

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Director of Community Health & Care Partnership

Community Health & Care Partnership Committee: 20 February 2013

Subject: West Dunbartonshire Social Transport Service Review & Equality Impact Assessment

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To present to the Committee an independent review and equality impact assessment of Council social transport provision within West Dunbartonshire.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 The Committee is asked to:

- Approve Option Three within the attached review, i.e. replace the current historical arrangements with an equitable social transport grant programme.
- Direct the CHCP to make arrangements to establish this social transport grant programme as an explicit enhancement to the Council's Community Chest grant scheme from 1st April 2013.

3. Background

- 3.1 For some years now West Dunbartonshire Council has made available a level of free social transport to an established list of recipients that has continued to grow. Appendix 1 is a list of users of the service and Appendix 1 details the actual bookings made across all groups between April 2012 and February 2013.

- 3.2 Like other local authorities across Scotland, and following the establishment of the CHCP, the opportunity was taken to reflect on the effectiveness and sustainability of the historical arrangements that have been in place, particularly with reference to the more recent obligations under the Equalities Act (Scotland) 2010; and the Audit Scotland's 2011 report on *Transport for Health and Social Care*.

- 3.3 A strong message from that Audit Scotland report was that:

"It is essential that eligibility criteria are clearly defined and understood by everyone using transport services and by the staff who refer them".

The Council confirmed to Audit Scotland that this would be an improvement activity that it would prioritise this year to ensure it had equitable, sustainable and best practice arrangements in place. Committee will recall that this was an action committed to within the approved CHCP Strategic Plan 2012/13.

- 3.4** Consequently, the CHCP commissioned West Dunbartonshire CVS to undertake an independent review of the scope and eligibility criteria for council-funded social transport provision. This specifically requested that the review generate impact assessed options which would allow for the updating of approaches and processes, helping improve on its ability to provide a sustainable service, compliant with the requirements of equalities legislation.
- 3.5** The review was completed on schedule, and the options formally considered by the CHCP Senior Management Team at the end of 2012. The review report is now being formally presented to CHCP Committee (Appendix 3), alongside a recommendation to approve and implement Option Three.

4. Main Issues

- 4.1** Social transport provision has consistently increased in demand across all Scottish local authorities in the last decade and West Dunbartonshire is not alone in seeking to review and improve its social transport provision. A number of local authorities across the UK are currently engaged in some form of review process – for many this spans their transport systems in general and expands to transport for the individual. In common with West Dunbartonshire, these authorities state the need for review as the:
- Need to ensure equalities needs are being met.
 - Need to ensure maximisation of existing resources.
 - Need to streamline processes to clarify systems and communication.
- 4.2** Audit Scotland in its review of transport practices highlighted the need for all local authorities to review their arrangements and practices. At the core of that thinking is the need to recognise that *social transport services are not a service in their own right – instead they must be viewed as a means of accessing services or support of benefit to the individual*. In addressing this, it is key that any review must be based on the needs, risks and outcomes and on promoting independence.
- 4.3** The historical arrangements that have developed in West Dunbartonshire have been found to operate in isolation from other West Dunbartonshire Council support measures, including (but not limited to) the Community Chest Grant Scheme. This works against the principle of targeted support leaving many most at need unaware of the potential service and raises the possibility of double funding for some activities and organisations.
- 4.4** The general level of satisfaction forthcoming from recipients of the current scheme reflects positively on the work of CHCP staff and the Council's transport section in organising the provision of services. However this does not ensure that the service is being accessed equitably and for maximum community benefit. Many of those recipients who participated in the review were unclear as to the reason why they were eligible to access the service on the basis that they 'just always had'.

4.5 The varying numbers of recipients within individual organisations may also mean that resources are not always being efficiently applied. Similarly, the current issue of restricted day time use may mean that some potential beneficiaries cannot access social transport at a time which meet their needs and therefore do not engage.

4.6 As the Council's historical arrangements have not been subject to significant review for a period of time, the changing nature of transport options for some user groups is likely not to have been taken into consideration in planning for future services. The broadening of access to free travel passes, increased mobility of older residents and the increase in provision of volunteer driver availability should all be considered when determining how best to maximise community benefit from the service. Several small community transport initiatives and volunteer driver schemes are operational in the West Dunbartonshire area and well supported by community residents.

4.7 The review presents three options, with an equality impact assessment detailed for each:

- Option One: Maintenance of the Status Quo
- Option Two: Service Re-design
- Option Three: Social Transport Grant Programme

4.8 In considering the review as a whole then it is clear that the historical arrangements within West Dunbartonshire (while valued by its many varied recipients):

- Have evolved into – and been utilised as - a service in their own right instead of consistently providing a means of fairly accessing services or support.
- Do not meet the Audit Scotland's reasonable expectations "*that eligibility criteria are clearly defined and understood by everyone using transport services and by the staff who refer them*".
- Are at risk of not fulfilling the requirements of the Equalities legislation.

Having established such a negative equality impact through this independent review then, the Council should now seek to materially revise its local arrangements so as to explicitly comply with – and avoid potential challenge on – the requirements of the legislation.

4.9 For those reasons **Option Three** above is recommended to be the optimal arrangement to now establish, as it would both represent an explicitly positive response to meeting the needs of vulnerable groups in relation to the Equalities legislation; and provide a best practice model for community transport in relation to community benefits and transparency of allocation based on need.

4.9 The eligibility criteria that would be applied have been designed to be person-centred in nature and are summarised as follows:

- Promotion of independence and self management.
- Mobility issues.
- Medical Issues.
- Communication issues.
- Behavioural issues.
- Vulnerability.
- Requirement to be accompanied.
- Social isolation.
- Other special needs.
- Access to and from the property.
- Existing grant funding in place.
- Reserves held or member charging policies in place (if applicable).
- Whether the activity is core or is additional.
- Purpose for which the transport is required.
- Number of instances of transport required per annum.

4.10 To allow the criteria to be used effectively, a scoring mechanism would then be used to determine the most appropriate allocation of service within the resources available, i.e. it is recommended that the criteria are rated as low, medium or high impact determined by the percentage of user group members affected. Using a point per impact based model, these impacts would generate a cumulative score in turn allowing for a fair and equitable allocation system to be developed, communicated and understood by all registered users.

4.11 First and foremost, these criteria allow for all aspects of the equality duty to be met by the recommended social transport grant scheme. The criteria also recognise the key health and social care challenges affecting the West Dunbartonshire area (e.g. a high rate of lone pensioner households; and the high prevalence of a range of long term health conditions), as well as acknowledging needs of current users.

4.12 Implementing Option 3 then would bring the following clear benefits:

- Greatly increase awareness of eligibility, improving equality of provision.
- Broaden the range of organisations gaining a benefit from access to transport not previously enjoyed.
- Broaden the range of options for groups, allowing meetings and services to take place at differing times.
- Make better use of resources by ensuring provision of service in a more responsive, flexible manner.
- Allow for more effective and transparent resource management.
- Link transport provision with other local authority grant schemes - most notably the local Community Chest - to ensure connectivity and reduce duplication of both assessment and funding distribution.
- Make better use of resources by ensuring maximum benefit is achieved for the level resource investment.

5. People Implications

- 5.1** There are no implications for any Council staff in regards to their substantive contracts of their terms and conditions. There is a potential impact on overtime payments for a small number of Council staff within the Housing, Economic & Environmental Development (HEED) directorate. The external review and this Committee paper have been shared with HEED senior management, who have confirmed their support for the recommendations made here.

6. Financial Implications

- 6.1** The current arrangements routinely generate a significant pressure on the financial resources available for other critical front-line community care priorities (e.g. Home Care).
- 6.2** In implementing Option Three, the full recurrent budget (i.e. £136k) for social transport would be transferred into the social transport grant programme. This would remove the budget pressure on other critical front-line community care services, and provide reassurance that no savings had been made from the established budget allocated for social transport.

7. Risk Analysis

- 7.1** The main risks of not adopting Option 3 as recommended are in relation to not acting in compliance with the Equalities Act (Scotland) 2010; and in not delivering best value (as per 4.8). For that reason, continuing the current arrangements (i.e. Option 1) is not judged as being viable or responsible to attempt to sustain. Option 2 is not being recommended as it is judged as providing (at best) a sub-optimal response; and would also lack the additional community benefits associated with Option 3.

8 Equalities Impact Assessment (EIA)

- 8.1** A full equality impact assessment was built into the review and is detailed within the appended report.
- 8.2** As per 4.9 above, in considering the review as a whole then it is clear that the current historical arrangements within West Dunbartonshire (while valued by its many varied recipients) are at risk of not fulfilling the requirements of the Equalities legislation. Having established such a negative equality impact through this independent review then, the Council should now seek to materially revise its local arrangements so as to explicitly comply with – and avoid potential challenge on – the requirements of the legislation.
- 8.3** Option Three as recommended represents an explicitly positive response to meeting the needs of vulnerable groups in relation to the Equalities legislation; and provide a best practice model for community transport in relation to community benefits and transparency of allocation based on need.

9. Consultation

- 9.1 Consultation with service recipients was a key element of the independent review. The findings have also been presented to and positively received by the CHCP PPF (as members will recall from the draft PPF minute presented at the November 2012 CHCP Committee).

10. Strategic Assessment

- 10.1 Approval of the recommendations would support the Council's strategic priority to "improve the wellbeing of communities and protect the welfare of vulnerable people".
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Appendices: Appendix 1 - List of Organisations/Groups registered for
Social Transport

Appendix 2 - List of Social Transport Users April 2012 –
Feb 2013

Appendix 3 - West Dunbartonshire Social Transport
Service Review & Equality Impact Assessment

Background Papers: Audit Scotland (2011) *Transport for Health and Social
Care*.

Wards Affected: All.