

South Somerset Community Accessible Transport update

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Purpose of the Report

To provide an update on the operation of the South Somerset Community Accessible Transport (SSCAT) in light of uncertainties about long term funding

Public Interest

Providing reassurance about the future of the SSCATbus, a charity providing important transport services to people living in the villages around Bruton, Castle Cary and Wincanton, who do not have access to a car, have no bus service or who are unable to access a bus due to mobility difficulties.

Recommendations:

- (1) To note and comment on the report

Background

In September 2017, Members received the annual progress report from the Council's Transport Strategy Officer and also a report from the Operations Manager of the SSCATbus which has been operating locally for 16+ years. Both reports explained the funding uncertainty facing this scheme and went on to say that the Board of Trustees were considering options for the future of the scheme including looking for alternative sources of funding and the potential for amalgamating with a larger community transport scheme. Alongside this the Transport Strategy Officer has continued to work with the charity and the team at Transporting Somerset to identify to explore other work options.

In addition to this it was explained that in other Counties increasingly, Towns & Parish Councils are stepping in to safeguard vital transport services.

The other area of concern was a Department for Transport (DfT) consultation about the future operation of Section 19 & 22 permits (SSCAT along with other community transport schemes operate within these permits which allow the use of paid, non-PSV drivers). The suggestion is that operators such as SSCAT will need to use drivers who hold a Certificate of Professional Competence (CPC) on tendered contracts. Somerset County Council (as the transport authority) has worked closely with community transport operators with both providing responses ahead of the consultation which closes in May 2018. District Council officers will also be considering the DfT's consultation document working with the County's Transporting Somerset Team and of course ensuring that the views of the respective CT operators are also included in this response.

Progress

In line with the discussion in September 2017, Parish & Town Councils were asked to consider precepting for a three year funding package to support the CATbus. Parishes were also invited to a meeting to encourage support to preserve the service. The response has been very positive with in excess of £7,200 secured for the forthcoming year from seven parishes. All three towns in the Area have provided at least £1,000 and several small parishes have also contributed. The majority of contributions have been agreed on a three year rolling basis which takes the potential amount secured

to over £20,000. Further work will be done during the summer to ensure feedback is provided to those local councils which provide support to ensure that this is built into precept discussions for 2018/9 and also to encourage participation by other Councils.

SSCAT bus have also been successful in securing £5k funding through Somerset Community Foundation to support the development of their social car service. This has been a long established part of SSCAT offer for which volunteer drivers use their own cars to provide one off journeys for hospital visits. The funding will allow the service to be developed into a more comprehensive to be developed.

The Friends of Verrington Hospital have agreed to provide £27k funding over the next three year in recognition of the significant role the SSCAT has in transporting patients and visitors to the hospital. This was a particular generous gesture by the Friends group, made possible by their own fund raising efforts.

In addition to the above attempts to safeguard the services, SSCAT are also seeking funding for a replacement vehicle as part of their ongoing fleet renewal programme which helps to reduce maintenance liability by aiming to operate vehicles less than 10 years old.

During this period, the scheme has undergone major staffing changes with the Operations Manager (who had been with the scheme since its inception) retiring and the deputy resigning. Following a successful recruitment in late Autumn, the new staff have settled quickly and are working effectively. Considerable progress has been made during the last six months to sustain SSCAT bus services. As a result of this, the scheme will be fully funded for the next 12 months. Whilst this is really positive progress every effort will be made to negotiate extended funding through the town and parish councils as well as exploiting other funding opportunities through grants and contracts

Financial Implications

There are no financial implications resulting from this report

Implications for Corporate Priorities

Communities that are healthy, self-reliant, and have individuals who are willing to help each other

Equality and Diversity Implications

Improvements to public and community transport help to reduce inequality and improve service accessibility for all

Other Implications

Included within the Area Development Plan

Background Papers:

Area East Committee Agenda and Minutes September 2017
