

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT– 16 FEBRUARY 2012
FUNDING FOR OXFORDSHIRE RURAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL
TRANSPORT TEAM

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

Introduction

1. This report invites the Cabinet Member for Transport to consider future funding for the employment of externally-based post/s, based at Oxfordshire Rural Community Council (ORCC), with a remit to advise, assist and encourage the provision of transport in various ways by the community and voluntary sector. Current County Council funding arrangements which support these posts comes to an end on 31 March 2012.
2. The availability of such advice and assistance has historically been seen as a precondition for encouraging the continuation and growth of a healthy community transport sector in Oxfordshire. The community transport sector plays a large part in the delivery of transport for people who are unable to access conventional public transport services. They are designed to enable wider participation in social, recreational and community activities. Particular beneficiaries of such schemes are the elderly and young people who have no access to alternative means of transport. The existence of these posts has enabled Oxfordshire County Council to secure cost-effective transport provision in circumstances where a conventional bus service is inappropriate.
3. This funding review needs to be taken in the context of partnership working with the district councils, some of which will continue to provide funding in support of the ORCC transport team (and which is reported elsewhere), and also on the work being undertaken in the County Council to develop and consult upon a funding framework for spending the community transport government grant.
4. Accordingly, this report seeks approval only for interim arrangements to be put in place that effectively would see the continuation of one post at ORCC for one further year, focussed on supporting parish councils and community transport providers with advice and support. The objectives of the post-holder can be clearly linked to the funding framework. The outputs of the post-holder are detailed at Annex 1.
5. The work of the post-holder at ORCC links closely with proposals coming forward in the funding framework which will be considered by Cabinet later this year. Engagement with communities to develop and extend voluntary schemes is likely to be an important element of the framework. Officers will

ensure a consistent and co-ordinated approach between ORCC and this Council, through the service level agreement, to deliver the agreed objectives.

Background

6. In November 2007 and March 2008 the Cabinet Member for Transport agreed, inter alia, to pay £86,290 per annum towards the establishment of three full-time equivalent posts at ORCC, with the balance of the necessary funding coming from all five district councils.
7. This position was maintained until April 2011, when it was agreed that County Council funding for the ORCC posts would be reduced to £26,290 as part of the general need to find savings in County Council budgets. In the event, continuation of County Council funding at the previous annualised equivalent level was maintained until 1 October 2011 by using £30,000 of the money received from the Department for Transport in the form of a Supporting Community Transport Fund grant of £279,000.
8. Nevertheless, as a result of this reduction in County Council funding, and similar reductions in support from some of the district councils, one of the three ORCC transport posts was made redundant as from 1 October 2011, and another post-holder is retiring on 31 March 2012 without current plans for the post to be replaced. This therefore leaves only one of the three previous posts.

District Councils' Agreed Positions

9. Cherwell District Council: The funding for the transport team at ORCC is now wrapped up inside a wider service level agreement (SLA) with ORCC. Within that funding an apportionment of approximately £5,000 is intended to support the Community Transport Advisor post, but this is not ring-fenced, and ORCC can allocate the funding in alternate ways if it chooses. Cherwell expect that their SLA payment in 2012/13 will be unchanged from 2011/12.
10. South Oxfordshire District Council: South Oxfordshire's funding for ORCC is paid through that Authority's grants process as an annual amount, which covers several areas of work (including those of the Community Transport Advisor and the Partnership Officer). The amount proposed for the transport team in 2012/13 is approximately £8,000, but this is not ring-fenced by South Oxfordshire District Council (SODC) and ORCC is free to redistribute this in other areas. The year 2012/13 will be the last of the current SLA between SODC and ORCC.
11. Vale of White Horse District Council: A partnership grant of £4,000 was given in 2010-11 and reduced to £2,000 in 2011-12. It is expected that this residual funding will be withdrawn from April 2012.
12. West Oxfordshire District Council: This Council is looking to agree an overall funding position with ORCC across a range of service interests (transport, village shops, community development, housing etc.). The final decision on the amount of funding to be awarded will not be taken until

February 2012. However, the sum of £5,615 has been included for transport support within the draft agreement that is still being discussed.

13. Oxford City Council had been contributing £5,000 per annum since 2008/09 to support the Disability Transport Advisor/Trainer post, but this funding has now been withdrawn and Oxford City Council is not expected to provide any funding for the ORCC transport team in future.

Summary of Financial Contributions Required and Committed

14. The committed or recommended funding from each source is as follows:

Oxfordshire County Council	£26,290
Oxford City Council	£NIL
Cherwell District Council	£ 5,000
South Oxfordshire District Council	£ 8,000
Vale of White Horse District Council	£NIL
West Oxfordshire District Council	<u>£ 5,615</u>
Total funding	£44,905

15. In order to fully fund the Community Transport Advisor post, a total of £51,000 is suggested by ORCC. However, they have indicated that they would be able to plug this funding gap for one year only using other resources which happen to be at their disposal.
16. The costs of the post also include the cost of providing free public liability insurance for community transport schemes, and for publishing the Oxfordshire Community Transport Directory and other handbooks and resources for the community transport sector. The Cabinet Member may wish to consider whether such project costs could be covered separately by the Council by accessing other Council funds dedicated to supporting schemes.
17. ORCC have confirmed that the levels of funding outlined above, if confirmed, will enable them to maintain the post and carry out the outputs and activities identified at Annex 1, at a level which reflects the resources available.

Consultations

18. For this review a joint consultation has been carried out in conjunction with all of the city and district councils, encompassing all parish councils in Oxfordshire, and all providers of community transport schemes (as contained in the 2010 published edition of the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council's "Directory of Community Transport in Oxfordshire". Copies of all consultation responses have been deposited in the Members' Resource Centre.
19. Replies were received from 20 parish councils and seven community transport providers. Of the parish councils which replied, 17 were supportive of the proposals. Swerford Parish Council felt that all funding for the ORCC transport function should be ended; Bodicote Parish Council adopted an essentially neutral position and Tadmarton Parish Council felt that they were not qualified to deliver a meaningful verdict.

20. Wroxton Parish Council, whilst supportive of the proposal, felt that the Community Transport Advisor post should be brought in-house and established within the County Council. Chalgrove and Blewbury parish councils felt that the Council should also be supporting the continuation of the Disability Transport Advisor/Trainer role.
21. All seven community transport schemes supported the proposals, but also offered warm praise for all of the ORCC transport team and its value to the community transport sector. Henley Handibus and Villager Bus particularly praised the Disability Transport Advisor/Trainer post-holder and additionally supported the retention of funding for this role.

Delivering MiDAS and PATS training to the volunteer sector

22. The former Disability Transport Advisor/Trainer's main function was the provision of free training to community transport volunteers of the nationally-recognised MiDAS (Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme) and PATS (Passenger Assistants Training Scheme) qualifications. This was enabled by the provision of a delegated fund of up to £8,500 per annum to cover the costs of materials, certification fees etc.
23. Since the post was declared redundant at ORCC, the previous post-holder has continued to undertake such training but now has to charge a commercial fee for doing so as this represents his livelihood. There are understood to be a small number of alternate qualified MiDAS and PATS trainers available in Oxfordshire, but these operate on a similar commercial basis.
24. The loss of this free training provision has been lamented by the volunteer transport sector in Oxfordshire, but in withdrawing support from ORCC for this role, it was the intention that it should be replaced by delivering such training through the utilisation of spare staff capacity at the Integrated Transport Unit. Unfortunately it was not possible to have this in place from October 2011, but is expected to be available from April 2012.
25. It is therefore proposed that this delegated fund be transferred to the Integrated Transport Unit from April 2012 so that the free provision of MiDAS and PATS training to the volunteer sector can be resumed.

Financial and Staff Implications

26. The financial cost to the County Council of supporting the external transport posts at ORCC currently amounts to £26,290 (excluding the interim additional sum of £30,000 drawn this year from the Department for Transport's "Supporting Community Transport Fund grant), plus the value of the previous £8,500 delegated training budget for the Disability Transport Advisor/Trainer
27. These sums are allowed for in the Bus Services Team's Community Transport budget for 2012/13.

Recommendations

28. **The Cabinet Member for Transport is RECOMMENDED:**
- (a) to pay Oxfordshire Rural Community Council £26,290.00 for 2012/13, to provide for the outputs listed in Annex 1 to this report;**
 - (b) that the Deputy Director for Environment & Economy (Highways & Transport) draw up a service level agreement with Oxfordshire Rural Community Council covering the job summary, key responsibilities, work programme and output targets expected for the Community Transport Advisor;**
 - (c) to ask officers to continue to liaise regularly with the Community Transport Advisor, through joint liaison and one-to-one meetings, and to monitor the outputs of the post in line with the service level agreement.**

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Background papers: Nil

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ORCC Transport Role

To promote and support improved transport and other means of accessing services* for people in rural, and other marginalised/isolated, communities (including communities of interest such as people with mobility impairments and learning difficulties).

This would be done by:

- Facilitating and supporting local transport initiatives.
- Raising transport needs and issues with policy makers and transport providers locally.

Specific aims

Keep under review the transport needs and issues in communities throughout Oxfordshire and draw these to the attention of policy makers, and transport providers.

Increase awareness among local communities of the self-help, community transport and other transport options available.

Identify communities with unmet transport needs and work with them to ensure that transport is arranged to meet their needs.

Provide on-going assistance and support for community transport schemes individually and collectively.

Outcomes

- People in rural, and other marginalised/isolated, communities benefit from improved or extended provision achieved through joint working by service providers and/or improved use of existing resources.
- Service providers and members of communities are more aware of opportunities available and examples of good practice.
- Community transport schemes themselves are helped to continue and be stronger and more effective.
- More people in communities have access to external services.

In the light of positive feedback, broad strands emerging from historical experience seem worth continuing:

1. Community development and needs analysis along with support for new and existing community-level transport schemes and initiatives particularly including “greener travel” initiatives.

2. Keeping under review the transport needs and issues in rural or marginalized /isolated communities and communities of interest, and drawing these to the attention of policy makers and transport providers nationally and locally.

Within this broad framework we would see the following pattern of activity.

Activities

Provide an on-going information, advice and support service for community transport schemes including information, advice and training on:

- Opportunities to benefit from new and existing funding or other support initiatives e.g. the Octabadge scheme.
- New legislation or other policy developments affecting CT operations.
- Effective community transport operational practice.
- Recruitment and support of volunteers.

Promote the concept and possibility of community transport provision particularly in villages where an existing transport service is threatened or withdrawn.

Provide advice and community project development support to rural communities wishing to establish a new community transport service in response to an identified need.

Produce a Community Transport Directory providing information about CT and appropriate other services available within the county including vehicles available to other groups ('Brokerage').

Investigate and document local needs including facilitation and analysis of local transport needs surveys.

Effective liaison and partnership working with local authorities, transport operators and other interests, as appropriate.