

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 11 October 2018

Report of the Head of Service Public & Integrated Transport

Part I

Electoral Divisions affected:
(All Divisions);

Community Transport - Results of Consultation on Proposals to Reduce Funding

(Appendices 'A' - 'C' refer)

Contact for further information:

Liz McClarty, Tel: (01772) 532423, Transportation Officer,
liz.mcclarty@lancashire.gov.uk

Executive Summary

At its meeting on 8 February 2018, Full Council approved proposals to renegotiate the contract with the Community Transport Consortium, reduce funding by a third and revise the in-house dial-a-ride provision to provide a reduced service subject to consultation, with the outcome to the consultation to be presented to Cabinet for final approval. This report presents the outcome of the consultation.

An equality analysis is attached at Appendix 'A'.

This is deemed to be a Key Decision and the requirements of Standing Order C19 have been complied with.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) Note the findings of the consultation.
- (ii) Confirm if it wishes to implement the saving as previously agreed by Cabinet and Full Council.

Background and Advice

Community Transport is provided to people who cannot use mainstream public transport due to lack of a service in their area or they have a disability or health condition which means public transport is an unrealistic option.

The term community transport used in this report refers to all of the services provided by the Community Transport Consortium and Dial-a-Ride services provided by the county council's Travelcare service. All minibus services are provided using vehicles equipped with lifts and passenger restraints so that wheelchair users can travel without having to transfer to a seat.

In Ribble Valley, Preston, South Ribble, Chorley and West Lancashire, community transport is provided by a consortium of transport operators under contract to Lancashire County Council. The Community Transport consortium also provides a Community Car Scheme where volunteer drivers pick up pre-arranged bookings and take individuals to various appointments, as required. The operators also provide group and day trips allowing individuals and friends to go to various events and destinations like local markets and the countryside or seaside. The consortium offers opportunities for some 160 volunteers who give 23,500 hours of their time to the operators whilst gaining life skills and enhancing their own wellbeing.

The Community Transport operators in Lancashire secure some funding including grants from other sources and offer services above and beyond those contracted by the county council.

In the other seven districts an off-peak 'Dial- a-Ride' service is provided by the county council's Travelcare.

At its meeting on 8 February, Full Council approved proposals to renegotiate the contract with the Community Transport Consortium, reduce funding by a third and revise the in-house dial-a-ride provision to provide a reduced service, subject to consultation, with the outcome to the consultation to be presented to Cabinet for final approval.

Consultations

The consultation was undertaken in two phases. The first phase aimed to establish how the proposed reduction in funding for community transport would affect the service provision of the community transport operators. This was done by consulting community transport operators over a four week period. The information gathered in this phase was used to inform the questions that were asked of community transport users, volunteers and other interested parties in the second phase of the consultation. The response from the consortium of operators is attached at Appendix 'B' which is not for publication as it is exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972. It is considering that in all the circumstances of the case the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.'

For the second phase of consultation, community transport providers distributed paper questionnaires to their service users and volunteers. An electronic version of the consultation questionnaire was available at www.lancashire.gov.uk. PDF, Word, large print and easy read versions were also available online. Posters were used to publicise the consultation as well as Facebook and Twitter posts.

416 stakeholders with interests in community transport were emailed at the beginning of the consultation to inform them that it had started and that they could respond online.

The second phase of the fieldwork was initially due to run for eight-weeks between 16 April 2018 and 10 June 2018. However, during the fieldwork period the closing date was extended by 14 days, ending on the 24 June 2018.

In total, 1,062 completed questionnaires were returned (909 paper questionnaire responses and 153 online questionnaire responses).

The questionnaire was subdivided to allow the gathering of views from both users and individuals and organisations representing them as well as from those who volunteer with the Community Transport Operators.

The consultation report is set out at Appendix 'C'.

Key findings included:

85% of respondents said that they were users of community transport services, 4% said that they were volunteers on community transport services and 11% said that they were neither of these.

Community transport service user responses:

- Over four-fifths of respondents who use community transport (84%) said that they use it because of a disability or health condition.
- Nearly half of respondents who use community transport (47%) said that they generally use it a few times a month, and about a third (32%) said that they use it a few times a week.
- The most common reasons respondents gave for travelling on community transport were shopping (67%), leisure/social activity (38%), day trips (29%) and medical appointments (29%).
- Respondents who use community transport were most likely to say, if community transport services were reduced, places would become inaccessible (38%), it would negatively impact on their freedom and ability to stay active (31%), services would become inaccessible (28%) and they wouldn't/might not get out at all/as much (20%).
- When asked how it would affect them if the community transport services fare was increased, over half of respondents who use community transport (53%) said that a modest rise in fare is better than losing the service.
- Respondents who use community transport were most likely to say that if community transport services stopped altogether it would affect them negatively as they rely on the service to stay active (40%), it would lead to isolation/social exclusion (29%), they will be completely housebound (25%), and it would limit/remove access to shopping, socialising and other amenities (24%).
- When respondents were asked how they would get to the places they usually go if they could not use community transport services they were most likely to

say they would not be able to access the places they go to (61%), they would use a taxi (47%) and they would go less often (37%).

Community transport volunteer responses:

- Respondents who volunteer with a community transport provider most of the 38 respondents commonly said that they volunteer because the service supports/has a positive impact on marginalised elderly (34 respondents) and they have strong commitment towards what the service does (26 respondents).
- When asked how it would affect them if service changes meant that they had to volunteer less, or not at all, respondents who volunteer with a community transport provider most commonly said they wanted to contribute to improve the lives of others (29 respondents), they would be disappointed for service users (28 respondents) and it would be upsetting (25 respondents).

Other comments:

When all respondents were asked if they think there is anything else that we need to consider about community transport or that could be done differently, the most common responses were to express satisfaction with the service (keep it/invest in it) (76%) and to describe the service as a 'lifeline' that users rely on (67%).

Additional responses:

We received seven emails and four letters in response to the consultation including responses from West Lancashire Pensioners Forum, Lancashire 50+ Assembly, Whittingham Parish Council, Woodplumpton Parish Council, Halsall Parish Council, Ribchester Parish Council, Ribble Valley Borough Council, Macular Society (Chorley group), and service users. All the responses express support for the work that the community transport service does and they appeal to us to continue the service or ensure that the savings are made in a way that has the least impact on service users.

Implications:

The terms of the contract with the Community Transport consortium require that, during the period of the contract, passenger growth targets are achieved and these have been delivered. The consortium has been asked to indicate what level of service could be provided with a reduction of funding of £175,000 phased over two years and this is still to be provided. Whilst the consortium are unable, at this stage, to indicate the level of service that it may be able to offer, it points out that it is made up of efficient providers and each have very little ability to further cut fixed and variable costs. Most operators question their viability following the proposed funding reductions.

A short term extension to the current contract has recently been agreed. In the event that the service requirements change considerably as a result of any budget reduction, the contract may require re-tendering. The terms of the contract require

that in order to terminate the contract, six months' notice is given and so the full savings in 2018/19 will not be achieved, and some will be delayed into 2019/20.

In relation to the in-house dial a ride service which is already more limited than that provided by the consortium, it is anticipated that a similar level of service can be provided as now within the proposed reduced budget.

Risk management

Finance

The saving agreed by Cabinet in January 2018 totalled £175,000 with £75,000 being removed from the budget in 2018/19 and a further reduction of £100,000 in 2019/20. This saving will be delayed as a result of discussions with the Community Transport Consortium, which is being managed within the public transport budget monitoring position.

If Cabinet does not agree to proceed with this saving this will result in £175,000 having to be built into the medium term financial strategy from 2019/20, therefore creating a further pressure and increasing the forecast financial gap.

Legal/Procurement

The Community Transport Consortium contract was initially awarded for a period of 3 years, with a further extension of 6 months ending on 30 September 2018.

The contract has recently been extended for a further three months until 31 December 2018 in order to allow adequate time to review the requirements of the service going forward, and in line with any decisions which arise from this report.

The contract can be further extended by any number of agreed periods up to the 31 March 2020 and changes of a non-material nature can be agreed between the parties. However, in the event that any required changes to the service provision are deemed to be substantial; in order to ensure compliance with the Public Contracts Regulations 2015, the contract would need to be re-tendered to reflect the requirements of the new service. The Public and Integrated Transport Service are working in conjunction with the Procurement Service to ensure this is managed appropriately.

Equality and Cohesion

In considering this report, Cabinet is required to give "due regard" to the contents of the attached Equality Analysis at Appendix 'A'. To summarise, the Equality Analysis highlights that many Community Transport service users are disabled people or older people with the protected characteristics of disability and age. Consultation responses have shown that any reduction or loss of the service could significantly adversely impact those people's opportunity to use local services and participation in public life. The service has been described as a "lifeline" and for many there could be significant difficulties in finding alternative ways of replacing this service.

The consultation exercise has revealed considerable objection to the proposal to reduce funding for community transport services.

The consultation responses indicate that community transport is contributing to the health and wellbeing of service users, including helping to reduce social isolation. Implementation of the proposals may increase demand for potentially more expensive health and social care services.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
Consultation Responses	July 2018	Liz McClarty (01772) 532434

Reason for inclusion in Part II

Appendix 'B' contains exempt information as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972. It contains information relating to the financial or business affairs of the Consortium of Community Transport Operators. It is considered that in all the circumstances of the case the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.