

HAMBLETON DISTRICT COUNCIL

Report To: Cabinet
19 July 2011

Subject: **COMMUNITY TRANSPORT FUNDING**

**All Wards
Scrutiny Committees
Cabinet Member for Partnerships: Councillor N D Clack**

1.0 PURPOSE AND BACKGROUND:

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to review the Council's revenue funding for community transport schemes in the context of the changes in responsibility for concessionary fares and the continuing need to identify savings.
- 1.2 The community transport schemes included in the report and the Council's contributions to them in 2011/12 are:

| | £ |
|---|---------------|
| Community Minibus Scheme | 15,000 |
| Community Car Schemes | 14,000 |
| Taxi Voucher Scheme (net contribution) | 1,450 |
| Wheels-2-Work | 10,000 |
| Hambleton and Richmondshire Rural Transport and Access Partnership | 2,500 |
| | <u>42,950</u> |

The scope of each scheme and how they are operated is described in Annex A.

- 1.3 Two of the schemes; the Community Minibus Scheme and the Taxi Voucher Scheme were linked to the Council's former duty to provide concessionary fares in that they were conceived as local enhancements of the statutory national scheme. The Council's responsibility for concessionary fares ceased on 31 March 2011 and transferred to North Yorkshire County Council. Since then the two schemes have continued but in an amended form (see below).
- 1.4 Since March 2011 the administration of the Community Car Scheme and the Community Minibus Scheme have been passed to the Hambleton and Richmondshire Rural Transport and Access Partnership for them to administer in accord with a Service Level Agreement. This organisation is core funded by the Council and run by the Northallerton and District Voluntary Service Association which is experienced in operating and supporting a range of community transport schemes such as Wheels-2-Work.

2.0 OPTIONS:

- 2.1 It is recognised that each community transport scheme is valued by residents and partners and that the Council's financial assistance is important to the operation of each scheme. Nevertheless, with the transfer of the concessionary fares function to North Yorkshire County Council from 1 April 2011 and the continued need to identify savings it is appropriate to reconsider this funding.

- 2.2 The broad options open to the Council are:
1. To continue to support each of the schemes at the current level.
 2. To maintain support for all schemes but reduce each of the budgets to make a saving.
 3. To prioritise the schemes for funding according to their community transport benefit and to cease funding those of a lower priority to make a saving.
 4. To prioritise the schemes for funding as above but maintain the overall funding for community transport at the current level.
 5. Cease funding to all of the schemes.
- 2.3 From 1 April the powers under the Transport Act that enabled the Council to offer the Taxi Voucher Scheme and the Community Mini-bus Concessionary Scheme as local enhancements to the statutory national scheme transferred to the County Council. It is now for the County Council to decide what local enhancements it offers.
- 2.4 For 2011/12 funding for community mini-buses has been maintained but the operation of the scheme has been changed to simple revenue support with each operator being given a revenue grant. However, as explained in Annex B this could result in an increased demand for grant as there are more operators than currently receive support. Currently only 5 minibuses in Bedale (1), Thirsk (2) and Stokesley (2) receive support whereas there are at least 9 operating in the District. Also, whilst some community mini-buses do provide for essential journeys they also provide for desirable/discretionary journeys eg group hire and social trips and therefore it is suggested they are not as high a priority as other forms of community transport which provide for essential journeys.
- 2.5 Similarly, the Taxi Voucher Scheme has been maintained although it is no longer offered as an alternative to a bus pass which could increase eligibility for vouchers and therefore the cost of the scheme. Historically, the take-up and cost of this scheme have been low and it should be accorded a lower priority.
- 2.6 The Community Car Schemes provide a District wide service, are well used and provide for almost exclusively essential journeys. The journeys are typically health related, access to day centres or for shopping. Generally the passengers do not have alternatives, apart from paying for taxis. Of the 3 schemes, it is suggested, this should be accorded the highest priority. However, the funding for the community car schemes could be made more equitable by ending the top slicing for Easingwold and distributing the total grant purely on passenger miles. If the Hambleton and Richmondshire Rural Transport and Access Partnership wished to make such changes the Council should support them, however, this is now a matter for them to determine.
- 2.7 The Wheels 2 Work moped loan scheme helps young people access work or training where no alternative transport is available. About 20 mopeds are on loan in Hambleton at any one time and up to 30 young people are assisted each year into employment, apprenticeships or training. Because it provides a life changing opportunity for young people and links to supporting the prosperity of the District the scheme should be accorded a high priority.
- 2.8 The Hambleton and Richmondshire Rural Transport and Access Partnership aims to identify and promote action on unmet local transport and access needs, including enabling and developing improvement measures. The partnership also runs some community transport schemes including the Council's Community Car Scheme and Community Mini-bus Scheme. The Council's contribution (£2,500) is relatively modest and represents value for money.

3.0 DECISIONS SOUGHT:

3.1 To withdraw the revenue funding for community minibus operators and to withdraw the Taxi Voucher Scheme but to continue with the Community Car Scheme, Wheels-2-Work and the core funding for the Hambleton and Richmondshire Rural Transport and Access Partnership.

4.0 LINK TO CORPORATE PRIORITIES:

4.1 There is a link to the Council Plan Partnership priority and its aims of encouraging residents to become involved in making decisions and delivering services which impact on their local communities.

5.0 RISK ASSESSMENT:

5.1 Risk in approving the recommendations:

| Risk | Implication | Prob* | Imp* | Total | Preventative action |
|---|--|--------------|-------------|--------------|---|
| The withdrawal of funding for community minibuses could reduce income to such a level that operators will be unable to deliver the service. | Access to transport for people and groups in the Bedale, Thirsk and Stokesley areas is adversely affected. | 4 | 3 | 12 | Maintain funding for the community car schemes to provide an alternative for essential journeys for vulnerable residents. |
| The withdrawal of funding for the taxi-voucher scheme reduces transport options for residents, particularly more vulnerable residents. | Access to transport for the disabled is reduced. | 4 | 3 | 12 | Maintain funding for the community car schemes to provide an alternative for vulnerable residents. |

5.2 Risk in not approving the recommendations:

There are no significant risks in not approving the recommendations.

6.0 SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS:

6.1 Withdrawal of the Council's revenue funding to community minibus operators and the Taxi Voucher Scheme may have broad sustainability implications, in particular with regard to the social and economic sustainability of rural communities. However, these are not likely to be significant.

7.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS AND EFFICIENCIES:

7.1 Withdrawal of the Council's funding to community minibus operators and withdrawal of funding for the Taxi Voucher Scheme will make a saving of approximately £16,450 per annum.

8.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS:

8.1 There are no legal implications.

9.0 SECTION 17 CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998:

9.1 There are no issues for Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998.

10.0 EQUALITY/DIVERSITY ISSUES:

10.1 The provision of community transport schemes improves access to services and facilities for older people across the District, those with disabilities and those living in remote areas poorly served by public transport.

11.0 RECOMMENDATIONS:

11.1 It is recommended that:

- (1) funding continues to be provided for the Community Car Schemes, Wheels-2-Work and the Hambleton and Richmondshire Rural Transport and Access Partnership;
- (2) revenue funding to community minibus operators and the Taxi Voucher Scheme be withdrawn from 31 March 2012;
- (3) the Hambleton and Richmondshire Rural Transport and Access Partnership continues to administer the Community Car Scheme and be given discretion over its operation and that £14,000 per annum be passed to them for this purpose.

MICK JEWITT

Background papers: None
Author ref: MAJ
Contact: Mick Jewitt
Assistant Director
Direct Line No: 767053

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Community Transport Funding

Community Car Schemes

- 5 Community Car Schemes are supported giving a complete District coverage.
- The annual budget is £14,000; of this £2,500 is top sliced for Easingwold because it does not have a community minibus and the remainder is distributed according to mileage.
- In 2010/11 the funding was distributed as follows:

| | Approx Grants 2010/11 |
|----------------------|-----------------------|
| - Bedale | £1,380 |
| - Easingwold | £5,430 |
| - Northallerton | £2,790 |
| - Stokesley | £1,480 |
| - Thirsk and Sowerby | £2,920 |
| | <u>£14,000</u> |

- The schemes mainly assist 3 groups of residents; the frail elderly, the disabled and the rural isolated, all of whom cannot access other forms of transport.
- The Community Car Schemes provide more than 18,000 passenger journeys per annum in Hambleton.

Journey purposes fall into one of the following categories:

- Primary healthcare
 - Secondary healthcare
 - Social care
 - Leisure and social activities
 - Work and training
 - Education and childcare
 - Access to shopping and other services
- Volunteers use their own cars and receive 40p per mile from passengers; the volunteers also provide support and care associated with the journey. The Council's contribution goes towards co-ordination and administration of the schemes.
 - There are two distinct elements to the cost of operating the community car scheme:
 1. The cost of the journeys (currently 40p per mile). This is paid to the driver by the individual passenger or agency.
 2. The cost of organising the journeys including the management of the volunteer drivers. The law requires that the journeys are organised and booked in advance with the scheme as opposed to being booked with the driver.
 - HDC has been the main funder of the community car schemes, the only other funder being the PCT which contributes about £5,000 to the Easingwold scheme. In 2011/12 NYCC will

make a one-off contribution of £25,000 to improve the service across Northallerton, Stokesley, Bedale and parts of Richmondshire by improving the organisation and co-ordination. This initiative is an improvement to the current service and assumes that the Council will maintain its contribution of £14,000.

Community Minibus Concessionary Scheme

- Revenue funding to community minibus operators was introduced to encourage them to accept Concessionary Passes issued by the Council and offer reduced fare journeys. It was introduced as a local enhancement of the statutory national Concessionary Fares Scheme. The Council’s revenue funding was administered by the North Yorkshire Concessionary Fares Partnership which processed payment to three operators and recharged the Council. The three operators and the sums they receive are:

| | |
|--|---------|
| • Northallerton and District Voluntary Services Association (operating the Bedale minibus) | £3,000 |
| • Thirsk Community Transport (operating 2 minibuses) | £6,000 |
| • Stokesley Community Transport (operating 2 minibuses) | £6,000 |
| | £15,000 |

- The Council formerly offered capital grants for replacement minibuses but these were withdrawn in June 2010.
- There are more community minibus operators in the District than listed above but for historic reasons these are the only ones to be assisted. Other operators have questioned the fairness of this and so if the grants continue there could be pressure to extend them. Across the District there are approximately 9 minibuses operating as follows:-

- Stokesley (2) Stokesley Community Care Association
- Appleton Wiske (1) Appleton Wiske Mini-bus Club
- Osmotherley (1) Osmotherley Community Trust
- Northallerton (1) Breathing Space
- Bedale (1) Northallerton & District Voluntary Service Association
- Thirsk (2) Thirsk & District Community Mini-bus Association
- Easingwold (1) Easingwold Air Cadets

Taxi Voucher Scheme

- The Taxi Voucher Scheme was introduced as a local enhancement of the statutory national Concessionary Fares Scheme. The aim was to provide an alternative for those residents unable to access public transport because of disability. Those purchasing taxi vouchers were not intended to be issued with a concessionary bus pass.
- Residents in rural areas are able to purchase £60 worth of taxi vouchers at a cost of £30 and those in urban areas can purchase £30 worth of vouchers for £15.

- The overall budget for the scheme is modest at £2,700 per annum and the take-up is low. 62 sets of vouchers were issued in 2009/10 and 70 were issued in 2010/11. So far this year 47 sets of vouchers have been issued.

Wheels-2-Work

- Wheels-2- Work is a moped loan scheme aimed at helping people aged 16+ get over the initial problem of getting to work or training where no suitable alternative transport is available. Successful candidates who are referred by agencies such as Connexions receive a moped for (a nominal) 6 months after completing their Compulsory Basic Training. Safety helmets and protective clothing are also supplied and insurance, tax and servicing are covered. During the 6 month loan period candidates are asked to make a contribution of £15 a week and are encouraged to save up for their own transport or make other arrangements. See www.wheels2work.co.uk.
- The Hambleton and Richmondshire Wheels-2-Work scheme was launched in May 2001 with 12 mopeds. Wheels-2-Work now have 40 mopeds of which 20 are typically in use in Hambleton at any given time. Wheels-2-Work has proved highly successful over the last 10 years in providing a life changing stepping stone to hundreds of (mainly young) people in Hambleton, helping them into employment, apprenticeships, training and education. Due to limited resources the scheme has only been able to help about one in three of those referred. Currently between 20 and 30 people in Hambleton are helped each year.
- In 2010/11 Wheels-2-Work lost a third of its funding with the demise of Yorkshire Forward, the withdrawal of the NYCC Student Support funding and the reduction in the RDC contribution. The scheme is currently supported financially by the Big Lottery, HDC, NYCC, IPT, RDC and the £15 a week user contributions.

Hambleton and Richmondshire Rural Transport and Access Partnership

- The Council contributes £2,500 towards the core funding of the Hambleton and Richmondshire Rural Transport and Access Partnership.
- The Partnership aims to identify and promote action on unmet local transport and access needs, including enabling and developing improvement measures.
- This financial year (2011/12) the funding also recognises their role in administering the Community Car and Community Minibus Schemes for the Council.