

12. Area North Rural Community Transport – Community Cars Scheme (Executive Decision)

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Purpose of the Report

For councillors to consider offering in principle support to the aims and initial objectives of an emerging programme to develop a network of Community Cars schemes across South Somerset, and to indicate a potential financial contribution towards the start up and development costs.

Public Interest

In rural areas lack of available transport is often the main barrier to accessing local services, healthcare, employment, training and social activities.

This report provides more information about this proposal and offers an opportunity for the Area Committee to consider its potential benefits and allocate a financial contribution towards the cost of setting up new community car schemes in Area North.

Recommendations

1. Agree in principle to support the development of community car schemes across South Somerset, subject to a detailed programme brief being approved by the programme steering group, with detailed costs, programme governance, confirmed match funding from other partners, evidence of efforts to secure external funding, and an agreed plan for the long-term sustainable operation of the service.
2. Subject to the agreement of recommendation 1: Highlight any key questions for or consideration by the programme steering group as the programme brief is developed, or comment on those recommended in recommendation 1.
3. Subject to the agreement of recommendation 1: Allocate up to £5,000 towards the one-off start and development costs for a programme of community cars, from the Area North Service Enhancement budget 2009-10, as a partnership contribution to Somerset County Council.
4. Note that the exact numbers of schemes, which are feasible in each SSDC area, has not been determined in detail for each area, and this will be reflected in any final funding proposals, and relative contributions by area.
5. Subject to the agreement of recommendation 1 Appoint one councillor to act as Area North representatives for the programme.
6. Subject to the agreement of recommendation 1: authorise the Area Development Manager (North) to confirm the final funding contribution to the programme, once the issues noted in recommendation 1 are agreed, and in consultation with the Area Chairman and councillor representative (recommendation 5).

7. Request an update on progress towards a detailed programme brief in three months.

Background

Somerset is the third most rural county in England and faces significant challenges in respect of access and transport. In rural areas a lack of regular accessible public transport is often the main barrier for people requiring local services, healthcare, employment, training and social activities.

The issue of transport and accessibility regularly features highly during consultation for community and parish plans. A priority in the Area Development Plan (North) is to “increase the availability of community and public local transport services, in particular to promote access to services and to reduce isolation”.

South Somerset Together (the district-wide partnership between public, private and voluntary organisations) recently commissioned a short study from Somerset County Council – the local transport authority - that examined the provision of transport in South Somerset.

The study concluded that developing and promoting new community car schemes would provide a valuable service for local residents reducing barriers to access to those living in rural locations.

A recent study commissioned by South Somerset Together (the Local Strategic Partnership for South Somerset) included an assessment of current transport provision and a comparison with other areas in Somerset.

Main Findings of SCC Report

- In general terms public transport provision in South Somerset is comparable with other districts in Somerset.
- Urban areas are generally better served by public transport than the rural areas. The Sunday service, compared with other districts, is seen as good.
- More low floor vehicles are being used on the bus network.
- In addition to the traditional bus service, South Somerset has a higher number of Demand Responsive public transport services, eg Nippy bus.
- South Somerset also has some community transport provision, which has been developed to meet the needs of residents who cannot access public bus services.
- The provision of community transport across the district is patchy, even though it is apparent that there is an unmet demand.
- Although Area North has the Links Transport Service, run by South Somerset Voluntary and Community Action, the area this service covers is limited to the Somerton and Langport area.
- There are some local volunteer car services in South Somerset, these are generally organised to serve one purpose, for example transporting people to and from a luncheon club.

Options for development rural transport

Over the last few years the development of community transport services to provide community transport has been limited. Starting up new or developing more community transport services using minibuses or where the operator has to finance or fund capital

purchases of vehicles is very costly and increasingly unlikely. A simple minibus, for example, will cost around £30,000 or more.

One low cost solution that has worked in other rural parts of the UK (including other districts in Somerset) is developing a network of community car schemes.

The report to South Somerset Together recommended three main actions that would help address the unmet demand and improve access to vital services. Action 1 of the report recommended the development of a network of community car schemes.

The other two actions can be undertaken by Somerset County Council and will see an improvement in how information and publicity about community transport is provided to the public, particularly those in need of its services.

Outline proposal - Community Cars Scheme for South Somerset

(a) Community car schemes (CCS) are generally established to serve a small geographical area such as a parish or occasionally a ward.

- A CCS will normally be a unincorporated voluntary group and occasionally a registered charity, which aims to provide the co-ordination of volunteer drivers to provide journeys for local residents who are unable to make the journey using local public buses or their own transport.
- A small committee of people often runs these schemes. They always, in Somerset, use a volunteer co-ordinator.
- CCS operate under car sharing legislation and use volunteers with their own cars.
- The drivers are checked through the Criminal Records Bureau, and are paid out-of-pocket expenses on a strictly not-for-profit basis.
- Most CCS that have already been set up in Somerset operate with limited overheads and are run by volunteers.
- If a CCS is set up and run to standards set by Somerset County Council, it could also benefit from entering into the concessionary fare scheme which would enable the passenger, with a travel pass, to get a reduction in the cost of using the service.

(b) The proposal is to provide sufficient capacity for up to 10 schemes across South Somerset, to be developed over an 18-month period, and establish an umbrella networking group for South Somerset. The number of schemes would be subject to demand but information held for Area North has indicated that access to local transport is one of the most important issues for residents. Funding to set up and support the early development of a car scheme would be around £500-£700.

(c) A South Somerset umbrella network group is recommended to support the proposed new schemes, although at present the means to support this beyond the life of the development phase is not yet clarified.

(d) Due to need for dedicated time, and some experience of setting up community cars schemes, the employment of a development worker with project management and some technical knowledge is proposed to carry out the development of such schemes. This post would work flexibly as many of the meetings with groups would usually be during the evening. The development worker would be located with a host organisation. The post would be line managed by Somerset Country Council, where there is expertise in this work.

(e) Along with a development worker, there would be a need for some revenue pump priming to help establish each community car scheme and the associated umbrella group.

Costs and Funding

Initial scoping of the project suggests that the costs involved in developing the schemes and providing the umbrella group will be in the region of £25,000.

Proposed project costs	£
Develop a network of up to 10 community car schemes	7,000
Set up an umbrella group for these schemes to operate under	1,500
Part-time development worker (2 days a week over 18 months)	13,000
Travel costs, purchase of hardware, fees to host organisation	3,500

Potential funding partners include Somerset County Council and NHS Somerset. Members may wish to note that the Area East Committee have allocated £5000 in principle, and Area West is currently considering a similar amount.

The next meeting of the working group, which is completing the feasibility study, is in early March.

Next Steps

- A project brief written which will include detailed costs, programme governance, confirmed match funding from other partners, evidence of efforts to secure external funding, and a realistic plan for the long-term sustainable operation of the service.
- Seek to identify target communities.
- A commissioning report will be produced in order to appoint a host organisation.

Financial Implications

The proposed in principle allocation could be made from the 2009-10 Service Enhancement budget. If the Turn Hill Lengthsman is approved, £15,000 remains for 2009-10, agreeing to make an in principle committed to the development of community cars schemes will leave £10,000 until the end of March 2010.

Corporate Priority Implications

- 1.11 Outcome: A vibrant and sustainable Yeovil, Market Towns and Rural economy
- 1.18 Outcome: A district tackling economic disadvantage
- 3.11 Outcome: Increased choice and quality of life for older people and vulnerable.
- 3.18 Outcome: Individuals and communities enjoying healthier and more active lifestyles
- 4.16 Outcome: Sustainable local communities (measured by participating in volunteering)
- 5.0 Outcome: A successful council delivering services valued by residents.

Area North Priorities 2009-10

Increase the availability of community and public **local transport services**, in particular to promote access to services and to reduce isolation

Carbon Emissions and Adapting to Climate Change Implications

Equality and Diversity Implications

- Community transport is a service used particularly by older people and disabled people to access health and other essential services
- Promotional literature will meet equalities standards
- Monitoring of service users and volunteers will be equalities strands
- Meetings to support the programme will be in accessible venues

*Background papers: Report to South Somerset Together – 25 September 2009 –
Community Transport*
