

CABINET MEMBER FOR TRANSPORT – 25 MARCH 2010

REVIEW OF FUNDING FOR CONSULTATIVE BODY REPRESENTING PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND MOBILITY IMPAIRMENTS

Report by Head of Transport

Introduction

1. This report invites the Cabinet Member to consider future funding for Transport For All (TFA), the Oxfordshire consultative body representing people with disabilities and mobility-impairments in relation to transport and accessibility issues.
2. TFA was set up in 1988 by the County Council's then Public Transport Sub-Committee to enable the Council to discharge its duty under the 1985 Transport Act "to have regard to the transport needs of members of the public who are elderly or disabled" when carrying out its public transport functions. [1985 Transport Act, Part IV, Section 63(8)]. This duty is still in force.
3. Current County Council funding arrangements for TFA were entered into as far back as September 1991, when the then Public Transport Sub-Committee agreed a budget of up to £1,500 per annum for what was then referred to as the Consultative Committee for the Transport-Handicapped. This group has evolved somewhat over subsequent years and undergone a number of changes of name, adopting its current title some three years ago. However, for the sake of consistency I refer to the group as TFA throughout this report.
4. The initial decision to provide funding for TFA was not time-limited, but discussions with the County Council's Legal Services unit have led to the advice that such open-ended financial commitments are no longer considered appropriate. Accordingly, this report offers an opportunity for the Cabinet Member for Transport to review the work of this group, and consider future funding arrangements.
5. For this review a formal consultation with external bodies (apart from "Unlimited") has not been carried out, as the organisation fundamentally exists to meet a requirement of the Council. However, various officers of the Environment & Economy Directorate were approached for their experience of using TFA as a consultative medium for their own work-streams and these results are reported. In addition, TFA members themselves have been invited to express their views as to the effectiveness of the organisation and their aspirations for the future. TFA members were also invited to consider the logistical and funding implications of future potential workloads. Specific responses are summarised in the appropriate sections and copies of all consultation responses are on deposit in the Members' Resource Centre.

History of Transport For All

6. This consultative body, a product of the report produced for the County Council by what is now known as Oxfordshire Community & Voluntary Action (OCVA) in 1988, was set-up originally under the organisational umbrella of the now-defunct Oxfordshire Council of Disabled People with the inaugural meeting taking place on 24 January 1991.
7. Amongst the early tasks accorded to the group were “to consider the desirable direction of development of the Ring-a-Ride, vehicle upgrading and minibus-sharing schemes operated by [OCVA] and to advise the Public Transport Sub-Committee of their views”; and on “Grant Funding for Accessible Transport”, examining the then-current transport options for disabled people and making recommendations for further research.
8. TFA was asked to advise the Council as to whether public transport provision for disabled people should be steered towards ‘mainstream’ accessible bus services, or via the provision of separate dial-a-ride minibus provision. TFA’s preference for ‘mainstreaming’ low-floor accessible bus services could be said to be part of the reason for Oxfordshire’s relative success in the roll-out of low floor buses, which has now reached almost 100%, some 6 to 7 years in advance of the legislative requirement under the PSV Accessibility Regulations 2000.
9. In its early days TFA was therefore accorded an influential role and a representative of TFA sat as a non-voting member of the Council’s Public Transport Sub-Committee.
10. As its role (and name) developed under successive Chairmen, TFA settled into a role where it was routinely consulted by the Council’s Public Transport Team on issues relating to public transport provision, whether bus service changes or developments in the provision of dial-a-ride services for people with disabilities or mobility-impairments.
11. More recently the Head of Transport has encouraged a wide range of officers from E&E to consult TFA on projects and policies on which they are engaged. This has offered a slightly wider role to TFA than its previous focus on public transport issues. Oxford City Council has also begun to use TFA for some consultations.
12. In this way, TFA has been consulted on matters as diverse as:
 - Factors that should inform bus subsidy decisions
 - Iffley Road parking restrictions
 - Disabled persons’ parking places in Oxford.
 - Proposed Toucan crossing improvements
 - Banbury South Bar bus stops
 - Restricted parking within Greys Hill and Vicarage Road
 - Merton Street (Banbury) one-way system
 - London Road improvement scheme.
 - “Transform Oxford”
 - Review of Octabus and Cherwell Dial-a-Ride schemes

- Various reviews of individual community transport projects
 - Local Transport Plan development.
13. A still more central role for TFA in future is now envisaged. This would see the organisation consulted at an earlier stage in the development of policies and schemes and at a more strategic level in terms of the engagement with Council staff. TFA members would be invited to transport scheme site meetings and policy briefings, where appropriate. If effective, this could see TFA restored to a position of an effective and influential role in the development and scrutiny of council policy, as it once had. However, to fulfil this enhanced role TFA will need to structure its activities to give confidence that it will be more effective.

Developments in Transport For All's structure and management since 2005

14. Following the death of its third Chairman, Geoffrey Newman, in 2006, the group has developed further. Gwyn Huish (a member of the funded 'external transport team' at ORCC) stepped into the vacant role. Since then the group has become more pro-active in seeking new members, drawn from experience of a range of different disabilities, and has taken to raising its profile through attendance at a number of 'Roadshows' organised by Age Concern at a variety of locations around the county.
15. Transport For All members expressed a desire for a more formal structure for the group, including the opportunity to freely elect their Chairman on a regular basis. Accordingly, the provision for members to formally elect (or re-elect) the Chairman and a Deputy Chairman was instituted from June 2008 and the post of Treasurer was also created with elections for this post first held in June 2009. Elections are held in June of each year, overseen by an independent "Returning Officer" appointed by a TFA meeting. Election is by secret ballot, and postal voting arrangements are also in place to allow all TFA members to participate.
16. In December 2009 the current Chairman announced that he would step down from the role, effective from the 2010 AGM (in June). This will provide more time for him to fulfil the role intended for him; that of providing officer support for TFA. He is understood to feel that he has set TFA on an upward trajectory, but feels that the time has come for TFA again to be led by a person with a disability or representing a disability group.

Transport For All role and functions

17. Essentially, what officers want TFA to achieve could be summarised as to:
- Allow the Council to meet its Transport Act 1985 duty.
 - Engage with bus, rail and taxi operators to ensure that the transport needs of disabled and mobility-impaired people are being properly understood and addressed by transport providers.
 - Fully engage in county council consultations, to ensure that the transport needs of disabled and mobility-impaired people are being properly understood and addressed; to help the county council to think

- strategically about such issues and to direct our resources effectively and efficiently.
- Ensure that consultation responses are based on a balanced comprehensive assessment of the issues, which adds to the county council's understanding.
18. In doing so, we would expect TFA to take steps to ensure that it is representative of people with a range of different disabilities and, as far as possible, representative geographically of the entire county of Oxfordshire and that TFA itself will utilise its resources effectively and demonstrate a degree of pro-activity.
19. In its early history, TFA undertook a number of quite significant specific research projects, in order to inform the guidance it offered to policy-makers. In recent times, when TFA has sought to increase its 'baseline' grant, it has been advised that one-off additional sums could be granted to TFA to meet the agreed costs of specific project proposals. Such projects could include, for example, a review of unmet transport needs amongst people with disabilities, or examining the potential application of design developments such as talking bus stops in Oxfordshire. It is suggested that delegated authority might be granted to the Head of Transport, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport, to consider funding for any such additional projects.

Consultation role

20. TFA is regularly offered opportunities to voice its opinion on transport matters by various officers within the Environment & Economy Directorate. In some cases officers brief TFA members through the process of making presentations at TFA meetings; in other cases TFA is invited to respond to written consultations. For more routine matters, or ongoing consultation processes, the Assistant Public Transport Officer attends TFA meetings and offers members an update on developments in the public transport work of the Council and invite views from TFA members on current issues.
21. Seventeen officers or teams of the Environment & Economy Directorate and of Oxford City Council were approached for their experience of using TFA as a consultative medium for their own work-streams, representing 27 separate consultations or projects. These figures exclude consultations entered into by the Assistant Public Transport Officer. Of the ten responses received at the time of writing this report only one officer reported that TFA had responded to the consultation opportunity offered. On the face of it this is disappointing.
22. Officers have raised this matter with the Chairman of TFA. He accepts that this response rate is capable of being seen in a poor light, but draws attention to other major consultations on which TFA have submitted very full responses, such as "Transform Oxford", and points out that until recently his approach had been not to comment on consultations which were felt to be non-controversial or with which TFA fully concurred. In the last three months this policy has changed, and TFA will now seek to respond to all

consultations, if only to affirm its support for whatever the Council may be proposing.

23. Where TFA had responded, the relevant officer reported that TFA's contribution had been "really helpful" and drew attention to the practical research which TFA had voluntarily undertaken in order to inform their response.
24. It is clear that TFA is capable of offering informed and effective responses to consultations when it properly addresses the issue. However, the present structure of quarterly 'plenary' meetings and a limited number of sub-group meetings in between does not seem to offer the most effective way of meeting the Council's aspirations for better engagement from TFA in future.
25. One possible approach that might be adopted, in order that TFA might better respond to localised consultations, would be the establishment of small local networks of disabled and mobility-impaired people able to offer a 'rapid-response' to invitations to attend site meetings or council briefings on specific projects, leaving the large 'plenary meetings' to address wider strategic policy issues, such as the development of the Local Transport Plan and to co-ordinate the work of the smaller local networks.
26. Additionally, to enable TFA members to be more effective in their roles, TFA could instigate appropriate training, for example Disability Awareness Training to encourage a broader understanding of the impediments inherent in disabilities other than the member's own; basic briefings on planning, highways and transport legislation and on the Council's structures and workstreams.
27. Discussion is still ongoing with Transport For All as to how they would propose to structure their work in future to meet the increased role that the Council might wish to place on them. I will make a verbal update on the position at the Cabinet Member meeting. I would expect to secure TFA's commitment to specific actions and targets as a condition of any funding proposed.

User Led Organisation ("Oxfordshire Unlimited")

28. The Social & Community Services Directorate of the Council has been developing a project to establish a User Led Organisation (ULO). This initiative derives from a central government approach, which is being interpreted locally and for which Social & Community Services was awarded funding from government to facilitate development and launch of the ULO
29. This ULO became formally established in November 2009, taking the name "Oxfordshire Unlimited".
30. Officers have discussed with Unlimited and with Council officers in Social & Community Services, who have been supporting the project, as to whether 'Unlimited' might take on the consultative role currently met by TFA. The response has been that, whilst 'Unlimited' may be in a position to consider

such a role in future, that time has not yet arrived. 'Unlimited' may be in a position to act as a consultative body for Environment & Economy in a year or two, once it has become fully established.

31. Unlimited's Chairman sees a future relationship between 'Unlimited' and TFA where 'Unlimited' takes on an 'umbrella' role, overseeing the work of a number of 'subsidiary' bodies dealing with a wide range of Council activities. In this scenario. TFA might form the 'Unlimited' 'subsidiary' dealing with transport and accessibility issues, as it does now.

How the project supports LTP2 objectives

32. Whilst TFA's core purpose is to meet a duty under the 1985 Transport Act, its existence should encourage policies and practices that offer extra transport opportunities for people with mobility impairments or the elderly. This therefore contributes to the LTP2 objective of "Delivering Accessibility". 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.

Financial and Staff Implications

33. The Public Transport Sub-Committee was invited, in September 1991, to consider a recommendation to provide TFA with a budget to enable it to carry out its work. A figure of £1,500 per annum was agreed as a maximum. For a long period only a small amount of this budget was being spent.
34. In the last few years the budget has been utilised much more fully. Indeed in the 2008/09 financial year the budget was overspent, and in the 2009/10 financial year, it has been possible to continue only by dint of aggressive budgetary restraint in the second half of the year. This is despite the additional resource of £1,500 provided to TFA as a one-off grant by the Learning Disability Partnership Board.
35. Officers believe that TFA needs to display better financial management if such situations are not to be repeated. In an effort to assist this, officers have insisted (through the mechanism of a formal Funding Agreement) that the TFA Treasurer presents a set of proposed spending projections at each TFA AGM, for the approval of TFA members and that at each TFA meeting a report be given on recent spending and the extent to which the budget projections are being met or missed. Officers are not yet satisfied that these commitments are being adhered to fully in the way intended.
36. Council officers recommend that a condition of continued funding of TFA should include a firm commitment on the part of TFA to ensure proper budgetary control and accountability.
37. TFA have suggested an increase in their budget to enable them to fulfil the wider role which may be expected of them. TFA have suggested £4,520 for the financial year 2010/11.

38. The current budget of £1,500 was set by the Council in 1991, and has never been revised or adjusted for inflation since that date. If the figure had been inflated by the amount of the change in the Retail Prices Index then the current figure would now be £2,410. Given the wider role and greater level of consultative engagement now sought from TFA, officers believe that a budget of £3,000 should be reasonable and sufficient, given prudent financial management, and that TFA should be encouraged to seek alternative sources of funding to meet any planned expenditure over and above the Council's contribution.
39. The total cost of funding Transport For All currently amounts to £1,500 per annum. The Cabinet Member for Transport is invited to consider what level of funding might be appropriate for the forthcoming year. If an increase in the TFA budget were to be agreed this would have to be met through our current budget provision. The report is not considered to raise any staff implications.

RECOMMENDATIONS

40. **The Cabinet Member for Transport is RECOMMENDED to:**
- (a) pay Transport For All a grant of £3,000 per annum to support the costs of its meetings and other consultative work for a period of one year commencing 1 April 2010, subject to the agreement of Transport For All to the terms of a Funding Agreement governing budget-setting and financial reporting and accountability and to an internal restructure to fit it for the enhanced role outlined in paragraph 13 of this report;**
 - (b) ask officers to review the position further during 2010, in the light of developments in the establishment and progress of "Oxfordshire Unlimited" and report again in early 2011, with recommendations for further action; and**
 - (c) delegate authority to the Head of Transport, in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Transport, to consider and, if felt appropriate, offer additional grant funding to meet the agreed costs of any specific additional projects which might be proposed subsequently by Transport For All.**

STEVE HOWELL
Head of Transport
Environment & Economy

Background papers: Correspondence with officers and TFA members (refer to contact officer)

Contact Officer: Neil Timberlake. Tel: Oxford 815585

February 2010

TRANSPORT FOR ALL : Financial statements 2008 - 2009

Spending for the financial year 2008/09 can be summarised as:

Receipts: £3,038.11 (of which £1,488.11 from Public Transport budget)

Expenditure: £1,194.30	transport costs
£ 794.60	Room hire
£ 880.86	Refreshments / catering
£ 14.70	Insurance
£ 32.76	Postage
£ 202.64	Stationery (including printer cartridges)
£ 34.27	Audio materials for sight-impaired members
£ 107.23	Taxation (VAT on meetings & insurance)
£ 35.98	Storage boxes
£ 9.00	Keys

Balance brought forward from 2007/08:	£ 113.25DR
Total receipts 2008/09	£3,038.11
Total expenditure 2008/09	£3,306.34
Balance carried forward to 2009/10	£ 381.48DR

Receipts in 2008/09 included exceptional items. The 'standard' committed budget is currently £1,500 per annum, provided by the County Council. The expenditure shown above therefore represents more than twice the present committed, regular income.

Consultation with TFA members

1. Officers have written to all TFA 'members' and sought their views as to the perceived value and deficiencies of the organisation, whether a wider, more strategic role for TFA would be welcomed and how TFA might adapt its procedures and management so as to effectively fulfil the requirements that the Council would expect of it. Some 17 responses were received. These are available in the Members' Resource Centre.
2. As might be expected, TFA members were supportive of the continuation of the organisation, but voiced some of the criticisms referred to elsewhere in this report.
3. There were very mixed views on the current TFA budget amount. Some members were adamant that no increase should be granted, citing the management of the present budget as a reason. Others felt that £1,500 was quite inadequate and would not enable TFA to fulfil the role expected of it.
4. Most respondents felt that TFA could reduce its costs by changing its policy of rotating meetings around hired halls in the county and instead using Council premises, either retaining a fixed central Oxford location or possibly adding district council premises also.
5. Most respondents who referred to the issue were keen on developing a wider and more strategic role for TFA. Most of those who referred to the issue were of the view that TFA had the potential to fulfil its role, but were critical of its present performance.