

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 7 OCTOBER 2022

COMMUNITY TRANSPORT IN WORCESTERSHIRE

Summary

1. The Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel will receive an update on Community Transport in Worcestershire.
2. The Cabinet Member (CMR) for Transport and Highways and the Assistant Director for Highways and Transport Operations have been invited to the meeting. The Community Transport Development Officer and the Chair of the Worcestershire Community Transport Consortium will also attend to update the Panel on matters relating to Community Transport.

Background

3. There are 14 Community Transport (CT) schemes in the County which provide transport using volunteers driving their own cars, dial-a-ride minibuses, Community Buses and fully-accessible Multi-Purpose Vehicles (MPVs) for those who cannot travel by other means – either because no appropriate services are available or due to their mobility limitations.
4. The Worcestershire CT Consortium provides support for not-for-profit transport operators and advises on and shares information about operational issues, vehicles, insurance, good practice, funding, publicity and marketing, working with external partners such as Public Health and the development of services.
5. Prior to the Covid-19 Pandemic, 500 volunteers were involved in delivering around 155,000 CT journeys each year. Several schemes closed due to Lockdown but all have re-opened and taken on the challenges of re-starting their services and helping their clients to gain confidence in making trips again. The CT Operators are on target to deliver around 130,000 journeys (85,000 by the Strategic Grant partnership) this year and, at the moment, have approximately 350 volunteer drivers, administrators and PAs – as well as some paid staff.
6. Information about Community Transport in the county can be found at www.communitytravel.org.uk (the website is currently being updated).

Strategic Grant for Community Transport

7. Worcestershire County Council (the Council) provides a Strategic Grant for Community Transport which in the current year is £90,000. It is offered through the competitive transport tendering process and is for two years (2022-24). A lead body (Persore Volunteer Centre) administers the Grant on behalf of 11 CT operators. The Grant for year 2 is not yet set and will be agreed with the lead body by the end of December 2022.

8. The award of the Strategic Grant enables the Council to ensure that CT partners work with the Authority in providing a range of transport services and to be involved in its Passenger Transport Strategy. Through the Community Transport Officer (CTO), operations are regularly reviewed via quarterly meetings and reports provided by the Grant lead body.

Community Buses

9. Despite the effects of Lockdowns and reductions in passengers using public transport over the last two-and-a-half years, there has been an increase in Community Bus services. There are now 11 Community Buses operating and these are run under the Transport Act Permit Legislation which enables not-for-profit transport providers to run two types of service:

- Under Section 19 where all journeys must be pre-booked and the route can be flexible
- Under Section 22 where the route must be registered (like a local bus service) and no pre-booking is required.

10. A national issue arose in 2017/18 regarding a commercial operator (in Nottingham) taking issue with not-for-profit operators being 'allowed' to bid for local authority contracts: this resulted in a nationwide consultation exercise by the Department for Transport (DfT) and the issue being taken to the High Court. The outcome has led to some change of wording in the application documents for Section 19 and 22 permits which require the applicant to confirm that they are not operating for profit. CT schemes can still and do bid for Council transport contracts.

11. Whenever a local bus service may be withdrawn, CT operators are always consulted to provide an alternative transport solution for passengers. Examples of this include the CB3 between Malvern and Upton-upon-Severn which is run by Community Action (CAMD) and provides a return journey between the towns four days each week.

12. In addition, when a County Councillor approaches officers about demand for transport in their area, CT will be involved and this is how four Community Buses came about last year providing journeys for residents of Norton, Norton Barracks, Littleworth and Hatfield (the 'Norton Connector'), the CB4 and CB5 serving Peopleton, the area north of the main road in Drakes Broughton, White Ladies Aston, Wadborough and Stoulton and the CB2 covering Upton, Ryall, Ripple, Uckinghall, Baughton and Naunton. Parish and Town Councils are key players in the establishment of these services and, in some cases, Parish/Town Councillors and County Councillors provide funding.

13. Three Community Bus services are currently run under contract to the Council. Details of all Community Bus services can be found on the Council's website [Bus Timetables | Bus Timetables | Worcestershire County Council](#)

Contracts

14. The CT sector has worked hard to engage with the Council and deliver transport contracts. Five operators currently provide a range of Adult Social Care, Education and Community Bus contracts. The value of these at the present time is:

- Pershore Volunteer Centre - £35,000
- Wyre Forest Dial-a-Ride -£60,000
- Worcester Wheels - £192,000
- Community Action Malvern and District £28,000
- Tenbury Transport Trust - £27,000

15. This activity supports schemes to develop and build their operations. 8 schemes are registered on the Council's Tendering Framework. They compete for transport contracts against commercial operators.

The Future

16. The challenges of Covid-19 on the not-for-profit transport sector have been significant. However, there is an active and willing CT network which is committed to being part of the wider passenger transport network and will always try to provide a solution. Most schemes have played an important part in providing journeys to vaccination centres and the CT Operators have worked with Public Health, surgeries and other locations to ensure residents can access them. In addition, a link was provided by one scheme between Crowngate Bus Station and Worcester Racecourse for this purpose.

17. Loneliness and isolation have proved a huge issue for many residents following Lockdown and the CT Operators and CT has worked closely with Public Health to set up an initiative called Countryside Rides to encourage people to get out-and-about again in a safe and supported environment. Schemes rang round all their clients to ask how they were and tell them about these trips and funding was secured to enable this to happen. These journeys will continue and become part of what CT can provide to those who may be stuck at home or whose mobility or mental health may restrict them from venturing out.

18. Electric vehicles have recently been acquired by two schemes and more may be introduced soon.

19. Interestingly, there has been a reduction in CT journeys to hospitals and surgeries for appointments but this could be related to new ways of working by GPs and hospitals. However, it does free up some capacity to concentrate on providing access to social settings and for shopping.

20. There is also a growth in interest in Community Bus routes in areas not served by conventional buses and to provide links to rail and bus services to enable onward journeys. This is likely to develop as the Council looks at demand responsive transport being a significant part of the passenger transport network. CT is an experienced and proven provider of such routes and is keen to participate.

21. One area of concern and a result of the events of the last two years is that there has been a reduction in volunteers coming forward (in all areas, not just CT). This is a real challenge, particularly because the Sector is wanting to develop its range, services and engagement.

22. Working with District Councils is also important and good relationships have been forged in most areas. Malvern Hills and Wychavon contribute to transport initiatives via their Spacehive crowdfunding platform.

Privacy Impact Assessment

23. None.

Equality and Diversity Implications

24. CT delivers a significant number of journeys to Worcestershire residents who have mobility limitations and have no access to public transport services. The Sector, therefore, is a prime provider of transport to vulnerable groups – helping to combat isolation and loneliness, maintain independence and enabling access to essential services.

Purpose of the meeting

25. The Panel is asked to:

- consider and comment on the information provided
- determine whether any further information or scrutiny on a particular topic is required
- agree any comments to highlight to the Cabinet Member.

Contact Points

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Background Papers

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

Agenda and minutes of the Economy and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Panel on 9 May 2018 [available via the weblink here](#)

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)