

CABINET MEMBER DECISIONS - TRANSPORT – 24 MARCH 2011

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

Report by Deputy Director of Environment & Economy – Highways & Transport

Introduction

1. This report invites the Cabinet Member for Transport 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 agreed in March 2010. However, in doing so, it was agreed that a further review of the activities of TFA would be undertaken, and a further report brought before the Cabinet Member for Transport, which would include discussion and recommendations on possible alternative ways of discharging the Council's 1985 Transport Act duty to consult.

Transport For All role and functions

4. TFA was set up as a consultative body in 1988, originally under the organisational umbrella of the now-defunct Oxfordshire Council of Disabled People, and the inaugural meeting took place on 24 January 1991.
5. TFA is expected to be representative of people with a range of different disabilities, and as far as be possible representative geographically of the entire county of Oxfordshire.
6. More a wide range of officers from E&E have consulted 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.
7. Since the last report on TFA a year ago, a still more central role for TFA in future has been achieved. This has seen 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 have been invited to transport scheme site meetings and policy briefings,

where appropriate. It was envisaged that 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.

8. In the last five years TFA 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 a number of initiatives.
9. Since 2008 Transport For All members have been able to elect (or re-elect) annually the Chairman and Deputy Chairman and Treasurer. 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.

Consultation effectiveness

10. 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 invites TFA members' views on current issues.
11. In the recent past, officers have been disappointed at the poor response of TFA to consultation opportunities offered to it.

User Led Organisation ("Oxfordshire Unlimited")

12. 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 the development and launch of the ULO.
13. This ULO became formally established in November 2009, taking the name "Oxfordshire Unlimited".
14. Oxfordshire Unlimited receives funding of £25,000 per annum (for the next three years) from the Social & Community Services Directorate, after which Unlimited will be expected to become self-funding, deriving income from the delivery of specific services to the County Council and to other bodies.
15. Officers have discussed with Unlimited and with Council officers in Social & Community Services who have been supporting the project, whether 'Unlimited' might take on the consultative role currently met by TFA. When last considered a year ago, the response was that Unlimited was not then in a

position to consider such a role. Now that Unlimited has become more established, this is seen as a viable option.

16. Unlimited has now presented a formal offer (reproduced as Annex 1 to this report) to take over the role currently fulfilled by TFA, and to do so at a cost of £2,000 per annum.
17. Officers have been impressed by the level of engagement that Unlimited has shown in the consultations it has been offered.
18. The Council has been seeking to reduce the number of external consultative bodies with which it engages, particularly where these may be seen to overlap or duplicate functions.
19. Some 24 members of TFA have been identified as being also members of Unlimited, and it seems to officers that it would make for more efficient use of the time provided by such volunteers if they were no longer obliged to duplicate their efforts or to choose between supporting one organisation or the other.
20. Accordingly, officers are of the view that the time is now appropriate to transfer to Oxfordshire Unlimited the consultative function which TFA has undertaken, and to transfer the grant funding which follows this role. Those 'dual-hatted' members of TFA who are already members of Unlimited will thereby be spared the duplication of their time and input; other members of TFA are thought likely to transfer to Unlimited if invited to do so. If this is achieved then Unlimited will itself be enhanced and made more representative. Officers believe that the representation of disabled and mobility-impaired people in Oxfordshire will be strengthened and enhanced by having one such consultative and campaigning body to refer to.

Financial and Staff Implications

21. From its inception in 1991 TFA was provided with a budget of £1,500 per annum, met from the Bus Services Team budget. For a long period only a small amount of this budget was being spent.
22. Since April 2010 TFA's grant from the Council has increased to £3,000. To this has been added a further £3,000 grant which TFA secured from "Grassroots Grants". Given the role and level of consultative engagement sought from TFA, officers believe that this level of funding should be reasonable and sufficient.
23. Unlimited has offered to undertake the same role as TFA, but for an annual grant of only £2,000. This would thus represent a saving of £1,000 per annum to the Bus Services Team budget.
24. At present, a certain amount of administrative support for TFA is delivered by one of the transport team staff at the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council. Quite separately from this review of TFA, the Council has agreed to reduce its

funding for the ORCC transport team by £60,000 per annum, and ORCC have been advised that such support for TFA is not required.

25. It is proposed that in future such administrative support will be provided by OCC staff. This is expected to be sourced primarily from the Assistant Public Transport Officer and from the Disability & Equality Advisor, both of whom in practice already provide some support and advice to TFA.

RECOMMENDATIONS

26. **The Cabinet Member for Transport is RECOMMENDED:**
- (a) To cease to fund Transport For All as a separate organisation after 31 March 2011, but to formally thank the officers and members of Transport For All for their work over the past 22 years, and to write to them informing them of this decision;**
 - (b) To agree to secure through Oxfordshire Unlimited the consultative role of representing disabled and elderly people in Oxfordshire in matters relating to Highways and Transport;**
 - (c) To award a grant of £2,000 per annum to support the costs of its meetings and other consultative work for a period of three years commencing 1 April 2011, subject to the agreement of Oxfordshire Unlimited to the terms of a Service Level Agreement governing budget-setting and financial reporting and accountability;**
 - (d) To agree that the Oxfordshire Rural Community Council will no longer be required to provide administrative support for TFA, and that such support as may be required by Oxfordshire Unlimited will be met from within the County Council's current staffing resources.**

STEVE HOWELL
Deputy Director

Background papers: Correspondence with officers and Oxfordshire Unlimited (refer to contact officer)

Contact Officer: Neil Timberlake. Tel: Oxford 815585

February 2011



Proposal to take over the role of Transport for All (TFA)

[This proposal is presented in response to an invitation from Neil Timberlake.
It is intended to assist in the preparation of his report on TFA.]

Unlimited is a developing pro-active and well known user group that is consulted by OCC and many other organisations asking for opinions and advice in a variety of areas and especially transport.

Unlimited is funded by OCC and controlled by disabled people for disabled people. The Management committee is made up of disabled people to ensure that disabled people have a voice in matters that affect their daily lives. This covers all aspects, so transport is included.

The following areas will be commented on:

1. Historical
2. Accessibility to meetings
3. Structure of the organisation
4. Pro active
5. Finance
6. Membership
7. Administration
8. Advantages for OCC
9. Benefits for Unlimited

Historical

Transport for All, started under the wing of OCPD as the Consultative Committee on Transport for Mobility Impaired People. Unlimited was formed in 2009 to take over the role of OCPD, which was by that time defunct, and it seems entirely fitting that we should take over responsibility for the role of TFA as the primary representative body for disabled people on transport issues.

Access to meetings

Unlimited believes that accessibility to meetings is of paramount importance to our members. Therefore, we hold all meetings on a regular basis in County Hall taking the view that buses from all areas come into Oxford. We have members in Banbury, Didcot, Abingdon, Upper Heyford, Kingston Bagpuize, Kidlington and, of course, Oxford. To keep us informed about other areas in Oxfordshire we have a representative on the following forums:

The Vale Disability Access Group
Oxford City Access Forum
Didcot Access Group
Cherwell Access Group.
Cherwell Disability Forum.

Management meetings take place between 12.30pm and 3.30pm thus avoiding large catering bills. Transport sub-committee meetings are held at similarly convenient times. Tea/coffee and biscuits are on offer at the beginning and middle of the meeting. County Hall canteen is also available supplying reasonable priced food.

Structure

There is a management committee voted on at the AGM with the option of co-option where advice and support would be valuable.

All of the 11 management committee members at present are disabled but there must always be at least 75% disabled on the committee. Within this structure there are sub committees. One relevant to this subject is the Transport sub-committee made up of people all whom are disabled and most are also current members of TFA. This is a very active group who use public transport regularly. OCC regularly consults us on Highways and Transport issues

Pro active

Our strength is in activity. The majority of responses we make to requests for opinions are made after a visit to the site. Recently a member walked around the City with an Officer of Highways and Transport looking at the sites where there is a proposed addition of cycle racks. All requests are replied to and often consultations take place as well.

Recently we have taken part in the following:-

- Blue Badge parking (a response for a comment in the NTL magazine)
- Blue Badge parking – assisting Cherwell District Council with new policies
- The local transport plan (LPT3)
- Frideswide Square improvements
- London Road improvements
- Cycle lanes in Old Road Headington and Horspath Driftway
- Radio interviews about disabled people and access to the train service
- Dial-a-Ride and Travel Tokens (TV appearance also)
- Spoken at Scrutiny committee meetings
- Lobbying Councillors and MPs about transport issues
- Representative on Stagecoach committee

The management committee are always informed about correspondence that has been sent out in the name of Unlimited.

Unlimited have attended various events to publicise their activities and gain opinions. We have produced publicity material and are planning further leaflets to spread the word about what Unlimited does and how people can be involved/give their opinions.

Projects

Our latest project, with the support of Oxford Bus Company, is to run a 3 hour course aimed at encouraging disabled people who use a mobility aid to use the bus service. Although this started as aiming at elderly people this has now been extended to teenagers who are pupils at Marlborough School, Woodstock.

Shortly, along with Shopmobility, we will be engaged in a scheme to make OCC staff aware of difficulties faced by disabled people in accessing the built environment.

Improving the signs in buses emphasising the priority for wheelchairs in the wheelchair space.

Organising a Race for Equality in University Park in the Autumn. This is an event to raise public awareness about disability issues (like transport) not a money raising event.

Finance

OCC and Unlimited have worked together to produce a Financial Agreement. Further to this Unlimited has produced a skeleton Budget setting out the spending target for each area e.g. Transport, Training, Administration, etc. The Treasurer keeps close records on how the money in each area is being spent. A written statement of the accounts is sent out to every member of the committee before a management meeting so that questions or concerns can be aired at the committee meeting. We believe that public money should be responsibly spent and accounted for.

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Any activity undertaken on behalf of Unlimited and funded by them has to be approved by the full committee and the person/people involved have to prepare a statement informing Unlimited what they expect to gain from this event and then bring back a summary of what was gained.

There are many opportunities for improvements in the transport provision for disabled people in Oxfordshire. Unlimited expects to achieve much more in this area than TFA has done in recent years. Furthermore we anticipate spending a much greater proportion of our funds on representation and consultation, and on the background research and opinion gathering activities than TFA has demonstrated recently.

However, there are inevitably administration, travel, and other costs that Unlimited is not currently funded to provide. We believe we will require additional funding of £2,000 for the first 12 months.

We will deliver:

- a response rate to consultations of more than 75%
- pro-active representation where discrimination is observed or reported
- a facility to run questionnaires on disability issues on transport amongst our members or the public
- newsletter articles about transport issues at least twice per year
- an increasing membership with interest in transport

Membership

We are a small group (approximately 70 members in February 2011) mostly consisting of disabled people. However our membership is increasing and we expect this to continue. Only disabled people are allowed to vote on any subject. However members of the public do ask us for help and advice on a number of topics and the appropriate lead will be contacted. We have a bi-monthly newsletter sent to all members and interested parties. Our newsletter normally includes current transport issues of interest to our members.

Administration

We have our own administration team and do not use OCC staff except to act as advisers when necessary. All administration is carried out by paid assistance. We are in the process of appointing an administrator for 6 hours a week. We are also actively seeking office space. A member of S&CS has responsibility for Unlimited and attends most committee and other meetings and is responsible for reporting back to S&CS about progress. We welcome this support and the guidance that has been given in setting up Unlimited.

Future Administration of TFA role

- The Unlimited Transport sub-committee, (current chairman – Gwynneth Pedler) will assume responsibility for the activities that are currently undertaken by TFA
- The name '**Transport for All**' will be used as the working title for the Unlimited Transport sub-committee.
- TFA members will become members of Unlimited and TFA will cease to exist as an autonomous membership organisation

Advantages for OCC

There are many advantages to this proposal amongst which are the following:

- TFA will become part of an increasingly large and very active group committed to improving life's chances for disabled people.
- Unlimited will give TFA a clearer and better structured management.
- Given the recent history of TFA it is arguable that the organisation will benefit from a change with a fresh start, fresh blood and fresh ideas.

Benefits for Unlimited

There are benefits for Unlimited, such as:

- The combination will give us a powerful mandate on transport issues
- The injection of members of TFA who have much to offer will help in the ongoing development of Unlimited
- TFA information will become a feature of our newsletter

[NOTE: This proposal does not take into account the considerable amount of advice given to TFA by various members of OCC e.g. N Timberlake, D Whelan, and it is assumed that this will continue at least at the same level.]

Unlimited is wholeheartedly committed to challenge and campaign in order to encourage changes in Oxfordshire's public transport provision and remove the many barriers that exist.

Let us unite.

Gwynneth Pedler
Chairman
Oxfordshire Unlimited sub-committee on Transport
February 2011