

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

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| Decision Maker: | Executive Member - Environment |
| Date: | 9 March 2010 |
| Title: | Community Transport Grants – Support to Group Hire Schemes |
| Reference: | 1399 |
| Report From: | Director of Environment |

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1. Executive Summary

1.1. The purpose of this paper is to consider grants to two group hire community transport schemes in Hampshire.

1.2. This paper seeks to:

- set out the background and funding history for community transport schemes
- set out the grant requests which have been received
- outline the options and recommend grant awards.

2. Contextual information

2.1. The arrangements for supporting district-wide community transport schemes were agreed by the Executive Member for Environment on 9 October 2007. The schemes currently covered by these arrangements include Basingstoke, Eastleigh, East Hampshire, Fareham, Hart, Havant, New Forest and Test Valley. With the exception of the Basingstoke scheme, which has been subject to a competitively tendered process, all the schemes above are supported through single tender contracts.

2.2. These community transport schemes provide a pool of wheelchair accessible mini-buses, available for hire by local voluntary and community groups. The contribution made by the County Council, and in some cases other funding partners, usually represents the cost of the staffing and associated administration costs necessary to oversee the operation of a fleet of mini-buses, to ensure that mini-buses are properly maintained and enable the recruitment and training of mini-bus drivers. The running costs of these mini-buses are recovered through hire charges to user groups.

- 2.3. This support has always been seen as a way of building capacity in the voluntary and community sector so that affordable transport is available to local groups. Building capacity within a single organisation, which can make good use of its mini-buses by hiring to a range of groups, has also been seen as a more efficient and effective use of public money as opposed to providing individual grants to organisations to purchase their own mini-buses, many of which will be little used.
- 2.4. Currently, the County Council does not directly support the staffing and administration costs of the district-wide community transport schemes in Gosport and Winchester through a formal arrangement. The reasons for this are largely historical. The process for negotiating new contracts with all schemes, due on 1 October 2010, has now commenced and the intention is to include the Winchester and Gosport schemes in the new arrangements. Prior to this process being completed any support given to these schemes will need to be provided through grants.

3. Grant Application from Winchester Area Community Action

- 3.1. A grant application form has been received from Winchester Area Community Action which organises and manages the Winchester Community Transport Scheme. This shows that staffing and administration costs for 2009/10 are estimated at £20,692. Winchester City Council currently provides annual support of some £3,352 towards the costs of organising and managing the scheme and a further contribution of £1,371 is expected to be made from the income from mini-bus hire charges. The balance of £15,969 is now requested from the County Council as a grant.
- 3.2. Winchester Area Community Action operates three wheelchair accessible mini-buses and one small wheelchair accessible vehicle. The mini-buses are available for groups to use across the Winchester District and the smaller vehicle available for individuals to use. The scheme predominately provides group transport to those organisations involved with older people and disabled people. The primary objective of the scheme is to provide the means by which community groups and individuals can access otherwise unreachable local services and amenities and improve people's independence and quality of life.
- 3.3. During the last full operating year the vehicles have been used by 70 different community groups and 701 mini-bus hires have taken place. Some 9,045 passenger trips have been provided and 19,572 miles covered by the vehicles. Most of this transport is provided using volunteer drivers. This equates to a grant subsidy per passenger trip of £2.13. Based on outturn figures from schemes for 2008/09 this compares with other similar schemes as follows - East Hampshire (£2.56) and Test Valley (£1.83).
- 3.4. In the past the scheme has received a number of vehicle grants from the County Council, the more recent of these for a mini-bus and a smaller vehicle

which have been based in the southern parishes of the district, where there is a well-documented need for transport.

4. Grant Application from Gosport Voluntary Action

- 4.1. A grant application form has been received from Gosport Voluntary Action which organises and manages the Gosport Community Transport Scheme. This shows that staffing and administration costs for 2009/10 are estimated at £17,313 and a contribution of £10,079 is now requested from the County Council as a grant towards these costs.
- 4.2. Gosport Voluntary Action operates six wheelchair accessible mini-buses. The mini-buses are available to all community and voluntary groups in the borough, although currently the scheme predominately provides transport for groups working with the frail, elderly or disabled. The scheme is currently looking to develop its work in the more deprived areas of the town to provide access to facilities and activities for those living there.
- 4.3. The vehicles are used by 23 different community groups and 1,070 mini-bus hires are expected to take place during 2009/10. These are expected to provide some 8,885 passenger trips with 23,812 miles being covered by the vehicles. Most of this transport is provided using volunteer drivers. This equates to a grant subsidy per passenger trip of £1.13. Based on outturn figures from schemes for 2008/09 this compares with other similar schemes as follows - Eastleigh (£0.47), and Havant (£0.62) although both of these schemes are long established and will have developed a strong user base.
- 4.4. In the past the scheme has received a number of vehicle grants from the County Council to replace and extend its vehicle fleet.

5. Outline of Options

- 5.1. A decision needs to be made on which grants should be supported and the following options exist:

- 5.2. Option 1: Provide grants to both of the organisations which submitted applications.

Risk Assessment: This will provide interim support to these schemes whilst the process of negotiating contracts is completed and a more formal arrangement for financial support put in place.

- 5.3. Option 2: Not to award the above grants to either of the organisations which submitted applications.

Risk Assessment: Not awarding grants to Winchester Area Community Action and Gosport Voluntary Action would leave these schemes with a shortfall in their finances for this financial year and this may affect the viability of these schemes in the longer term.

5.4. Option 3: Increase charges to vehicle hirers.

Risk Assessment: Whilst hire charges to mini-bus hirers could be raised to cover these costs, the impact of this could not be applied retrospectively to the current financial year. This may also make this transport unaffordable for some community groups.

6. Option Analysis/Comparison

6.1. Option 1 is seen as the preferred way forward. This will provide interim support to these schemes whilst the process of negotiating contracts is completed and more formal arrangement for financial support put in place. This is consistent with the County Council's approach of supporting similar schemes elsewhere in the county.

7. Finance

7.1. The grants can be funded from the Community Transport budget in the current financial year.

8. Recommendations

8.1. That a grant of £15,969 be awarded to Winchester Area Community Action to provide interim support to assist in the costs of managing and operating the Winchester Community Transport Scheme to allow the process for negotiating new contracts with all schemes to be completed.

8.2. That a grant of £10,079 be awarded to Gosport Voluntary Action to provide interim support to assist in the costs of managing and operating the Gosport Community Transport Scheme to allow the process for negotiating new contracts with all schemes to be completed.

CORPORATE OR LEGAL INFORMATION:**Links to the Corporate Strategy**

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| Hampshire safer and more secure for all: | no |
| Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate): | |
| Maximising well-being: | yes |
| Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate): | |
| Enhancing our quality of place: | no |
| Corporate Improvement plan link number (if appropriate): | |

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents

The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)

DocumentLocation

None

IMPACT ASSESSMENTS:

1. Equalities Impact Assessment:

- 1.1. The proposals in this report seek to improve accessibility and community involvement for hard to reach and disadvantaged members of the community.

2. Impact on Crime and Disorder:

- 2.1. Most schemes offer transport for youth groups and support wider community involvement.

3. Climate Change:

- a) How does what is being proposed impact on our carbon footprint / energy consumption?

Use of demand responsive and group transport reflects users needs and reduces needs for individual car journeys.

- b) How does what is being proposed consider the need to adapt to climate change, and be resilient to its longer term impacts?

Introduction of newer vehicles allows the latest emission standards to be meet.