

Bath & North East Somerset Council

DECISION MAKER:	Cllr Anthony Clarke, Cabinet Member for Transport	
DECISION DATE:	On or after 25 March 2017	
		E 2927
TITLE:	Voluntary sector funding applications for community transport for 2017-18	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Appendix 1 – Terms and conditions for funding community transport 2017-18 Appendix 2 – Funding applications for community transport 2017-18		

1 THE ISSUE

1.1 Funding applications have been received from voluntary sector bodies for the provision of community transport services in Bath & North East Somerset in 2017-18. This Report gives details of those applications with recommendations on the allocation of funding.

2 RECOMMENDATION

2.1 That, under authority delegated by the West of England Combined Authority (WECA), the Cabinet Member for Transport approves and implements the funding proposals in Appendix 2.

3 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCE, PROPERTY, PEOPLE)

3.1 Eight community transport providers applied for funding of £100,850 in total for 2017-18. The applications have been evaluated and assessed for value for money. Six schemes applied for funding at or around the 2016-17 level, allowing for inflation. One scheme applied for slightly less and one scheme applied for a significant increase in funding. Awards totalling £91,796 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 were extended to expire in September 2017. Bath Dial-a-Ride is operated by the Council's in-house fleet. Funding of the two external 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 £195,870 based on the current arrangements. It should be noted, however, that funding for the dial-a-rides for the second half of 2017-18 will be subject to negotiation of new SLAs by WECA or B&NES Council on its behalf.
- 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 2017-18, total spending on community transport support in 2017-18 will be £287,666. WECA agreed at its meeting on 15 March 2017 to transfer this amount to B&NES Council.
- 3.4 In addition to support for community transport services, the Council has hitherto provided funding for safeguarding checks for paid staff, training for trustees in their roles and responsibilities, and basic first-aid training for volunteer drivers. The cost is approximately £1k per annum and is currently met from within the B&NES Public Transport budget.

4 STATUTORY CONSIDERATIONS AND BASIS FOR PROPOSAL

- 4.1 There is no statutory duty on B&NES Council or WECA to fund the provision of community transport 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.
- 4.6 The Government's guidance on EU State Aid rules in respect of community transport schemes has been considered and the proposed grants do not conflict with the those rules.

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 Keynsham Transport Strategy confirmed “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 and it is anticipated that the importance of community transport to those areas will be recognised.
- 5.3 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.
- 5.4 The number of individual passenger journeys on community transport services (including dial-a-rides) fell very slightly by 1.85% to 103,214 in 2015-16 after several years of growth. A similar trend has continued into the first half of 2016-17. The overall average subsidy per passenger journey in 2015-16 was £2.80.
- 5.5 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.
- 5.6 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 grant application assessments and monitoring processes were implemented in 2016.
- 5.7 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. Meetings have been held with the larger community transport providers to help build an understanding of how they operate and to assess how they may be able to play a bigger role in the future.
- 5.8 Groups are encouraged to apply for other grants that are available to the voluntary sector. In 2015, two groups made successful applications for new vehicles to the Department for Transport’s Community Transport Minibus Fund.

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 has applied for funding in excess of the current level (allowing for inflation) but it is recommended that their grant be maintained at the 2016-17 level adjusted for inflation. The scheme applies for funding from other bodies too so it is unlikely that the recommended award would give rise to a substantial curtailment of their current services.

6.4 One scheme applied for a slightly lower level of funding and it provided more than 30% fewer journeys in 2015-16 than in 2012-13. The recommended award is less than that applied for and it caps the average subsidy per passenger journey at the level achieved in 2015-16 – but that is still the highest subsidy per journey of any of the schemes supported by the Council.

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.

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.

Contact person	Andy Strong, Public Transport Manager – 01225 394201
Background papers	West of England Combined Authority Order 2017 SI 2017 No 126 Joint Local Transport Plan for the West of England Partnership Area 2011 – 2026 Keynsham Transport Strategy July 2016
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