

CABINET

13 April 2006

GRANTS FOR COMMUNITY TRANSPORT SCHEMES

REPORT OF DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT

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RECENT REFERENCES:

CAB 1123 – Review of Travel Concessions – 14 September 2005

CAB 1170 – Concessionary Travel Scheme – 14 December 2005

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY:

This report recommends the establishment of a small grants scheme for community transport initiatives as provided for by Cabinet in the 2006/07 budget. The scheme will be targeted at those providing transport for vulnerable and hard to reach groups. The provision of small grants will enable providers to reduce fares and provide additional services.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1 That a community transport grants scheme be established within the £10,000 approved in the 2006/07 budget for the promotion and support of community transport.
- 2 That the award of grants be made annually by a decision of Cabinet.
- 3 That the detailed terms of operation of the scheme be devised by the Director of Development in consultation with the relevant Portfolio Holder in accordance with the Council's established policies in relation to grant schemes.

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##### DETAIL:

#### 1 Introduction

- 1.1 At its meetings on 14 September 2005 and 14 December 2005, Cabinet considered major changes to the concessionary travel scheme arising from new legislation requiring the City Council to introduce free fare bus passes from 1 April 2006. The legislation requires district councils to provide free fare bus passes to all residents of age 60 and over and to those who are registered disabled.
- 1.2 As a result of the new bus pass scheme involving considerable extra costs which were not provided for by central Government, it was decided that the alternative option of travel tokens could no longer be offered. Bearing in mind the potential impact on local transport schemes which have made use of travel tokens, Cabinet made provision of £10,000 to provide additional support for these schemes. This report suggests how that support should be used to provide assistance to these through the establishment of a small community transport grants scheme.

#### 2 Existing Community Transport Schemes in Winchester

- 2.1 There are three categories of community transport schemes in the Winchester area; those operated by Winchester Area Community Action, community minibus schemes, and voluntary car schemes.
- 2.2 The funding for Winchester Area Community Action (WACA) and their Dial-a-Ride services was considered in detail by Cabinet on 14 December 2005. The WACA services operate with paid organisers and some paid drivers, and as a result their costs are higher than the other community transport schemes that depend solely on volunteers. The subsidy from the City Council for the WACA services for the current year will be about £68,000 and it is therefore proposed that WACA should not be eligible for any further funding from the £10,000 budget under consideration.
- 2.3 There are five community minibus schemes in the District, covering Meon Valley, Alresford, Bishops Waltham, Colden Common, and Curdridge areas. All these schemes depend on volunteer organisers and volunteer drivers, but they have the substantial costs of purchasing and operating their own minibuses. The schemes operate a variety of services including weekly journeys to local town centres, journeys to local lunch clubs for the elderly, and private hire for local community groups.
- 2.4 The Meon Valley scheme is unique in that it operates its journeys to local town centres as registered bus services. This involves the organisers in considerable extra formalities, but it has the benefits that the scheme is eligible for Bus Service Operator Grant (previously fuel tax rebate) from central government, and it is able to accept the free fare bus passes so that most of its remaining costs are refunded

through the Hampshire Farepass scheme. The Alresford scheme operates a similar number of journeys that could become registered bus services, and it has been suggested that they should consider whether there would now be sufficient benefits of additional funding for the scheme and free travel for users over 60 for the Alresford services to become registered bus services.

2.5 Of the community minibus schemes, Alresford, Bishops Waltham, and Colden Common accepted travel tokens while Curdridge did not. The income from travel tokens in 2005/06 was as follows:

- Alresford £1,400
- Bishops Waltham £1,200
- Colden Common £200,

2.6 This gives a total income of £2,800 to these schemes from travel tokens. In discussion on the issue, the Alresford scheme has already requested a subsidy of £3,900 to include £1,400 for loss of travel tokens income plus £2,500 for a net excess of expenditure over income in 2005.

2.7 There appear to be 18 voluntary car schemes operating within the District, of which only six have ever accepted travel tokens as a means of paying for journeys. Two schemes, Bishops Waltham and Droxford, had travel token income in 2005/06 of approximately £800 and £600 respectively, while the other four schemes each had income of about £100. The total loss of travel tokens income for the voluntary car schemes would therefore be just under £2,000.

2.8 In these schemes each user pays the volunteer driver direct to cover the costs of using their own car, based either on a mileage charge, a fixed fee, or a donation, depending on the scheme. Some voluntary car schemes appear to cater primarily for visits for medical appointments, dental appointments, hospital visits, and other emergency journeys rather than regular journeys to shopping or leisure facilities.

### 3 Proposed Grants Scheme

3.1 It is proposed that a grants scheme should be set up to support the community transport schemes (a generic term to cover both mini-bus and car based schemes) providing services within the City Council's area. The £10,000 allocated for this will be considerably more in total than the amount of subsidy indirectly provided through the travel tokens scheme. It should be noted that the County Council already provides a wide range of grants to community transport schemes and that the City Council would be providing additional funding into what, for a district council, is a non-statutory area of activity. The criteria for the award of grants is the subject of discussion with the County Council to ensure a 'joining up' of criteria.

3.2 The principles of the scheme are suggested as follows:

- it is for revenue funding of journey costs only. No capital grants for purchase, repair or maintenance will be made;
- applicants will be required to demonstrate how the funding will be used to reduce the fares that would otherwise need to be charged;

- the beneficiaries of the scheme should be people in vulnerable or hard to reach groups in accordance with the Council's Social Inclusion Strategy;
  - priority should be given to schemes serving areas with few bus services to facilities such as hospital, doctor or important community and leisure facilities;
  - the service must be openly available and publicised. Personal or 'one to one' arrangements will not be eligible;
  - grants will only be made to schemes where drivers are volunteers
- 3.3 In order to ensure that the benefits of any grant scheme are distributed between the many rural communities within the District, it is suggested that there should be a maximum amount of grant from this £10,000 budget for any individual community transport scheme, and that for 2006/07 this maximum amount should be £1,500. It is anticipated that the community minibus schemes would be likely to apply for relatively higher amounts, and setting a maximum grant will ensure that smaller amounts of grant are still available for a larger number of voluntary car schemes.
- 3.4 The detailed operation of the scheme needs careful consideration once the principles are established by Cabinet. The Council has standard procedures for grants including application processes and the formulation of service level agreements to ensure value for money. These need not be onerous or unduly bureaucratic but applicants must be willing to comply with reasonable requirements to obtain public funding. It is not envisaged that this will represent any difficulty for larger schemes, but those operated on a more informal basis may need to consider some simple formalities to be able to apply.
- 3.5 It is suggested that the decisions on grants to be awarded are made annually by Cabinet in the early part of the financial year.
- 3.6 To save time in bringing the scheme forward it is suggested that if Cabinet approves the principles outlined in the report that the operational aspects of the scheme are put in place by the Director of Development in consultation with the Portfolio Holder. This would mean that the awards for 2006/2007 could be made by September this year.

#### OTHER CONSIDERATIONS:

#### 4 CORPORATE STRATEGY (RELEVANCE TO):

- 4.1 The Strategy includes improving access to services and to cultural opportunities for residents, and helping the most deprived parts of our community to be more self confident and self supporting. The provision of community transport schemes enables those who are mobility impaired to gain access to essential and other services, and helps in particular those who are elderly or live in the more rural parts of the District to be more self supporting.

#### 5 RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 5.1 A growth item of £10,000 has been approved within the 2006/07 budget for the promotion and support of community transport. The report proposes that this item should be used to fund a community transport grants scheme. Should the Council

wish to extend the amount of funding available at some time in the future then it will be able to do so.

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS:

None

APPENDICES:

None