

## **Discretionary Assisted Travel Scheme**

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



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  
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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 1.

## 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 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.

Flexibus currently operates a number of routes throughout most of Warwick District from Monday through to Saturday, however not all routes operate on all of these days. Timetables are shown in Appendix 2.

In order to ensure all residents receive the same level of service another bus with appropriate routes would need to be introduced, this would be at an approximate cost of £35,000 - £50,000 depending on the route.

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, 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. Age Concern currently provide transport for groups and organisations, but are not set up to cater for individuals.

Further correspondence with Age UK has revealed that the Leamington Spa Age UK bus is underused and therefore has capacity to provide a service to residents of Warwick District but they have not got the volunteer drivers to fully utilise the bus.

- 3.7 **Warwickshire Community And Volunteer Action (WCAVA)** – Councillors Michael Coker and Bill Gifford had a meeting with Pauline Urwin of WCAVA, where she agreed 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 3. The analysis indicated that there was a lack of awareness that community transport existed. In addition, residents who do not have access to alternative transport would use it if available.
- 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 597 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.

The 2009/10 budget allocation for travel tokens was £120,000 with an actual spend of £24,600. The 2010/11 budget allocation for travel tokens is £121,500.

However, it was discovered that uptake by taxi drivers was low because drivers were under the impression that tokens can only be redeemed in batches of £100 and that there was a 10% administration charge each time these were redeemed.

Subsequent research has revealed that tokens can be redeemed for any amount and there is no administration or postage charge.

- 3.11 **Transfer of Bus Pass 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. 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.

The travel token scheme provides a service that enables residents to travel effectively but research shows that the take up has not been as high as anticipated. The 2010/11 budget for the provision of taxi tokens is £121,500.

November year to date take up figure is £19,400. Income received was £2735, which leaves a balance of £104,835. Projected usage for total year is £38,000 which leaves a balance of £66,835 from which funds could be made available to provide additional discretionary transport.

Therefore, recommendation 1 is that the Warwick District Council Executive approves the cost of £35,000 to £50,000 to provide another bus route operated by Flexibus that accesses those residents that the current routes do not reach. The specification for the additional route will need to be explored following approval.

### **Recommendation 2**

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 2 is that officers undertake discussions with Age UK to ascertain if WDC can assist in the recruitment of volunteer drivers so that the Leamington bus can be fully utilised, therefore, enabling groups or organizations access to community transport.

### **Recommendation 3**

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 3 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.

This would require joint working between all parties but likely to be a minimal cost.

## **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 – Flexibus timetables.

Appendix 3 – Analysis from questionnaire