

WYVERN COMMUNITY TRANSPORT GRANT

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report is to seek Members' views on a request from Wyvern Community Transport to receive 100% of the funding allocated to Rochford District Council from Essex County Council under the Community Transport Partnership Agreement for 2008/09.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 In October 2003 a Community Transport Scheme was introduced in the District which aimed at assisting residents who were unable to access public transport with their transport needs.
- 2.2 Users must join the scheme for an annual fee of £5 and as a member they may book their door-to-door transport service, paying a small fee for the journey. Bookings must be made in advance of the day of travel and are carried out in a wheelchair accessible minibus.
- 2.3 The Community Transport Scheme in Rochford is operated by the Wyvern Community Transport Trust and has developed over the past four years to have over 400 individual members and about 40 group members. The number of journeys undertaken has also steadily increased and is about 700 trips per month.

3 FUNDING

- 3.1 Each Local Authority in Essex operates a Community Transport Scheme and is issued a grant to support the scheme under a tripartite Community Transport Partnership Agreement, between Essex County Council, the Local Authority and the Community Transport Scheme in that District.
- 3.2 The Agreement is effective from 1 April 2006 and runs for 5 years until 31 March 2011. It includes a fair funding formula to calculate the amount of funding allocated to the Community Transport Scheme in each Authority.
- 3.3 Rochford receives 6.11% of the total funding allocated and this is paid by Essex County Council to Rochford Council in two instalments, in April and in October. However, Rochford pays the grant to Wyvern in one instalment in April each year.
- 3.4 Rochford is one of only two Districts, where the funding is paid to the Local Authority and not directly to the District's Community Transport Scheme. This arrangement operates because a percentage of the grant is allocated to support Rochford Council's Taxi Voucher Scheme.
- 3.5 Rochford Council is also one of the few Authorities that do not make any further contributions specifically to support the Community Transport Scheme, though substantial additional resources are allocated to the Taxi Voucher Scheme.

- 3.6 Each year the funding from Essex County Council increases slightly in line with inflation and this year the funding was £67,094.30. This is split every year, with 66% allocated to Wyvern Community Transport and 34% allocated to the Taxi Voucher Scheme.

4 TAXI VOUCHERS

- 4.1 Rochford Council is the only Authority in Essex that offers a Taxi Voucher Scheme to its residents who meet the qualifying criteria. There are 455 members in receipt of Taxi Vouchers and they pay an annual fee of £6.50 to become a member. Taxi vouchers can be used to pay for journeys in taxis, licensed with Rochford Council, or when using the Wyvern Community Transport Scheme.
- 4.2 The number of taxi voucher members has reduced by around 100 in the last year due to an amendment in the qualifying criteria, which requires that members must not be in possession of a bus pass, thus preventing there being a double travel subsidy.
- 4.3 Taxi Voucher Scheme members are split into two categories; 380 non-wheelchair users receive £72 of vouchers per quarter and 75 wheelchair users receive £108 of vouchers per quarter.
- 4.4 In 2006/07 the Council allocated £106,000 to taxi vouchers, which included the 34% funding from ECC. This was increased during the year to £114,000 and was over spent by around £4,500. This year (2007/08) the Council has allocated £106,000 which again includes the 34% from ECC; this budget has been increased to £120,000.
- 4.5 It is estimated that between 70% - 75% of taxi vouchers issued are reimbursed, with the remaining vouchers either expiring or no longer being required by the member.

5 ESSEX COUNTY COUNCIL

- 5.1 The Tripartite Community Transport Partnership Agreement states that a percentage of funding be allocated to Wyvern Community Transport and to the Taxi Voucher Scheme by the Council. However, it is understood that Essex County Council fully support Wyvern Community Transport receiving 100% of the grant funding and are happy to amend the Partnership Agreement accordingly.

6 WYVERN COMMUNITY TRANSPORT

- 6.1 In 2006/07, the Wyvern Community Transport scheme had 453 individual members and 38 group members, resulting in 8,399 journeys being made. The scheme is no longer in its infancy and, it is understood, is rarely able to rely on volunteer staff to operate. Most of the current funding received from Essex County Council is used to pay drivers to operate the buses and for the co-ordinator's salary. However, with further funding, a part-time office

administrator may be employed to answer the increasing number of calls received and to enhance the hours of the booking line.

7 OPTIONS

7.1 In assessing whether Wyvern should receive 100% of the funding, there are a number of options for Members to consider: -

- (1) The request could be refused so that 34% of the grant continues to provide support for the Taxi Voucher Scheme.
- (2) To agree to the request and pay 100% of the grant received for Essex County Council to Wyvern Community Transport, and for the Council to make up the 34% (£22,812 in 2006/07 figure) shortfall to continue to fully support the Taxi Voucher Scheme.
- (3) To agree to the request from Wyvern Community Transport, but to reduce the level of assistance given to members of the Taxi Voucher Scheme; reducing the amount to £60 per quarter to non-wheelchair users and £90 per quarter to wheelchair users would achieve a reduction in expenditure on the scheme of around £23,000.
- (4) To agree to the request from Wyvern Community Transport, and to maintain Taxi Vouchers at their current level of £72 and £108, but to reduce the number of vouchers that can be issued.

8 WAY FORWARD

- 8.1 The Wyvern Community Transport scheme is now showing itself to be successful, but there are considerable costs associated with paying the wages of the drivers since volunteers willing to work full days, 9 to 5, are not available.
- 8.2 Equally, the Taxi Voucher Scheme has also proved itself to be a popular way of providing additional flexibility for residents with disabilities to travel around the area.
- 8.3 Overall, whilst there may be merit in agreeing to a larger portion of the transport grant being paid to Wyvern Community Transport, at this stage it is considered that the success of the Taxi Voucher Scheme, and its much greater flexibility for disabled residents, is such that a change to funding arrangements could not be recommended for 2008/09. That having been said, it is suggested that Wyvern Community Transport might be asked to approach the Council with a proposal for greater engagement and to discuss options for the operation and funding of the service in 2009.

9 RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 If Members decided to refuse Wyvern Community Transport's request for 100% of the funding there is a risk that the scheme may not be able to develop further, given the growing demands from residents for this service.

- 9.2 However, the reduction in the Taxi Voucher Scheme budget would place greater limitations on the ability of vulnerable disabled people in the district to travel.

10 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 If it was decided to pay the full Community Transport Budget to Wyvern Community Transport there would be a shortfall of £22,812 (plus inflation) in funding for the Taxi Voucher Scheme commencing in 2008/09.

11 RECOMMENDATION

- 11.1 It is proposed that the Executive Board **RESOLVES**

- (1) That the request from Wyvern Community Transport to receive 100% of the funding provided by Essex County Council as part of the Community Transport Partnership Agreement be refused for 2008/09.
- (2) That Wyvern Community Transport be requested to give consideration to arrangements for greater levels of engagement with the Council and to consider options for the operation and funding of the service in 2009.

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Background Papers:-

Community Transport Partnership Agreement 2006-2011

Letter from Wyvern Community Transport, August 2007.

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