

Bath & North East Somerset Council

DECISION MAKER:	Cllr Mark Shelford, Cabinet Member for Transport & Highways	
DECISION DATE:	On or after 31 March 2018	
		E 3031
TITLE:	Voluntary sector funding applications for community transport for 2018-19	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: Appendix 1 – Terms and conditions for funding community transport 2018-19 Appendix 2 – Funding applications for community transport 2018-19		

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 2018-19. 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 & Highways 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 £103,477 in total for 2018-19. The applications have been evaluated and assessed for value for money. Most schemes applied for funding at or around the 2017-18 level, allowing for inflation. Two schemes applied for slightly less and one scheme applied for a significant increase in funding. Awards totalling £85,584 are recommended – a

reduction of £6,212 from the 2017-18 figure. This enables a saving to be made towards the target in the Strategic Review of Transport.

- 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 have been extended to expire in March 2019. Bath Dial-a-Ride is operated by the Council's in-house fleet. Total funding for dial-a-ride schemes in 2018-19 will be £195,870 – the same as in 2017-18 and thus not being adjusted to reflect inflation.
- 3.3 If the recommendations are accepted, total spending on community transport support in 2018-19 will be £281,454. This will enable a saving of £8,565 to be made in the subsequent year because WECA adjusts its financial levy and grant retrospectively.
- 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 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 noted “continued support for community transport” as a Key Action and the Somer Valley Transport Strategy noted “promote greater use of the existing community transport service for all potential users” as a Key Action.

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. It helps to reduce social isolation and promote independent living.

5.4 The number of individual passenger journeys on community transport services (including dial-a-rides) in 2016-17 was 102,820 - virtually unchanged from the previous year. The overall average subsidy per passenger journey in 2016-17 was £2.86.

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 Transport 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. The Review includes some challenging savings targets to spur the drive for greater efficiency.

5.8 Community transport providers have been consistently encouraged to seek commercial sponsorship and to make their operations as efficient as possible. There has been some success in both these areas and the Council aims to continue working with groups to reduce their reliance on public sector funding.

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 In view of the financial challenge facing the Council, it is recommended that overall spending on community transport be reduced by 6% in 2018-19. This can be achieved by capping grants at a level 5% lower than in 2017-18, by the agreement of the dial-a-rides not to have an inflation-related increase in their support level and by a greater reduction in support for one scheme that has comparatively high operating costs. It is possible that the recommended reduction in support will lead to higher charges to service users and some deferment of vehicle replacement.

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 Somerset Valley Transport Strategy October 2017
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	