

CABINET

Review of Community Transport 20th January 2009

Report of the Chief Executive

PURPOSE OF REPORT				
To determine whether there should be changes in the provision of Community Transport for NoWcard holders within the Lancaster City Council district				
Key Decision	X	Non-Key Decision	Referral from Cabinet Member	
Date Included in Forward Plan	January 2009			
This report is public				

RECOMMENDATION OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE:

Cabinet is asked to consider and indicate their preferred option for Community Transport and whether a Service Level Agreement continues between Lancaster City Council and Lune Valley Transport

1 Introduction

- 1.1 The Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007 provides everyone in England aged 60 and over and the disabled free off peak travel on bus services anywhere in England. This statutory entitlement came into operation in April 2008.
- 1.2 Free off-peak travel was introduced to passengers to combat social exclusion faced by many elderly and disabled people who otherwise would be unable to afford access to public transport. The introduction of free travel has empowered older or disabled people to access employment, healthcare, visiting families and friends as well as other essential services.
- 1.3 Community Transport is a discretionary element of concessionary bus travel and was developed in the Lancaster City district over 15 years ago for the elderly and disabled unable to access public transport. At that time, Community Transport was considered to be essential allowing the elderly and disabled access to many vital services. Although not obliged to do so, Lancaster City Council extended the offer of free travel from April 2006 to passengers using Community Transport.
- 1.4 Community Transport is provided by the voluntary sector on a non-profit making basis and Lune Valley Transport operate the service in the Lancaster District.

2 **Community Transport**

- 2.1 The objective of the service is to provide local, accessible transport, enabling people who have mobility problems and suffer some social isolation a degree of independence. The transport services are provided by Dial-A-Bus or Community Cars. The cost of each journey is paid for by Lancaster City Council.

Dial-A-Bus – provides a door to door bus service specially designed for people who cannot access main stream public transport. Dial-A-Bus routes and timetables are loosely planned so that a bus can deviate from the route to pick-up customers at their door and transport them in the general direction of their planned route. The bus can deviate to drop the customer at their chosen destination. The vehicles used have been specially adapted to make them easy to use, equipped with lifts or ramps and wheelchair clamps so that wheelchair users can travel without having to transfer to a seat. The customer has to pre-book a route journey. Up to the present time demand for the service in the Lancaster City Council area has been high – in 2007/08 a total of 55,243 single passenger trips were made.

Community Cars – is a service provided for people with a disability or who live in an isolated location, e.g. rural areas, where access to the public transport network is difficult or impossible. Cars are used when it is uneconomic to provide a Dial-A-Bus. The service complements the public transport network. Community cars are provided by volunteers using their own vehicle, with financial support by Lancaster City Council towards running costs, approximately £120 per month. This voluntary service has declined in recent times.

- 2.2 The services provided by Community Transport are currently included as part of free bus travel offered by the NoWcard scheme, to those aged 60 and over and the disabled, for travel after 0930hrs Monday to Friday. Enforcement of the system is undertaken by customers presenting their NoW card to the driver before being able to commence their journey.
- 2.3 As previously mentioned, Lune Valley Transport operates Community Transport in the Lancaster City Council district within the remit of a permit issued under Section 19 of the Transport Act 1985 and does not require a Public Service Operators Licence. The service is designed to be non-profit making and only transports people who are elderly or disabled and hold a NoWcard.
- 2.4 Community Transport cannot be used for clinic/hospital appointments – there is a system of NHS transport organised through a GP for this type of journey.
- 2.5 The cost of providing Community Transport within the Lancaster City District has increased considerably since April 2006 when free travel was introduced. The majority of people who use Dial-A Bus are Over 60 NoWcard holders rather than disabled NoWcard holders.

The percentage difference in cost is increasing as shown below:-

	2006 - 2007				2007 - 2008				2008 - 2009			
	Over 60 £	%	Disabled £	%	Over 60 £	%	Disabled £	%	Over 60 £	%	Disabled £	%
April	3715	78	1051	22	8918	79	2371	21	9748	85	1724	15
May	4992	77	1448	23	7645	79	2005	21	9958	84	1922	16
June	4846	79	1299	21	8100	82	1752	18	10146	86	1668	14
July	4791	79	1281	21	9621	85	1666	15	12498	87	1840	13
August	5323	79	1423	21	9428	85	1685	15	10005	87	1441	13
September	5537	81	1306	19	9886	84	1883	16	11528	87	1748	13
October	5703	78	1588	22	8288	82	1803	18	12336	85	2250	15
November	6242	79	1630	21	8075	75	2136	25				
December	5017	78	1415	22	9437	83	1955	17				
January	6205	78	1716	22	7170	86	1213	14				
February	5752	77	1682	23	9172	84	1750	16				
March	6245	78	1761	22	8257	83	1632	17				
Total	64368	78	17600	22	103997	83	21851	17	76219	86	12593	14
Annual cost	£81,968				£125,848				£152,249 (projected)			

- 2.6 The number of single journeys has increased from 46,000 in 2006/7, 55,243 in 2007/8 to an estimated 65,000 in 2008/9. Significantly, there is a substantial increase in the numbers of Over 60 users when compared to disabled users, although over the time period, the number of disabled users is also rising as part of the general increase in demand.
- 2.7 Dial-A-Bus (Lune Valley Transport) operates many routes within the Lancaster City area using between 9 – 11 vehicles from Lune Valley Transport. Lancashire County Council fund Lune Valley for a 3 vehicle operation and due to the excessive demand Lune Valley carry passengers on their own vehicles. If funding is restricted this will have implications on Lune Valley Transport themselves, for example; drivers, vehicles and obviously a dramatic drop in passengers being carried.
- 2.8 The number of routes is determined by NoWcard holder demand. If the demand for a certain route is sufficient, Dial-A-Bus will provide a service for that route. The routes, approximately 12 each day, change from week to week depending on demand. The sample routes shown in the table below offer passengers destinations along the route, e.g. a bus travelling to Morrisons supermarket would allow passengers to disembark at say the Arndale Centre as it passes that location.

Below are examples of the various types of route:-

From	Destination
Heysham	Asda/Morrisons
East/Bare area	Morrisons
Westgate/West End	Morrisons
Various Morecambe	Rainbow Centre - Housebound Club
Various Morecambe	St Barnabas Church - Housebound Club
Various Morecambe	Blind Centre, Morecambe

Lancaster	Blind Centre, Lancaster
Various Morecambe	Salvation Army Hall, Morecambe
Hala/Scotforth	Sainsburys & Asda
Skerton area	Asda/Morrisons/Arndale Centre
Silverdale	Carnforth
Galgate	Lancaster
Halton	Lancaster
Hornby	Morecambe & Morrisons
Carnforth	Morecambe & Morrisons
Caton	Morecambe & Morrisons

3 Financial Arrangements for Community Transport

- 3.1 No specific funding is received by Lancaster City Council for providing Community Transport services. The discretionary service is offered free by the City Council and associated costs are essentially met through the Council Tax. It should be noted that in Blackpool, Burnley and Pendle, Community Transport is provided on the basis of a half fare charge.
- 3.2 Lune Valley Transport operation earns income from contracts agreed with schools and charitable organisations and from other miscellaneous hire work. The company advises that the level of this income reflects on the overall effectiveness of the service provided by Community Transport and in effect subsidises the operation of Dial-A-Bus and Community Cars. This view is supported by Lancashire County Council although no direct evidence has been provided to support this assertion.

4 Service Level Agreement with Lune Valley Transport

There is a signed Service Level Agreement (SLA) between Lancaster City Council and Lune Valley Transport which ensures the provision of a Dial-A-Bus facility. Through the SLA the Council agrees funding for the provision of core services by Lune Valley Transport.

- 4.1 The core services provided by Lune Valley Transport include:
- A door to door minibus service, booked by NoWcard holders who cannot use conventional public transport
 - Provision of a service to over 100 clients within the City Council District
 - To actively pursue additional, independent sources of funding towards the running of the service
 - To provide a fair and just service with no discrimination
- 4.2 The costs of the SLA are paid yearly by Lancaster City Council to Lune Valley Transport in the form of a grant - currently this is £3,300 per annum. Cabinet resolved, following consideration by the Budget and Performance Panel, in January 2008, that a one-year SLA be offered to Lune Valley Transport and may be subject to change following a review of Community Transport. Options for the SLA are outlined at 6.2.

5 Details of Consultation

- 5.1 In a meeting with Lune Valley Transport, Council officers have been familiarised with the provision and administration of the Dial-A-Bus service. Lune Valley Transport is

aware that costs are rising each year and that a review of Community Transport is taking place.

- 5.2 Informal talks have taken place with the Community Transport Team at Lancashire County Council who administer Community Transport schemes throughout Lancashire. Any proposed changes to the administration of the existing scheme within the Lancaster City Council area will have an impact on the whole transport scheme and will need to be discussed with the Community Transport Team.

6 Options and Options Analysis (including risk assessment)

6.1 Community Transport

Option 1 – No change to the present service provided by Lune Valley Transport. Under this option financial commitment may rise in future years due to the continued increase in demand for the service. The increase in costs will depend to a large degree on the level of contract and hire work achieved by the present operator.

Option 2 – Restrict the use of Community Transport to either the disabled only or to include in the restriction those over 60s who live in “hard to reach areas”. With this option, many of the over 60s may move to the standard Concessionary Fare Scheme resulting in an additional cost to the Council under this budget area, however, this would reflect the true costs of this service. There may be other issues arising, linked to the extent of the reduction in operation.

Option 3 – Achieve a % reduction, as determined by Cabinet, in agreement with the Lancashire County Council Community Transport Team and Lune Valley Transport. The reduction could be achieved by capping the number of single journeys claimed or setting a budget amount for Lune Valley at the beginning of each financial year. There would be practicalities attached to adopting this approach, however.

Option 4 – Introduce a half fare charge for all journeys made by the over 60s and disabled who use Lune Valley Transport. This charge is already in operation in Burnley, Pendle and Blackpool.

Option 5 – Remove the provision of Community Transport within the Lancaster City Council district. The saving made by this option will be approximately £156,000 in 2009/10, increasing to £164,000 in 2010/11 and £172,000 in 2011/12. It is likely the removal of Community Transport will result in numerous complaints and a potential backlash against the removal of the means of “social inclusion” for the disabled and those isolated from the public transport network. There could also be implications for Lune Valley Transport as an organisation affecting their drivers, employees, etc. Also, there is a further risk that many of the over 60s would move to the standard Concessionary Fare Scheme and in so doing add an additional cost to the Council in a different budget.

6.2 Service Level Agreement

Option 1 – Continue with an SLA between Lancaster City Council and Lune Valley Transport. A continuation of the SLA would result in a financial commitment of £3,300 per year.

Option 2 – Discontinue the SLA with Lune Valley Transport. In removing the SLA there would be no guarantee that the provision of the service (as set in section 4) would continue.

7 Officer Preferred Options

7.1 Community Transport

Option 5 – Discontinue providing funding for a Community Transport Scheme within the Lancaster City District. This will clearly make a saving but extra costs will be born by the Concessionary Travel budget by the over 60s and disabled moving over to use standard bus services.

7.2 Service Level Agreement

Option 2 – Discontinue with the Service Level Agreement as 7.1 above

RELATIONSHIP TO POLICY FRAMEWORK

Council Core Values: Sound Financial Management, Sustainable Development and Improving Services

Council key priorities:

Provision of customer focused, accessible services; and supporting sustainable communities.

CONCLUSION OF IMPACT ASSESSMENT

(including Diversity, Human Rights, Community Safety, Sustainability and Rural Proofing)

Direct links with the Lancaster District Local Strategic Partnership (LSP) – Travel and Access

Community Transport supports the Council's policies on equal opportunities and diversity for older people and people with disabilities.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Option 1: Continue existing service provision.

The revised estimates currently reflect this option with £156,000 budgeted in 2009/10, £164,000 in 2010/11 and £172,000 in 2011/12. It should be noted that there is no service restriction therefore the demand and costs could increase above these estimates.

Option 2: Restricted use.

Further analysis would be required to determine the % of over 60s who live in 'hard to reach areas' if this element of the option was agreed, as well as considering any operational matters that may affect costs, but based on a disabled only restriction the potential savings will be approximately £129,000 in 2009/10, £136,000 in 2010/11 and £143,000 in 2011/12. This is based on the 17% take up rate for 2007/08 (covering a full year) taken from the table under section 2.5 of the report.

Option 3: % Reduction.

Depending on the % reduction chosen by Members a further detailed analysis would be required to determine the potential cash saving target and how practically this could be achieved in terms of the reduced single journeys.

Option 4: Half fare charge for all journeys.

Based on the revised estimates the saving made by this option will be approximately £78,000 in 2009/10, £82,000 in 2010/11 and £86,000 in 2011/12.

Option 5: Removal of provision.

The saving made by this option will be approximately £156,000 in 2009/10, increasing to £164,000 in 2010/11 and £172,000 in 2011/12.

The report clearly shows that there are potential savings to be made with regards to the current Community Transport provision, which would be beneficial to the Councils current overall financial situation. The figures shown within the report indicate that there is scope for the over 60's in particular to be redirected to the main Concessionary Travel Scheme. This may result in a slight increase in the expenditure of this area, however this will provide a true and realistic cost for this service.

Should Members opt for anything other than the Officer preferred option, then a further report to Members will be required to cover all operational, financial and legal matters of the decision before final implementation can take place.

SECTION 151 OFFICER'S COMMENTS

In reaching a decision on the preferred option, Members are advised to consider the options in context of their priorities, the budget position and their targets for achieving savings, as well as the impact on service users.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no direct legal implications arising from this report

MONITORING OFFICER'S COMMENTS

Under the Disability Discrimination Acts, the Council, like every public authority, has a duty, in carrying out its functions, to have due regard to the need to promote equality of opportunity between disabled persons and other persons, the need to take steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities, even where that involves treating disabled persons more favourably than other persons, the need to promote positive attitudes towards disabled persons, and the need to encourage participation by disabled persons in public life. However, the provision of Community Transport is not a statutory duty for the Council, and in considering the options open to it, Cabinet should have regard to and balance all the relevant considerations, which will include not only the needs of the users of the service but also the financial constraints on the Council.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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