

Appendix A – South Somerset Community Accessible Transport - Annual Report 2018/19

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The core business of the company is a demand-responsive door-to-door Ring and Ride Service; this uses fully accessible minibuses to provide transport for people in the operating area of South Somerset who are unable to use public transport due to mobility difficulties, or because the service provided is inadequate. Local community groups hire minibuses for social outings and trips in a wider geographical area. The company also operates a busy Social Car Scheme using volunteer drivers in their own cars to provide transport for hospital appointments further afield. This is an expanding, highly valued service due to the reduction in provision of hospital transport by the PCT.

In September 2017 SSCAT experienced a severe financial setback when its bid for continued National Lottery funding was unsuccessful. As a consequence, its budgeted revenue funding shortfall was in the region of £36,850 (excluding depreciation on vehicles) and urgent action was needed to address this immediate substantial deficit and prepare a medium/long term plan to place the charity on a more secure financial footing.

The first, and most necessary, course of action was to review our charging structure. Although we pride ourselves on maintaining an affordable local community transport service, it was clear that we could not survive on the rates then being charged. On 1 January 2018, fare charges were increased by approximately £2 per person per return journey, or £1 for bus pass holders (with the other £1 being reclaimed under the SCC discretionary concessionary fares scheme). Fares were increased again on 1 January 2019 to cover inflation. Our passengers have been very understanding of the necessity for this increase and, not wanting to lose SSCAT, have supported our action.

Local town and parish councils were asked for their support through an annual precept allocation, which received 15 positive responses from the 25 councils in the SE Somerset area, amounting to £8650. This support has proved invaluable in providing much needed certainty and continuity of funding.

In addition, the Friends of Wincanton Community Hospital have pledged £9000 a year over 3 years (2018, 2019 and 2020) and a number of additional fundraising initiatives aim to raise over £6000 in 2018/19. We have been successful in being selected by the Co-op as one of its charities to be supported in 2019 in raising funds towards computerising our bookings, servicing/maintenance records and management/admin systems.

We have also looked at our costs and planned small savings in a few areas. Inevitably however our largest costs are vehicle maintenance, fuel and salaries, all of which will increase and are unavoidable.

Our budget for 2018/19, with the above action and support, is aiming to hit a break-even target (excluding depreciation on vehicles) by March 2019.

Local businesses have been issued with our latest newsletter to make them aware of our services and to gain their support.

SSCAT minibuses are a vital link in helping to maintain or create new connections for the people of SE Somerset; they also meet the governments' current remit of helping prevent isolation and loneliness.

There is little doubt that funding of the SSCAT 'Ring & Ride' service to cover all operational revenue costs, even with the current support from councils and other funders, will be challenging. Over the next year or so, we will also need to replace one of the older minibuses, which we aim to achieve through further fundraising.

Local town and parish councils' support is therefore an essential component in our financial recovery plan and is very much appreciated. We hope to receive their continued support.

From an operational perspective, there has been significant use of the services we provide as the figures below will show. We continue to be the main provider of transport for the neediest members of our community and are an essential service in the transport provision for South East Somerset. Without our accessible vehicles with their friendly helpful drivers, many people would be isolated in their own homes.

Statistics: Jan – Dec 2018

Calendar Year

	2017	2018
Total mileage	68477	68207
Single passenger journeys	23698	24032
Group journeys	281	292
Social car single passenger journeys	1166	1332

{Average journey length (2018) in 'Ring & Ride CAT bus = 2.8 miles}

As reported last year, an area of concern is the DfT consultation about the future operation of Section 19 & 22 permits (which allow the use of paid, non PSV drivers). A possible outcome could require SSCAT (and other CT operators) to hold a PSV 'O' Licence and all drivers a PCV D1 (by test) and Driver Certificate of Professional Competence. Other additional requirements are also mandatory eg fitting of tachographs in every vehicle, class VI MOTs etc. This would come with significant cost implications if introduced and would seriously challenge the viability of Community Transport. The DfT is undertaking further work in order to determine the final approach to take and has delayed its intended response which was due last autumn.

In December 2018 we became a casualty of Somerset County Council cuts when we were given notice that our school contract for King Arthurs would be terminated on 15th February 2019 (for a contract that should have run until 31 July 2023). This came as very disappointing news and will result in a loss of income in the region of £12,800.

M M Rowlands
Operations Manager
SSCAT

4 February 2019