

South Somerset Community Accessible Transport - Annual Report 2016/17

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Purpose of the report

The purpose of this report is to update members on the progress made over the last year. There are no financial implications for the council in this report.

Recommendation

That AEC members note the contents of the report.

Report Detail

The core business of the company is a successful demand-responsive door-to-door Ring and Ride Service; this uses fully accessible minibuses to provide transport for people in the operating area of South Somerset who are unable to use public transport due to mobility difficulties, or because the service provided is inadequate. Local community groups hire minibuses for social outings and trips in a wider geographical area. The company also operates a busy Social Car Scheme using volunteer drivers in their own cars to provide transport for hospital appointments further afield. This is an expanding, highly valued service due to the reduction in provision of hospital transport by the PCT.

It has been another very busy year for the service, with increased demand for both the social car scheme, and the ring and ride service, especially with the further reduction of public bus services. Although there are few County contracts available in this area we have been successful recently in winning two which will be a welcome addition to our funding. Transport demand for community groups is still very high during the summer and in the months leading up to Christmas.

A significant milestone for the scheme has been the appointment of a new Operations Manager last August, he will job share with the current post holder. This new appointee has been brought into post to promote the scheme by means of electronic media, and as well as updating the website he has now linked the scheme to Twitter and Facebook, which will broaden our appeal and coverage to younger members of the community. The current manager, of the last sixteen years, will be retiring by late October at the latest, so there will also be the need to recruit another which will give the scheme a boost from the new idea's and outlook which this person will bring.

After the big achievement of the previous year when our two oldest vehicles were replaced, we have now received another new minibus, a 16 seat VW Crafter. Last December David Warburton, the local MP visited the scheme for an official launch of all three new vehicles. Local newspapers attended, and their articles produced welcome publicity for the scheme. Individual membership of the scheme has continued to grow this year with registered members now numbering 2089. Two new community groups have also registered with the scheme over the last year. We have recruited three more volunteer drivers, but two did retire, and as the requirement for this service continues to grow we still need more volunteers.

A Stage 1 bid was submitted to the Big Lottery fund, which would, had it progressed successfully through stage 2, have secured a further five years funding to ensure the continued operation of the scheme. Unfortunately this bid was not successful, which means that a potential main source of funding has now gone. A further two bids have been submitted to other funders. However these are

relatively small in comparison and we anticipate receiving notification shortly as to whether we have been successful. Although very successful in obtaining funding in the past, with the long period of austerity being currently experienced, grants have been difficult to obtain. Two small grants have been received during the past year, one from SSDC and the other from the Somerset Community Foundation.

We have healthy reserves which we have built up during our fifteen years of operation. The reserves are primarily for vehicle replacement, but due to recent initiatives in this area, some of the money can now be used as revenue whilst we await the outcome of the Lottery bid. We have now started to use reserves and the scheme is reaching the most critical time since its inception. If we are not successful with the Lottery bid then we only have funding to remain in operation until May/June next year, at which point we will have to end the service, and leave a huge gap in the transport provision for this area of South Somerset.

From an operational perspective, there has been significant use of the services we provide as the figures below will show. We continue to be the main provider of transport for the neediest members of our community and are an essential service in the transport provision for South East Somerset. Without our accessible vehicles with their friendly helpful drivers, many people would be prisoners in their own homes.

Statistics: April 2016– Mar2017

Previous Year

Total mileage	66,638	62,552
Single passenger journeys	20,759	17,372
Group journeys	91	89
Social car single passenger journeys	1,218	1,320
