

Area West Committee - 17th February 2010

7. Area West Rural Community Transport – Community Cars Scheme (Executive Decision)

Strategic Director: Rina Singh, Place and Performance
Assistant Director: Martin Woods, Communities
Service Manager: Andrew Gillespie, Head of Area Development (West)
Lead Officer: Zoë Harris, Community Regeneration Officer
Contact Details: zoe.harris@southsomerset.gov.uk or 01460 260423

Purpose of the Report

To consider in principle making a financial contribution towards a project that has arisen from the South Somerset Together LSP to develop a network of Community Car Schemes, across South Somerset.

Public Interest

For people without a car living in a rural location the lack of available transport is often the main barrier to accessing local services, healthcare, employment, training and social activities.

A recent report by Somerset County Council examined the provision of transport in South Somerset and concluded that developing and promoting new community car schemes would provide a valuable service for local residents with access issues living in rural locations.

This report provides more information about this proposal, and offers an opportunity for the Area Committee to provide a financial contribution towards the cost of setting up new community car schemes in Area West.

Recommendations

- (1) Agree in principle to support a project to develop community car schemes across South Somerset subject to match funding from all other partners;
- (2) Allocate £5,000 towards the Community Cars project, from the Area West Service Enhancement budget 2009-10.

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 figures highly during consultation for Community and Parish Plans.

The local accessibility strategy states that: Through the Local Transport Plan there is a commitment to improving access to work, learning, healthcare, food shops and other services and improve access to recreation.

Rural Transport Options - across South Somerset

A recent research project, funded by South Somerset Together (the Local Strategic Partnership for South Somerset), included an assessment of transport provision and a comparison with other areas in Somerset.

In general terms public transport provision in South Somerset is comparable with other Districts in Somerset. Urban areas are generally better serviced 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 as Somerset County Council has influenced early provision of these accessible vehicles through letting contracts for longer periods and stating the preference for such vehicles through the contract tendering process.

In addition to the traditional bus service, South Somerset has a higher number of Demand Responsive public transport services e.g. Nippy Bus and Slinky Bus services.

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.

Over the last few years the development of community transport services and the setting up of new charities 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. For example a simple minibus will cost around £30,000 or more.

One low cost solution that has worked in other rural parts of the UK including other Districts of Somerset is developing a network of Community Car Schemes.

The report recommended three main actions that would help meet the unmet demand and improve access to vital services. Two of those 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 and particularly those in need of its services. Action 1 of the report recommends the development of a network of Community Car Schemes.

Proposed Community Cars Scheme for South Somerset

Community Car schemes are generally set up to serve a small geographical area such as a parish or occasionally a ward. They are normally a small constituted group and occasionally a registered charity, providing the coordination of volunteer drivers to provide journeys to local residents who are unable to do 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 coordinator. They operate under car sharing legislation and use volunteers with their own cars. The drivers are CRB checked and are paid out of pocket expenses on a strictly not for profit basis.

Due to the complexities with setting up the schemes within the law a development worker would be required 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 South Somerset Voluntary & Community Action, which already runs a number of community transport services in the

District including the Chard & Ilminster Slinky Bus. Somerset County Council would line manage such a post – where there is the expertise in this work.

Most schemes in Somerset have been set up with limited overheads and are run by volunteers. To support the new schemes a South Somerset umbrella network group is also recommended.

Such schemes provide a local service using volunteers, coordinated locally. They are low cost schemes to maintain and if set up and run to Somerset County Standards 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.

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. Funding to set up and support a car scheme would be around £500-£700 each and the umbrella group would be £1,500.

How many schemes could be developed?

The proposal is to provide sufficient capacity for up to 10 schemes across South Somerset to be developed over an eighteen month period, and establish an umbrella networking group for South Somerset. This would be subject to local demand but evidence suggests that there would be sufficient interest in Area West. A recent questionnaire was sent out to Area West Parish Councils asking them to prioritise the issues of most concern to their parish, early indications show that transport is the most important issue. The consultation results for the Parish Plan recently carried out in Hinton St George also shows an interest from residents in starting a community car scheme.

Costs and funding

Initial scoping of the project suggests that the costs will be in the region of £25,000.

Funding	
SCC	£5,000 - to be confirmed
NHS	£5,000 - to be confirmed
SSDC – Area East	£5,000 - confirmed
SSDC – Area North	£5,000 - awaiting a decision from Area Committee
SSDC – Area West	£5,000 - to be confirmed

Financial Implications

Allocate £5,000 towards the Community Cars project, from the Area West Better Aligning Services budget 2009-10, which will leave £8,000 in the Better Aligning Services budget for 2009/2010.

Corporate Priority Implications

- Theme 3: 3.11 Increased choice and quality of life of older and vulnerable people
- Theme 3: 3.12 Increase the number of vulnerable people who are supported to maintain independent living

Carbon Emissions and Adapting to Climate Change Implications

Carbon emissions through the use of a volunteer car scheme are lower than the alternatives, which would use larger vehicles. Private cars tend to be more recent models with lower emissions.

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*
