

South Somerset Community Accessible Transport - Annual Report 2019

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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.

Recommendation

That Area East Committee members note the contents of the report.

Report Detail

The core business of the company is a demand-responsive door-to-door Ring and Ride Service using 5 wheelchair accessible minibuses to provide transport for people in the operating area of South East 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 NHS Somerset CCG.

AEC members will recall from previous reports that SSCAT experienced severe financial setbacks following National Lottery funding being withdrawn in 2017 and more recently in February 2019, the early termination of King Arthur's School contract (which should have run until July 2013) due to SCC funding constraints. As a consequence, SSCAT income revenue has fallen despite fare increases in January 2019, whilst costs have remained essentially constant.

This has made the support of local town and parish councils, through an annual precept allocation, even more important. SSCAT received 15 positive responses from the 25 councils in the SE Somerset area, amounting to £8650. This support has proved invaluable in providing much needed certainty and continuity of funding.

It is understood that most of these allocations are made on a 3-year rolling cycle and the importance of this support cannot be overstated.

In addition, the Friends of Wincanton Community Hospital have pledged £9000 a year over 3 years (culminating in April 2020) and this has proved a lifeline. A number of additional fundraising initiatives aim to raise over £6000 in revenue income over 2019; to date we have raised approximately £1500. We have been successful in being selected by the Co-op as one of its charities to be supported in 2019 in raising funds towards computerising our bookings, servicing/maintenance records and management/admin systems and will receive its grant payment in October.

We have also looked at our costs and planned small savings in a few areas. Inevitably however our largest costs are vehicle maintenance, fuel and salaries, all of which will increase and are unavoidable.

Our budget for 2019/20, is aiming to hit a break-even target (excluding depreciation on vehicles) by March 2020.

We also urgently need to replace one of our ageing minibuses (which is now over 11 years old) and must raise over £38,000 for a smaller 9-seat wheelchair accessible minibus over this financial year. A number of bids have been submitted to charitable trusts and foundations with limited success. A bid for £5000 to the Somerset Community Foundation was submitted in June and it is intended to ask for grant support from SSDC shortly.

Local businesses have been issued with our latest newsletter to make them aware of our services and to gain their support.

SSCAT minibuses are a vital link in helping to maintain or create new connections for the people of SE Somerset; they also meet the governments' current remit of helping prevent isolation and loneliness.

There is little doubt that funding of the SSCAT 'Ring & Ride' service to cover all operational revenue costs, even with the current support from councils and other funders, will be challenging.

Local town and parish councils' support is therefore an essential component in our financial recovery plan and is very much appreciated. We hope to receive their continued support.

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 isolated in their own homes.

Statistics: Apr – Mar 2019	Financial Year	
	2018-19	2017/18
Total mileage	69446	67665
Single passenger journeys	24564	23371
Social car single passenger journeys	1418	884

{Average journey length (2018/19) in 'Ring & Ride CAT bus = 2.8 miles}

The DfT consultation about the future operation of Section 19 & 22 permits (which allow the use of paid, non PSV drivers) which could have required SSCAT (and other CT operators) to hold a PSV 'O' Licence and all drivers a PCV D1 (by test) and Driver Certificate of Professional Competence, has potentially been avoided by the creation of a new exemption. The DfT has introduced a 'Short distance' exemption permitting CT operators to provide '*any service within a radius of 10 miles, with the radius being measured from a specified central*

point'. SSCAT would be able to operate under this exemption and further guidance is being issued before 1 October 2019 when the new rules take effect.

**M M Rowlands
Operations Manager
SSCAT**

1 August 2019
