

Division(s): Faringdon; Grove & Wantage; Hanneys & Hendred; Kingston Bagpuize; Shrivenham; Sutton Courtenay & Harwell.

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT – 1 SEPTEMBER 2011

REVIEW OF GRANT FOR PROVISION OF LOCALLY ORGANISED TRANSPORT SCHEMES FOR PEOPLE WITH MOBILITY IMPAIRMENTS

Report by Deputy Director for Environment & Economy (Highways & Transport)

Introduction

1. This report invites the Cabinet Member for Transport to consider future funding for a well-established locally-organised community transport scheme, namely the volunteer car scheme organised by and forming part of the services offered by the Wantage Independent Advice Centre (IAC)
2. Funding is sought for a further period of some three-and-a-half years to June 2015, to co-incide, as now, with the periodic review of subsidised bus services in the Wantage area.
3. Details of the scheme are shown below, along with a summary of consultation responses.

Grant support principles

4. Oxfordshire County Council has continued to give grants for a number of locally-organised transport schemes, some of which date back to the 1980s. Such schemes are locally-organised, where the local community is either providing funds or volunteer effort (or both), and therefore the absolute cost of these schemes is low.
5. The Council's Local Transport Plan refers to the importance placed on supporting a healthy community transport sector in order to support the populations of rural areas, and to enable more disabled and older people to live independently rather than in residential care homes. Such community transport plays a large part in delivering transport for people who are unable to access conventional public transport, and enable wider participation in social, recreational and community activities.
6. This service, like other Community Transport schemes, aims to enable extra transport opportunities for people with mobility impairments or the elderly. This therefore contributes to the LTP3 objective of "Improving Accessibility", and in particular to policy AX3 which states that "Oxfordshire County Council will support the use of community transport and dial-a-ride services and

encourage the use of taxis and private hire vehicles to meet local accessibility needs, including those of disabled people". These extra transport opportunities improve access to community facilities and therefore contribute to improving the quality of life for some people, minimising the risk of social exclusion.

7. In the case of this community car scheme, the client pays the volunteer driver a fare for the journey (which in the case of hospital journeys meeting NHS criteria may be re-claimed from the Hospital Trust on application), and it is the irrecoverable overhead costs related to the scheme organiser, the administration of the scheme, and the actions required to match journey requests with volunteer drivers which the County Council is being asked to contribute towards.
8. All volunteer car schemes are encouraged to try to secure funding from the appropriate NHS Trusts to support the costs associated with those journeys undertaken to meet hospital appointments and by clients referred to schemes by the Hospital Transport Unit. For example, it is reckoned that approximately 45% of all Wantage IAC journeys in 2010/11 were made to meet medical purposes. Council officers and Oxfordshire Rural Community Council work with schemes, collectively and individually, to lobby the NHS in this way. Nevertheless, securing financial support from the NHS has proved very difficult in the past.
9. For this review consultation has been carried out with all the appropriate Parish Councils and relevant County Councillors, as well as Oxfordshire Unlimited (the County's user-led organisation representing disabled and mobility-impaired people) and the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council. Specific responses are summarised below and copies of all consultation responses have been deposited in the Members' Resource Centre.

Wantage IAC Community Car Scheme

10. Oxfordshire County Council has funded the Wantage Independent Advice Centre to provide a voluntary car scheme since October 1998. From small beginnings this has grown into a significant transport provider for people with mobility impairments living in a wide catchment area of the Vale of White Horse district. It enables users of the service to travel for a wide range of social, medical, and shopping purposes, both within the catchment area and to Oxfordshire hospitals.
11. In total there are now approximately 900 clients (718 in 2007) who in 2010/11 made 3,982 return journeys (3,994 in 2004/05, 5,324 in 2008/09), covering a total of 68,900 miles (48,286 in 2004/05). The year 2010/11 saw a reduction in demand for travel, with the loss (from July 2009) of a contract to provide transport to day centres on behalf of Social Services. It is expected that this reduction will now be reversed in 2011/12.
12. This scheme must be regarded as having become a highly successful operation, especially as it caters only for those with mobility impairments.

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Fares charged to users (42p per mile, with a minimum charge of £4.50 return) reflect re-imbusement to drivers (at 39p per mile) plus a small contribution to IAC administration costs. The funding which the County Council provides therefore contributes directly towards the administration of the transport service. Wantage IAC intends to raise their fares from September 2011 to 45p per mile, with a minimum charge of £5 return. Driver re-imbusement will increase to 40p per mile at the same time.

13. Historically, the County Council's funding has been based on a proportion (30%) of the costs of the overall transport service, whose total costs (including the salary of the part-time Transport Manager) now amount to some £37,509. The 30% figure is derived from the approximate proportion of the total of passenger journeys undertaken by the Car Scheme that are for Social / Shopping purposes or to non-County-run social clubs / centres, and ensures that Community Transport budget funding is not being used to support journeys for hospital or social services purposes.
14. Since the last review, the Advice Centre has improved its data recording and accounting procedures, and now states that it has 'under-claimed' for grant support in the past. They have stated that "Having looked at the previous settlements, we can see that for the settlement 2006 onwards the correct figure should have been £8,000 but in fact we were awarded £5,000" and that "Had we been able to more accurately assess costs at that time" they would have claimed the higher amount. The Scheme manager states "This means that to a large extent we have run the transport scheme with a funding shortfall from the County Council. However, in previous years we have been able to cover this with public donations, grants and resource savings in other services. Given the very difficult economic climate, our ability to cover any council funding shortfall is severely impacted and we already see that public donation is substantially reduced."
15. On this basis, the Independent Advice Centre has requested that the grant for 2011/12 be increased to £11,500.00. This will enable them to carry on improving the quality of life of the elderly and infirm people in the community. If the Council is unable to meet the requested increase in the grant, then the Advice Centre states that "We would be at serious risk of being unable to administer the scheme appropriately" and "would obviously have to review all the elements of the scheme, including transportation of Day Centre clients. In short, we may have to reduce the transport service to reduce costs".
16. Letters of support have been received from Cllr Zoe Patrick and Cllr Jenny Hannaby (County Councillors for Grove and Wantage) and, as well as from Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (ORCC). In addition supportive responses have been received from the parish councils of Ardington & Lockinge, Charney Bassett, Childrey, East Hanney, East Hendred, Grove, Letcombe Bassett, Letcombe Regis, Sparsholt and Wantage Town Council, and from Oxfordshire Unlimited. Cllr Mrs Judith Heathcote (County Councillor for Faringdon & The Coxwells) also responded.

17. Cllr Patrick stated that “the IAC car scheme is a hugely valued service for residents within the Grove, Wantage area and surrounding villages. I would hope that this service would continue because the benefits to the community are great. You have asked whether the increase in the grant from £6,015 to approximately £11,500 would be justified. I believe that in these hard times there is an increased demand for the service and the costs for providing it have also increased. It is also worth noting that the IAC had put in a bid to the Big Society Fund to help run clients to the day centres but unfortunately this has not been successful in the first round. I would therefore hope that this additional grant money will be well spent to ensure that the service continues.”
18. ORCC wrote that “The scheme offers a more personal, timed service to appointments or shopping journeys with the drivers often accompanying the client into the appointment or to help with shopping. This scheme is very well run and managed. The scheme is also very popular with residents of Wantage and the surrounding area. Generally the number of journeys has increased year on year, with the exception on 2009/10 when a reduction occurred. This was caused by the cancellation of a contract with OCC to take people to the local day centre with their service being replaced by OCC Special Transport Services. Late 2011/12 showed almost a reversal of this decision with the move to personal budgets and individuals making their own transport arrangements. Regarding the level of grant, it is important to recognise that the scheme includes a small charge in the rates used to calculate the cost to the passenger over and above the driver’s mileage rate but this does not meet the whole costs. Accordingly I do not think that the requested grant of £11,500 is unreasonable. I do hope OCC can support Wantage IAC to this full amount in future”.
19. Childrey Parish Council stated “(We) totally support the application by Wantage IAC as (we) see this as a necessary and valuable service to the local community”. Ardington & Lockinge Parish Council stated that “The Parish Council has made an annual contribution to the IAC since 1997. One of our councillors attended last year’s AGM and was impressed by their activity”. Wantage Town Council wrote “The Town Council gives its unreserved endorsement and support to the car scheme. It would be extremely detrimental to our community if the County failed to maintain a substantial financial contribution.” East Hanney Parish Council was a little qualified in their support for the scheme, stating “We would certainly wish the valued support from Oxfordshire County Council for the Wantage IAC car scheme to continue,...however the requested increase to £11,500 does seem high and a figure of the order of £7,000 would seem to be a more reasonable ceiling”.
20. As a result of the meetings and communications which they have had with IAC, officers have gained a very favourable impression of the operation of the IAC community transport service. I therefore recommend that the Cabinet Member continues his support for the Wantage IAC car scheme, in which case it is recommended that a total grant of £11,500.00 be awarded. On current patronage (2010/11 figures) of 7,734 passenger journeys (down from 9,099 in 2006/07, 8,783 in 2005/06 and 7,988 in 2004/05) this would be

equivalent to a cpj of £1.49 (58p when last reviewed in 2007, £1.27 in 2005) which represents extremely good value for money. This service would continue to be restricted to those people with mobility impairments who cannot use conventional public transport. On the basis of the current County Council funding of £6,015.42, the cost per journey amounts to 78p.

21. It is proposed that the Wantage IAC car scheme service is reviewed again at the same time as the scheduled Area Review of subsidised bus services in the Wantage / Faringdon area, which is due for implementation in June 2015.

Financial and Staff Implications

22. The total cost of this scheme currently amounts to £6,015.42 on a full-year basis. The total cost of the recommendation below amounts to £11,500.00 on a full-year basis. Funding for this scheme would be drawn from the Community Transport budget, part of the Integrated Transport Unit. The increase in spending would therefore place further demands on this budget, and may create further pressures to reduce expenditure on other elements of Community Transport spending. It may be possible to meet some or all of this year's element of the award to Wantage IAC by utilising the special one-off grant which has been provided to the Council by the Department for Transport to support the growth of community transport schemes. The actual amount of the increase sought is very small, and supporting volunteer-led community transport provision is generally of much lower cost than providing transport to isolated communities or mobility-impaired people in other ways. The report is not considered to raise any staff implications.

RECOMMENDATION

23. **The Cabinet Member for Transport is RECOMMENDED to pay Wantage Independent Advice Centre up to £11,500.00 (but with annual adjustments of 2% for inflation) to secure the continuation of the Wantage IAC Community Car Scheme for a period commencing 11 December 2011 and concluding on 30 May 2015, or on whatever date the scheduled area review of bus services in the Wantage & Faringdon area is implemented.**

STEVE HOWELL

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Background papers: Correspondence with service providers and user representatives
(refer to contact officer)

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