

Community Transport – Draft Commissioning Strategy **Briefing Note **DRAFT v0_01****

Introduction

The council is currently consulting on proposals for a draft commissioning strategy for the funding of Community Transport (CT) in the city. The consultation runs from Wed 20th February to Wed 15th May.

The Community Transport Association defines community transport as “safe, accessible, cost effective, flexible transport run by the community for the community”

In Bristol, the council’s existing CT budget provides annual grant funding to external Voluntary, Community and Social Enterprise (VCSE) providers, Bristol Dial a ride, Bristol Community Transport providing services citywide and CATT bus (Hartcliffe and Withywood Community Partnership), Mede Sprint (from Mede Centre in Filwood) and Lawrence Weston Community Transport + Bristol Shopmobility (from Cabot Circus).

Between them they provide a range of services that are fully detailed in the market position statement, including:

- a variety of door-to-door demand-responsive accessible minibus services managed locally or citywide,
- community ‘bus’ services with regular destinations, but variable routes, to suit the membership users’ requirements,
- accessible minibus and car hire services for the use of voluntary groups and other not-for-profit organisations as well as individuals,
- the provision and training of minibus drivers,
- wheelchair and mobility aid hire

The surveys clearly show that demand far outstrips supply and is increasing. Funding available is reducing and the council can no longer fund in the way it does at present. It must comply with requirements for accountability and value for money as well as guidance on funding voluntary and community sector organisations through the Bristol compact.

Up to now grants have been allocated based on a target number of journeys delivered set for each provider based on their previous performance. This is recognised as a poor method of assessment and the draft commissioning strategy seeks to resolve this.

Summary of the draft strategy proposal

An outcomes based approach to improve social inclusion and quality of life – measuring value to individuals and contribution to the prevention of need for statutory Council services.

Focussed funding on individual door-to-door demand responsive services for the most vulnerable – those unable to use public transport and having no access to a car – based on individual statement of need rather than assessment criteria. (This will be mainly, but not exclusively, older and disabled people)

Depending on the results of the consultation (resulting requirements to specify), the proposal is to fund using a GRANT process for a minimum 3yr duration (probably 5yr). However, this is required to be open to others – a competitive process. If forced to specify too much, owing to scale of funding, the process would have to follow EU procurement for contracts.

A citywide provision managed in 3 (or more) areas – prioritising links to local services, maximising available journeys, all linked to City centre (alternatives 5 or 7 areas) with funding allocated equally to each area. This can be by individual area providers or consortia or a bid for all three. Also separate funding for the hire of Mobility scooters etc for City Centre

To no longer specifically support group hire (all assessment based on outcomes for individuals) – group hire could still be provided at commercial rates – likely to still be cheaper as use volunteer drivers.

To no longer fund use for medical appointments – difficult to deliver, more a single passenger service. Alternative is for non-council funding to support such services.

Removing free travel for concessionary pass holders – its current provision does not prioritise most vulnerable and does not reflect the cost of services.

Fares to be set by the provider(s) to suit their business plans (with provision for reduced fares for those on low incomes and for the necessary transport of carers)

Council funding supports the outcomes based service only, but enables providers to use their assets to develop range of services to other clients on a more commercial footing.

Proposed timescales dependant on the results of the consultation

- Draft strategy consultation ends on 15th May
- Finalise strategy and report to cabinet in July 2013 (at earliest) for a decision on how to proceed.
- If a strategy is agreed, then commissioning process could run in Autumn/Winter 2013.
- Aim to commence newly commissioned services by April 2014 (*and potentially decommission others where funding ceases*).

Full details of the draft strategy and consultation questionnaire and access to the background needs surveys, market position statement and draft equality impact assessment are available online at:

www.bristol.gov.uk/communitytransport