previously but with limited success; the community transport scheme only provides transport for organizations / groups and therefore parish councils would need to deal with the logistics of using the service in order to gain full benefit from any grant arrangement. However, may be worth reconsidering*)
 - Attracting commercial sponsorship and / or advertising on the vehicles; *some advertising has already been secured*
 - Increasing the charge for using the service (*charges had been increased in April 2011 and therefore a further increase in the short term was not considered to be viable*)

Working in partnership

- 2.6 The Task Group investigated the availability of other community based transport in the District and met with representatives from the following organizations:
- Lichfield and District Voluntary Care Scheme (Community and Voluntray Sector Support)
 - Voluntary Transport for the Disabled
 - Staffordshire County Council

Members also received advice in relation to the availability and cost of taxi journeys (compared to the equivalent cost of trips made by the community transport vehicles) and received information about Ring and Ride (West Midlands Special Needs Transport) and Walsall Community Transport Limited.

3. CONCLUSION

- 3.1 From research undertaken and anecdotal feedback, the Task Group concluded that the community transport service is very valued, especially by the elderly and vulnerable people who use it. Given the demographic context and the need for an increasing number of elderly, frail people to be cared for and supported in their own homes, the need and demand for community based transport is likely to increase.

- 3.2 The Task Group would like to see greater use of the vehicles and an expansion in business (leading to additional income); however, they acknowledged the critical importance of the supply and availability of volunteer drivers as a key factor in facilitating any growth in the service.
- 3.3 Following on from exhaustive investigation, the Task Group concluded that the status quo be maintained but that the economic viability of the service be kept under review.

4. RECOMMENDATION

- 4.1 The Task Group recommends that the Cabinet Member - Organisational Development and Community considers the economic viability of the community transport on an ongoing basis, having regard to the outcome of their research and investigations.

Councillor Mark Warfield
Chairman, Community Transport Member Task Group