

Meeting: **COMMUNITY SELECT COMMITTEE**

Portfolio Area: Community, Health and Older People
Economy, Enterprise and Transport

Date: **28 JANUARY 2014**

DRAFT REPORT

**DRAFT REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE SCRUTINY REVIEW OF
COMMUNITY TRANSPORT**

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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To consider the recommendations of the Scrutiny review into Community Transport undertaken by the Community Select Committee.

2 BACKGROUND & SCRUTINY ISSUE IDENTIFIED

2.1 At the Scrutiny evaluation and planning event in February 2013 and having canvassed Members for potential Scrutiny work plan items the following issues were identified as potential scrutiny items for consideration during 2013-14:

- Active Lifestyles of the 16-24 year olds (including Sports and the Arts)
- Community Transport
- Partial night time street light switch off

2.1.1 The issue of Community Transport for Older People was subsequently agreed by the Select Committee as its scrutiny review for the year at its meeting on 17 June 2013.

2.2 Scope and Focus of the review

2.2.1 The Committee meet and agreed a scope for the review which should consider the following areas:

- Look at what other providers there are in the town, what service are they providing?
- What informal services are there e.g. private taxi hire?

- Are there any over provision issues that need addressing?
- Are there any areas of provision that are currently not serviced?
- Does the service provide value for money or are there alternative models that may merit consideration?
- What is the current performance of Community Transport services, users, budget etc?
- What is the current performance of other providers?
- What services does the Council get for its budget?
- What monitoring is carried out?
- What other ways of providing a service exist?

2.3 **Process of the review**

2.3.1 The following Members conducted the review:

Councillors Sarah Walker (Chair), Margaret Notley (Vice Chair), Lorraine Bell, Liz Harrington, Carol Latif, John Mead, Graham Snell and Pam Stuart.

2.3.2 The Committee met on 3 occasions to undertake the review on 10 October, 6 November 2013 and 28 January 2014.

2.3.3 The Committee received written and oral evidence from the following people:

- Executive Portfolio Holder for Economy, Enterprise and Transport, Cllr Ralph Raynor
- Head of Leisure, Environmental Health and Children's Services, Aidan Sanderson
- Leisure Manager, Geoff Caine
- Community Transport Officer, Paula Mills
- Ian Edwards, Community Bus Driver
- Mrs Sybil Graham and Mrs Barbara Swainston (Community Bus Users)
- David Neilan, HCC Integrated Transport Partnership and Angie Reynolds HCC Transport Access & Safety - Fleet Operations Team Leader

3 **REVIEW FINDINGS**

3.1 **Conclusions of the Environment & Economy Select Committee**

3.1.1 Based on the input provided by the witnesses the Committee have made the following conclusions.

3.1.2 The review looked at the Council's own Community Transport Service and also at what other provision was available in the area.

3.2 **Who uses the SBC Community Transport Service?**

The service is targeted towards and mostly used by older residents who require an assisted service or wheelchair access for whom other forms of Community Transport such as the CVS car volunteer service may not be

suitable. However, the service is open to people of all ages with mobility difficulties or other disabilities. There is a limit to the severity of the disabilities that the service can accommodate but this is assessed by staff via the client access/needs audit prior to using the service.

3.3 Service highly valued by users

3.3.1 During the evidence gathering session with users of the service it was obvious to the Committee that the Stevenage Community Transport Bus Service offers an invaluable service to its users. It provides an opportunity for otherwise housebound older people the opportunity to go out for a day and meet friends and have contact with people which they would not have without the service. The clients that met with Members and those who have been surveyed have described the service as “we would be lost without it”; “a much needed service”; “love the door to door service, very helpful staff”; “I wouldn’t go out if I didn’t have this service”

3.3.2 One of the most important features of the SBC Community Bus Service is that the drivers, as well as being a caring and familiar point of contact for the client, are able to monitor the wellbeing of clients as they see their mobility and health over a long period of time and notice gradual or sudden changes in their health which are then flagged up with family members or next of kin as well as with health and social services partners.

3.3.3 Members were of the view that the drivers they met during the review and at the evidence gathering meeting demonstrated a very good empathy and understanding of their client’s needs.

3.4 What wider service provision is there in the town?

3.4.1 In terms of community transport provision in the town, there appears to be broadly 5 levels of service ranging from (1) Commercial Bus operators (free bus pass for pensioners); (2) CVS Volunteer Car Journeys (users pay mileage rates); (3) HCC Dial-a-ride (assisted service which users pay mileage rates); (4) SBC Community Transport (assisted service, users pay a flat rate fixed fee per journey) and (5) HCC Health Shuttle Bus.

3.4.2 Commercial Bus Service

The Commercial Bus service is provided locally by Arriva and Uno the University Bus service. Pensioners are eligible for a free bus pass which they can use on any commercial bus provider. However they users need to be able to board the bus without assistance.

3.4.3 North Herts and Stevenage CVS

North Herts and Stevenage CVS operate a volunteer run car service which is provided to people based on medical and social need. Last year they provided 1246 journeys and have a total of 1457 registered service users. Journeys cost 45 pence per mile.

3.4.4 HCC dial-a-ride

Hertfordshire County Council operates the dial-a-ride service. Dial a Ride is a door to door transport service for the elderly or people of any age, including children, who have difficulty travelling due to permanent disability or illness. The vehicles used are designed to offer easy access and have tail-lifts/ramps that can be used by those who cannot easily climb steps or who use a wheel chair. Users of the dial-a-ride service pay £1.70 for the first mile and thereafter 40p per mile.

3.4.5 SBC Community Transport Service

Stevenage Borough Council is the only District Council in Hertfordshire who operate its own fully assisted Community Transport Service. There are two buses in use, a small 8 seat vehicle and a larger 14 seat vehicle. Seating in the buses is flexible to allow for various configurations including wheel chair access. The service provides regular trips to Day Centres, Lunch Clubs and Shopping trips. The service also provides leisure trips twice a week to various destinations including garden centres, seasonal day trips to the coast, pub lunches, Shopping centres and other places of interest. Local journeys in Stevenage cost £3.20 for return journeys. For longer journeys the costs are £5.80 up to 15 miles, £10.00 up to 30 miles and £14.00 over 30 miles. There are over 4000 Community Transport users a year, with 800 leisure trip users.

3.4.6 The gross cost of the SBC Community Transport Service is £107,500 per annum with an income of £11,000 per annum from journey fares, the net cost being £96,500 a year. The service employs 1 Full time Community Transport Officer and 5 part time drivers/escorts (3.45 full time equivalents). The total employee costs are £84,885 a year. The other costs are for vehicle maintenance, fuel and insurances.

3.4.7 HCC Health Shuttle Bus

The Lister Hospital Shuttle Bus is a service that was established by the HCC Community Transport Unit. This service provides a non-emergency ambulance service to and from hospital appointments. The service operates within a catchment of 10 Kilometre radius of the Lister Hospital and the North and South Bedfordshire Villages. The Lister Hospital Bus service is a high frequency service with fares costing £5.00 each way. The vehicle is a 10 seat vehicle with wheelchair access.

3.4.8 Members were of the view that between all of the services described above there is currently a good overlap of provision which offers the right community transport service for local residents based on the users need.

3.5 What other Community Transport is available in North Hertfordshire?

3.5.1 Members asked officers to find out what provision there is in the surrounding area from other voluntary and Community Transport providers. There are 9 organisations identified locally in North Hertfordshire who can provide Minibus transport for voluntary and community group usage, of this 7 allow their bus to be used by other drivers. The community minibuses tend to be used by community groups not individuals as the 5 Community Transport Providers operating in the town, described above, do offer.

3.6 Improved publicity information

3.6.1 Having heard what service provision is available in the town Members are of the view that an area that could be improved for customers and potential service users would be for all Community Transport providers to work together on some joint publicity. Publicity leaflets and each service provider's web sites (HCC/SBC/CVS) should inform customers what services are available with a description of the service and the costs clearly stated so that users can make an informed choice.

3.6.2 The Committee suggested that improved publicity for the SBC Community Transport Service could help potential new customers find out what a valuable service is available. To this end, a good focus for publicity of the service could be to profile the Driver explaining how the service operates with a photo and a quote from the driver as well as quotes from the current service users and then a description of what the service entails including booking details, trips and service costs.

3.7 Promote the use of Vouchers to subsidise the service for those who can't afford the Leisure Trip

3.7.1 During the evidence gathering session it became apparent that some residents on modest fixed incomes are only able to afford the occasional leisure trip or in some cases none at all. The Chair has asked Officers to consider promoting a voucher scheme that could be bought by family members as a gift or by funding bids to Members Local Community Budgets. The vouchers could supplement the cost for clients who can only afford the occasional leisure trip in the form of a leisure trip voucher for a fixed monetary value (potentially £25 per client) which could be used to subsidise the cost for existing or new clients against the more expensive leisure trips. Local Community Budget bids could be made for a higher monetary value perhaps £50 to £100 which could cover the cost of between 2 to 4 older people's leisure trips. Similarly Vouchers could be marketed at various levels providing specific numbers of trips per voucher.

3.8 Corporate Sponsorship

3.8.1 The Chair has asked Officers to look into discussing with larger Stevenage based businesses the opportunity to sponsor and support the service. The buses could carry the logo and name of companies that have part funded the

service. Members understand that there is no guarantee that this approach would be successful but parts of the local economy are in recovery whilst local government finances continue to be squeezed, so making the approach to local larger businesses is worth trying.

3.9 Equalities & Diversity issues

3.9.1 The Members undertaking the review are of the view that the current service provided by the Council provides a vital local Community Transport Service that would not be available without the service. The Leisure Trips are unique and offer a valuable social service to older people who would not be able to get out and meet other people for social events without the service. When considering the 2015/16 priority based budgets the impact of a reduced or withdrawn service will need to fully consider the social impact that any reduction in the service might bring to vulnerable residents.

3.9.2 If officers are able to develop a voucher scheme as suggested by Members at paragraph 3.7 then those pensioners who are currently unable to afford Leisure Trips would benefit from such a scheme which could be funded by gifts from family members of by Members supporting bids to their Local Community Budgets.

3.10 Delivery model

3.10.1 During the initial meeting with officers the Head of Leisure, Environmental Health and Children's Services reminded the Committee that Members had consistently supported the retention of the Community Transport Service but suggested that each year through the budget and savings discussions the service has to be considered along with all other budget areas as potential savings items. Next year the service would be considered once again during the 2015-16 Priority Based Budget process and officers and Members may have to consider whether the service could be delivered in a more efficient way with other partners in an alternative delivery model.

3.11 Conclusion

3.11.1 In conclusion the Select Committee were of the view that the following issues could be considered by the Economy, Enterprise & Transport Executive Portfolio Holder and Officers as areas of potential future development:

(i) The Committee is of the view that the current SBC Community Transport Service offers an exemplary service to its users and Members would wish to support the service, whether in its current arrangement or via a different delivery model, so long as Stevenage residents are able to access a local and comprehensive Community Transport Service.

(ii) Members will invite officers during the next round of priority based budgeting to make a case for keeping the service not just on economic grounds but against the high social value that the service provides to its users;

(iii) Improved publicity and joint efforts to advertise all Community Transport that is available in Stevenage and the wider area as suggested at paragraph 3.6 should be encouraged;

(iv) Officers should consider looking at ways of making the Leisure Trips available to a wider group by investigating the possibility of developing a voucher scheme as suggested at paragraph 3.7; and

(v) Officers should consider approaching larger local businesses with regards to providing some corporate sponsorship to support the service as suggested at paragraph 3.8.

(vi) Officers should consider working with partners and other stakeholders to share resources and consider a new delivery model which meets all of the client's needs in one social enterprise or other single delivery model.

4 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.1 That the Community Select Committee considers the findings of the review, contained within this report and the recommendations below be presented to the Economy, Enterprise & Transport Portfolio Holder and the Strategic Director (Community) and that a response be provided from these and any other named officers and partners within two months of the publishing of this report.
- 4.2 That during the next round of priority based budgeting officers make a case for keeping the service not just on economic grounds but against the high social value that the service provides to its users.
- 4.3 That officers investigate ways in which partners can work together to provide improved publicity with joint efforts to advertise all Community Transport that is available in Stevenage and the wider area as detailed at paragraph 3.6.
- 4.4 That officers consider looking at ways of making the Leisure Trips available to a wider group of users by investigating the possibility of adopting a voucher scheme as suggested at paragraph 3.7.
- 4.5 That officers consider approaching larger local businesses with regards to providing some corporate sponsorship to support the service as suggested at paragraph 3.8.
- 4.6 That officers consider the merits of whether Stevenage's Community Transport needs can be delivered by one entity, whether that entity exists presently or whether a different delivery model needs to be considered.

5 IMPLICATIONS

5.1 Financial Implications

Details of the funding of the service are detailed at paragraph 3.4.5 and 3.4.6.

5.2 Legal Implications

There are no direct legal implications for this report.

5.3 Equalities Implications

The Equalities implications have been addressed within the report at paragraph 3.9.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Notes of the Committee meetings held on 10 October and 6 November 2013 and 28 January 2014.

Table detailing the Community Transport Minibus provision for Voluntary and Community Groups in North Hertfordshire

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Scrutiny Scoping Proforma