

# COMMUNITY TRANSPORT STRATEGY

## Briefing note for Growth and Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee 20<sup>th</sup> October 2011

**Project sponsor:** John Disley

**Project manager:** Joy White

### **Purpose of this briefing note**

The purpose of this briefing note is to provide background information for the question and answer session on Community Transport that will comprise the Community Transport Strategy item on the agenda for this meeting. It is hoped that this will help members prepare some of the questions they would like to ask the panel. Items arising at the Members Steering Group meeting on Thursday 13 October will also be used to help structure and steer the Q&A session.

### **Background information**

Community Transport is a crucial, but frequently overlooked part of the transport system in the UK. Where commercial bus services are not viable, or are subject to funding cuts, Community Transport is a means of complementing existing transport provision. By doing so, Community Transport provides a valued and essential service, often for the most vulnerable in our society. It can provide efficient and effective transport solutions of both a general and specialist nature, whilst combating social exclusion and rural isolation.

Community transport provisions are often delivered in partnership with the voluntary sector with or without county and district council funding. However, many authorities offer a number of 'in-house' services in addition.

Community Transport can be defined broadly as being transport solutions for people of all ages who have no other transport options to access places and services they need to.

This is likely to include;

- People in rural areas where there is no public transport provision and other options are not practical
- People with mobility impairments who require support/assistance when travelling or to travel in adapted / suitably equipped vehicles.
- People on low incomes for whom alternative transport options are unaffordable

Currently community transport provision in Oxfordshire is focused on the following:

- Accessible, cost-effective and flexible transport services run by the community / voluntary sector e.g. car share schemes, community minibuses. Some of these are subsidised by Oxfordshire County Council. These vary in the purpose for which they can be booked (some are medical related only) and whether they can carry passengers in wheelchairs. Some operate on fixed routes, and some vehicles are available to hire. There is usually a modest charge for the service to cover costs.
- Dial-a-Ride (DAR) services provided in partnership by Oxfordshire County Council and one or more of the five district councils (VOWH, WODC, SODC, CDC & Oxford City), primarily for disabled and older people.

Demand for community transport is likely to increase over time due to the aging population and the number of elderly people staying in their own homes, among other factors. Funding pressures mean there could be more of a reliance on communities and volunteers in future.

The panel has been selected to provide members with an opportunity to talk to community transport providers and those who support them, as well as hear first hand about the approaches to community transport being taken in other local authority areas. However, no suggestion is made that particular approaches taken by other local authorities represented are necessarily right for Oxfordshire.

## The panel

The following have confirmed their attendance:

- Phil Clark, FISH Community Transport, Sonning Common\*
- Patricia Chirgwin, Volunteer Link Up (West Oxfordshire)\*
- Andy Stokes, Warwickshire County Council\*
- Jennifer Sherrey and Nick Small, Northamptonshire County Council
- Vicky Freeman, Community Transport Association
- Philip Newbould and Emily Lewis, ORCC

Officers from other neighbouring local authority areas have also been invited, but have not yet confirmed whether they will attend.

Those marked with an asterisk have supplied the following information:

**FISH** is a community transport provider run by volunteers, serving elderly, infirm and disadvantaged people in the Sonning Common area, with a 16-seater bus primarily for shopping and social trips and a car scheme which is primarily for medical purposes. Established 31 years ago, FISH provides 500 car trips and 185 bus trips annually. It has 50 car drivers, 12 bus drivers, and 12 people managing logistics.

**Volunteer Link Up (West Oxfordshire)** is the nationally-accredited volunteer centre for West Oxfordshire, recruiting volunteers for local charities as well as for its own projects which include befriending isolated people, gardening and DIY and a very busy and successful community transport scheme, with between 450-500 clients registered who cannot use or access public transportation due to infirmity or because of their rural location. Transport is provided by volunteers using their own cars and requests include taking clients to hospital, doctors', dentists', opticians' appointments as well as providing transport to day centres, regular club activities, or for social appointments such as visits to hairdressers or to do some shopping. Volunteers also regularly provide transport to allow clients to visit loved ones who may be hospitalised or in residential care. Established in 1983 it has four paid part-time members of staff. It is funded partly by OCC (for transport, befriending and gardening/DIY work) and by the Big Lottery (for volunteer infrastructure support for local voluntary organisations).

**Warwickshire County Council** currently (2011/12) provides funding for the following Community Transport projects, though some of these may be under threat due to reduced budget:

- Busterwerkenbak - Demand responsive travel to work in North Warwickshire (fully funded from s106 developer funding)
- Shipston Link - Section 22 community minibus operating scheduled bus services in Stratford District
- Back & 4th - Minibus hire, with or without a driver, serving disadvantaged organisations and individuals in Stratford District
- Volunteer Community Car Schemes - Various health related schemes - Stratford District
- Care To Share - Brokerage minibus project - Rugby Borough
- Community Links - Dial a ride service in Stratford District (funded by Stratford District Council) for those stuck for transport as a result of mobility problems or rural isolation. All vehicles also provide SEN home to school transport
- Health Travel Service Warwick - Health related car scheme (funded by Health Service)
- Rugby Hospital car scheme - Health related car scheme - Rugby Borough
- Bee Line - Health related car scheme - North Warwickshire
- Medi-Car - Health related car scheme - Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough
- Warwickshire also operate a network of 'Flexibus' services funded from the revenue support budget. Fully accessible vehicles operated by the commercial sector running to a semi-fixed timetable, which will pick up/drop off closer to homes for people with mobility problems. All operate SEN home to school transport.

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