

## Bath & North East Somerset Council

DECISION MAKER:	Cllr Anthony Clarke, Cabinet Member for Transport	
DECISION DATE:	On or after 22 March 2016	
		E2842
TITLE:	Voluntary sector funding applications for community transport for 2016-17	
WARD:	AI	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Appendix 1 – Terms and conditions for funding community transport 2016-17 Appendix 2 – Funding applications for community transport 2016-17		

### 1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 Funding applications have been received from voluntary sector bodies for the provision of community transport services in 2016-17. This Report gives details of those applications with recommendations on the allocation of funding.

### 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 That funding proposals in Appendix 2 be approved.
- 2.2 That the Divisional Director for Environmental Services be given delegated powers to reallocate funds, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport, from approved projects that become unviable owing to the level of funding allocated or to a change in circumstances of the applicant group, should such situations arise during the year.
- 2.3 That the Divisional Director for Environmental Services be given delegated powers to negotiate new service level agreements with Keynsham Dial-a-Ride and Midsomer Norton & Radstock Dial-a-Ride to take effect from 1 October 2016 and, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport, to agree the appropriate levels of payment for those agreements.

### 3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

- 3.1 Eight community transport providers applied for funding of £98,342 in total for 2016-17. The applications have been evaluated and assessed for value for money. With one exception, all schemes applied for funding at or around the 2015-16 level. One scheme applied for a significant increase in funding. In view of the reduction in fuel costs over the past 15 months, it is recommended that funding for individual schemes be capped at the 2015-16 level. Awards totalling £91,703 are recommended.
- 3.2 The 3 dial-a ride schemes (Bath, Keynsham and Midsomer Norton & Radstock) do not apply for annual grants because they operate under service level agreements (SLAs) that expire in March 2017 (Bath) and September 2016 (the other two). Funding of the dial-a-ride schemes is subject to an annual inflation-related adjustment, based on changes in transport industry costs. Total funding for dial-a-ride schemes will be equivalent to an annual figure of £191,860 based on the current arrangements. Funding for the second half of 2016-17 will be subject to negotiation of new SLAs for Keynsham Dial-a-Ride and Midsomer Norton & Radstock Dial-a-Ride.
- 3.3 If the recommendations are accepted and if overall funding for the new dial-a-ride SLAs is maintained at the same level in the second half of 2016-17, total spending on community transport support in 2016-17 will be £283,563, which is to be managed within existing budgets.
- 3.4 In addition to support for community transport services, the Council provides funding for safeguarding checks for paid staff, training for trustees in their roles and responsibilities, and basic first-aid training for volunteer drivers. This is estimated to cost in the region of £1k and will be managed within the Public Transport budget.

#### **4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL**

- 4.1 There is no statutory duty on the Council to fund the provision of community transport as such, but there is general recognition of its value in meeting the transport needs of those who are unable to use mainstream public transport, enabling them to live independently, to access essential services and to participate in community activities. Most users are elderly or disabled and value the service very highly.
- 4.2 The funding of community transport helps the Council meet its duty to ensure equal access to transport services.
- 4.3 Community transport relies heavily on volunteers to drive vehicles, provide escorts and carry out administrative tasks. In that way, it provides volunteering opportunities for those who wish to help their communities.
- 4.4 Community transport is firmly rooted in local communities, who have identified transport needs in their areas and sought to meet them. The Council is committed to encouraging, facilitating and supporting such local initiatives.
- 4.5 There are no adverse implications on any of the protected groups defined in equalities legislation.

## 5 THE REPORT

5.1 The Joint Local Transport Plan for the West of England Partnership Area 2011 – 2026 aims to maintain, diversify, expand and integrate community transport provision by:

- Linking with other forms of transport
- Optimising community transport operations
- Encouraging social enterprises
- Helping with marketing, publicity and information

5.2 The draft Keynsham Transport Strategy proposes “continued support for community transport” as a Key Action. Work is now under way on transport strategies for the Chew Valley and Somer Valley areas.

5.3 The Council received an award in 2015 from the Department for Transport’s Total Transport Pilot Fund to look at all forms of passenger transport in the Chew Valley area (buses, home-to-school transport, community transport and non-emergency patient transport). The purpose of the award is to assess the scope for co-ordinating transport provision and making more efficient use of available resources. The final report is expected in the first half of 2016.

5.4 Community transport improves access to work, education, training, shopping, leisure and health facilities for people living in rural areas and those who are elderly or disabled.

5.5 All schemes have made efforts to contain their costs and operate more efficiently. The number of individual passenger journeys on community transport services (including dial-a-rides) grew by 11% to 105,155 in 2014-15, continuing the trend of growth in previous years. The overall average subsidy per passenger journey fell from £3.49 in 2011-12 to £2.72 in 2014-15, reflecting a more efficient use of resources. The trend in the first half of 2015-16 has levelled out, though. The reason for this is not clear.

5.6 Recommended awards have been arrived at following assessment of grant applications, previous performance and a comparison of value for money, within the constraints of the budget available.

5.7 In 2015, the Council carried out an internal audit on community transport. The overall conclusion was that systems of internal control are satisfactory. Recommendations in the report for changes to assessment and monitoring processes are being implemented.

5.8 The Council is carrying out a strategic review of all transport provision with the purpose of making more efficient use of limited resources and getting better value for money, whilst protecting the needs of the most vulnerable and isolated. Community transport is seen as a vital element of overall transport provision and the review aims to broaden its appeal and improve its sustainability. A greater role is foreseen for those community transport schemes that share this aspiration and have the willingness to develop and evolve.

5.9 In January 2015, the Government published guidance on EU state aid rules in respect of community transport schemes. The Council’s legal officers have confirmed that the proposed grants do not conflict with the EU state aid rules.

## 6 RATIONALE

- 6.1 The recommended awards will ensure the continuation of existing community transport services and will help the Council meet its objectives.
- 6.2 The Council's Public Transport Team has considered the applications against set criteria (see Appendix 1) and assessed value for money by comparing the cost per trip of comparable schemes, based on the information that applicants provide.
- 6.3 One scheme applied for funding in excess of the current level (allowing for inflation) but it is recommended that the funding they receive be maintained at the 2015-16 level. The scheme concerned has been advised of the recommendation and confirm that the recommended award would not give rise to a substantial curtailment of the services they currently provide.

## 7 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 7.1 None.

## 8 CONSULTATION

- 8.1 Consultation has been carried out with the Section 151 Finance Officer and the Monitoring Officer. As in previous years, it was not deemed appropriate to consult more widely.
- 8.2 Consultation has been carried out electronically.
- 8.3 Advice will be sought from the Council's Procurement Team, as necessary, in the negotiation of new SLAs for the dial-a-ride schemes.

## 9 RISK MANAGEMENT

- 9.1 A risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations has been undertaken, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

<b>Contact person</b>	Andy Strong, Public Transport Manager – 01225 394201
<b>Background papers</b>	None.
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