

Discretionary Assisted Travel Scheme

A Task and Finish Group report for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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September 2010

Members of the Task and Finish Group

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Councillor Judy Falp
Councillor Bill Gifford
Councillor Elizabeth Higgins (from May 2010)
Councillor Bertie MacKay
Councillor Anne Mellor
Councillor Alan Wilkinson (from May 2010)

Acknowledgements

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Councillor Jane Knight – Warwick District Council (Group member up to May 2010)
Councillor Michael Coker – Warwick District Council (Group member up to May 2010)
Councillor Tony Heath – Warwick District Council
Emma Millward – Committee Services Officer, Warwick District Council
Graham Leach – Senior Committee Services Officer, Warwick District Council
Susie Drummond – Head of Customer and Information Services (Interim)
Stephen Roots – Community Transport Officer, Warwickshire County Council
Dave Mathews – Community Transport Officer, Warwickshire County Council
Roger Lee – Transport Manager, Age Concern / Age UK
Pauline Urwin - Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action (WCAVA),

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1.0 Overview & Scrutiny Summary

- 1.1 On the 2 February 2010, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report from Councillor Alan Boad that sought the establishment of a Task and Finish Group to try and establish whether it was possible to introduce a single community transport scheme. The scheme would be for both the elderly and residents with mobility problems, where normal public transport is unsuitable to meet their changing travel needs.
- 1.2 The Committee resolved that the scope be approved, with the inclusion of the provision of an alternative transport system for able residents to use where no regular bus service operates and a cross party Task & Finish Group was established to consider the scope as set out in attached at Appendix A.

2.0 Methodology

- 2.1 The Task and Finish Group met on 8 occasions.
- 2.2 **First meeting March 2010** - the group appointed Councillor Barrott as the Chair and reviewed the contents of the scoping document with members putting forward ideas of appropriate witnesses to be added to the document. The timescale for the reporting date was discussed and changed to the 23 October 2010 due to the work that was needed to ensure all areas of the scope were covered. The Group requested information on the current and previous schemes along with information on related schemes that were available at present.
- 2.3 **Second meeting April 2010** - The group reviewed the information received from officers. It was noted that travel tokens could be used on Chiltern Trains. The Group split into pairs to go and discuss current travel arrangements with the following organisations: - WCAVA, Age Concern and the Health Travel Service. In addition, contact would be made with the local Taxi/Private Hire Associations to ascertain how the travel token scheme was operating. Councillor MacKay offered to speak to the Rural East Community Forum regarding what was in place and the needs of people in that rural area. Officers would obtain information from the County Council about their current arrangements including funding. Officers would also arrange for this topic to be included as an agenda item for the following Rural West Community Forums to discuss the needs of people in those areas.
- 2.4 **Third meeting May 2010** - Councillors Mrs Higgins and Wilkinson joined the Group, replacing Councillors Coker and Mrs Knight. Members reported on their meetings with the organisations that had been decided upon at the previous meeting. Members agreed that Stephen Roots, the Warwickshire County Council Transport Manager, should be invited to a meeting to enable them to ask him direct questions.

- 2.5 **Fourth meeting June 2010** - Members gave an update on information collated. Actions were agreed moving forward, included inviting a representative from Age UK to the next meeting and compiling a questionnaire so that the public could be consulted /engaged in this process. The questions for Stephen Roots were circulated via email and agreed at the meeting.
- 2.6 **Fifth meeting July 2010** - Roger Lee from Age Concern attended and provided a detailed report on the transport operations that his organisation provided, which included funding streams. The Group agreed the questions that were to be included in the questionnaire, along with the where and how members of the public could access them.
- 2.7 **Sixth meeting July 2010** – Stephen Roots attended, along with his colleague Dave Mathews, answered the group’s questions and gave a clear insight into what Community transport schemes Warwickshire County Council provided and how funding was allocated to other schemes.
- 2.8 **Seventh meeting August 2010** - The Group were updated on how the response to the questionnaire was going. The deadline for the return of the questionnaires was 31 August 2010, following that date a full analysis of the replies would be undertaken. Councillor Mrs Falp updated the group on information she had received at a meeting she had attended regarding the ongoing third sector grant review. Members discussed the possible recommendations of the final report, but had to bear in mind that they still needed the questionnaire analysis. It was agreed that the Chair and officers would start to draft the report.
- 2.9 **Eighth meeting September 2010** – The Group discussed the draft final report and asked officers to circulate the final version for agreement by email prior to submission to the Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

3.01 Evidence, Observations and Research

- 3.1 **Community Links** - This service is run and funded by Stratford District Council (SDC). It is designed for residents of SDC who have a genuine need for local transport but cannot access public transport because of mobility or other reasons, or live in an isolated location with no other form of transport available. The service operates on weekdays between 9.15am and 2.45pm and focuses on differing parts of Stratford district on different days. Customers need to book the service three days in advance and the service will do its best to meet the needs of the customer, but can not always. All vehicles have disability access and the necessary safety features. Customers are charged a flat rate of £1.30 for a single journey and £2.60 return. (This price was correct at September 2010). Family or informal carers who wish to travel with the person they are supporting can travel free of charge.

- 3.2 **Flexibus** – Flexibus is operated by the A&M Group on behalf of Warwickshire County Council. Flexibus is a bus service open to everyone and is particularly helpful to people with mobility problems as the bus is equipped with an electric lift to help passengers on board. A trained care assistant is on hand to assist passengers on and off the bus and to help whilst on board. The buses operate to a destination point from a number of fixed intermediate points and the bus can operate off-route to collect people with mobility problems if it is practical to do so. The scheme has been operating for over ten years and it has proved so successful, the County Council has just purchased five brand new vehicles.
- 3.3 **Health Transport** – This service was rescued in 2009 following the demise of Racing-to-Get There and now works out of the Warwickshire Rural Community Council (WRCC) in Stoneleigh. Customers can book this service (to travel to and from medical appointments only) via telephone on Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday mornings from 10.00am – 1.00pm. The drivers are all voluntary.
- 3.4 **Respite Care** – Warwickshire County Council now have a brand new mode of transport for older people and the disabled, with 24 new wheelchair accessible Optare Solo buses, specially made to give travel freedom to people receiving day and respite care across the county.
- 3.5 **Medical Voluntary Transport** – Warwickshire Voluntary Transport (WVT), launched in February 2010, is the group formed by 5 voluntary car schemes to give them a new common platform to work at improving relations and negotiations with health services and to increase recognition for the valuable work done. It fits well alongside Warwickshire County Council's joint working efforts with the Primary Care Trust on improving Patient Access to Health project. Its members are Beeline Community Transport, Nuneaton & Bedworth, Warwickshire Community and Voluntary Action (WCAVA), Volunteer Centre Rugby's Hospital Car Scheme and Health Travel already outlined in 3.3.
- 3.6 **Age Concern (Warwickshire)** (Nationally known as Age UK) - Age Concern provides a service that meets the social needs of older people by enabling them to leave their homes and meet other people. It also helps in alleviating the social and rural isolation giving cultural and learning opportunities in the community. They have minibuses based at Bidford-upon-Avon, Leamington Spa, Rugby and Stratford-upon-Avon. These minibuses have disabled access via passenger lift or ramp so that the service is suitable for all members of the older community. All Age Concern's drivers are volunteers and have to be certificated to the Minibus Driver Awareness Scheme. The main customers of Age Concern are groups and organisations who need access to transport, however, they are not set up to cater for groups not for individuals.
- 3.7 **Warwickshire Community And Volunteer Action (WCAVA)** – Councillors Michael Coker and Bill Gifford had a meeting with Pauline Urwin of WCAVA, where she pointed out that WCAVA would discuss the matter with their members. Ms

Urwin had recently attended a very useful meeting which discussed Community Transport and that was a need for greater provision in Warwick District for more Community Transport that will support group activities. Ms Urwin felt that that the Task & Finish Group needed to speak with Stephen Roots at the County Council and also Age Concern about their transport schemes and how it operates in Warwick District. Ms Urwin offered to let all the charities that members of WCAVA know about the Task & Finish Group and will distribute any questionnaires to those bodies.

- 3.8 **Questionnaire** – 2200 questionnaires were sent out around Warwick District and a link to the Council's website was also advertised so these Questionnaires could be completed online at the Council's website. A total of 264 (12%) were completed and returned. A complete analysis of the results can be found in Appendix 2. The analysis does show that residents in Warwick District were not aware of community transport, do not have access to alternative transport and would use transport if available for a number of very valid reasons.
- 3.9 **Warwickshire County Council** – Stephen Roots and Dave Mathews from the County Council gave members an insight into the transport schemes operating within Warwickshire and how they are funded. This news was tempered when Stephen stated that there could be funding cut backs.
- 3.10 **Travel Tokens** – These are available for residents within Warwick District who live within specific parishes within the District are 60 and over or have a disability. In addition some disabled people are entitled to travel tokens in the Towns and other parishes which are not part of the main scheme. There is £5 administration charge payable annually on collection of the tokens. Between 1 April 2010 and 30 September 2010 368 lots of tokens were issued to people. Travel tokens can be used on trains, buses or taxis if they are signed up to the scheme. However, it was discovered that uptake by taxi drivers was low because of the need to redeem tokens in batches of £100 and there was a 10% administration charge each time these were redeemed.
- 3.11 **Transfer of Bus Pas Service** - It was confirmed during the process of the review that the government had confirmed that the transfer of the issuing of bus passes would be made to Warwickshire County Council in April 2011.

4.01 Recommendations

The Task and Finish Group established that due to the nature of the district it would not be possible to provide a single community transport service that was efficient, effective and sustainable. However, there is a need for a community transport scheme to be more for a coordinated approach to community transport for elderly residents and those residents with mobility problems, where normal public transport is unsuitable to meet their travel needs and for residents where no regular bus services operates.

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The following recommendations provide the basis for how this should be established.

Recommendation 1

Members of the Task & Finish group strongly believe that the Flexibus travel scheme is the one that could meet the requirements as set out in our scoping document.

Therefore, recommendation 1 is that Warwick District Council enters into discussions with the A&M Group (operators of the Flexibus) and Warwickshire County Council to explore and negotiate an extension of the service within Warwick District so that the residents whose travel needs are currently not met can be.

Recommendation 2

Community Links Travel service is operated by Stratford-upon-Avon District Council (SDC) and which does provide access to Warwick District for its users from (SDC) has potential to expand, subject to funding, as this would provide a reasonably priced service which is available via pre-booking for anyone.

Therefore, recommendation 2 is that the Council explore joint partnership working with SDC so that the current Community Links service can be expanded to those residents within Warwick District who meet the requirements as laid out in the scoping document, who currently do not have access to such a service.

Recommendation 3

Any Discretionary Travel Scheme that is implemented will have a cost attached to it. All Councils are currently looking at levels of funding for all schemes, but members of this Task & Finish group are unanimous in wanting a scheme to meet the varying needs of residents within the district.

Therefore, recommendation 3 is that officers to investigate whether Warwickshire County Council would be prepared to match fund any District Council allocation for an approved discretionary travel scheme to enable the scheme to be launched with the long term aim of delivering self funding sustainable scheme.

Recommendation 4

The travel token scheme provides a reasonable service that enables residents to travel effectively. The Group were significantly concerned that the scheme was not favorable for taxi drivers and did not incentivize them to take part. Currently the drivers can only redeem in batches of £100 but are charged a 10% administration charge but, in addition, this transaction is taking place in Blackburn, which means there is now a further waiting period for the driver. This non participation reduced options for individual users in rural communities.

Therefore, recommendation 4 is that Officers investigate the way that Travel Tokens are presented back to Warwick District Council by hackney carriage and private hire drivers.

Recommendation 5

Age Concern (Warwickshire) (nationally known as AGE (UK) provide excellent and valuable service within the District with specially adapted vehicles. These vehicles could be used to provide a similar service to elderly and disabled people within the District where normal public transport is not suitable to meet their changing travel needs.

Therefore, recommendation 5 is that officers undertake discussions with Age UK to ascertain what their additional requirements would be, in terms of vehicles and volunteers, to expand the service and if this would be viable

Recommendation 6

The clear feedback from the public questionnaire was that there was not a wide public awareness of the current community transport schemes available.

Therefore, recommendation 6 is that a joint promotion activity is undertaken to promote all the community transport schemes available. This should include the community places where the questionnaire was issued as there was comprehensive response from the target audience in these places.

5.01 Monitoring Arrangements

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee should receive a report in 9 months on the progress of the recommendations.

6.01 Appendices

Appendix 1 - Scoping document

Appendix 2 – Analysis from questionnaire

Appendix 3 – Distribution list for questionnaire.