

Community Transport Funding - 2021/22

Report of the Planning Portfolio Holder

Recommended:

That the Community Transport contract be extended for one year (2021/22) and that funding of £19,458 is provided.

SUMMARY:

- This report seeks the agreement to extend the Community Transport contract for 2021/22.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report seeks agreement to extend the Community Transport contract with Unity for the year 2021/22 and provide funding of £19,458 from within existing budget.

2 Background

- 2.1 The Test Valley Community Transport Scheme has existed in Test Valley since 2001 and is an essential service for those without a car, with mobility issues or suffering from social isolation. It is operated by Unity and comprises two elements; dial a ride (Call'n'Go) and the community minibus hire scheme. Funding is shared between Hampshire County Council and TVBC.
- 2.2 HCC /TVBC last tendered the community transport contracts in the autumn of 2018 so that new contracts would be in place for 1 April 2019. These contracts were for an initial 2 year period (2019/20 and 2020/21) with the option to extend for up to a further 4 years (six year term in full). This, along with the Council's financial contribution of £37,505 for the 2 year period, was agreed by Cabinet on 10 October 2018.
- 2.3 The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has meant that funded organisations have had to respond and adjust their services and the way that they are delivered. The Community Transport model in Test Valley has been affected severely, both in terms of patronage, hire and in maintaining volunteers. This pandemic has come during the last of the two year contract period where a decision needs to be made on triggering the extension to the current contract and for what period.
- 2.4 In September 2020, as part of considering whether to extend the current funding arrangement for organisations which receive funding through the Council's Revenue Grant programme, Cabinet agreed that the decision of extending the Community Transport funding after March 2021 would be considered separately in co-ordination with HCC as primary funder.

3 Corporate Objectives and Priorities

- 3.1 The Council's Corporate Plan 'Growing Our Potential' was approved in 2019. Helping to fund community transport helps support the residents of the Borough to live well and support the most vulnerable access services.

4 Consultations/Communications

- 4.1 No consultation is required. Communications between the Council, Hampshire County Council and Unity continue.

5 Options

- 5.1 The option to consider is whether to extend the contract for an additional year and provide the necessary funding.

6 Option Appraisal

- 6.1 The impact of the pandemic on service provision and the ongoing uncertainty makes the decision of whether to extend the contract, and for what length, a complex one. Ordinarily, at this time the two Councils would be considering the possibility of extending the contract from 1 April 2021. As part of this process officers would be reviewing service provision and monitoring patronage and forecasting future demand and requirements. However, given the current situation there remains uncertainty about what the key needs of the service users might be. This makes an effective review to guide funding for the next four years particularly difficult. To end the contract is not a realistic option because of the impact this would cause on those members of the community who rely on the service. Also, as community groups rebuild their offer it is important that there is some degree of functioning community transport model in place ready to meet their demand, although recognising that the level of demand may not be there in the short term.
- 6.2 The existing contract is worded to allow funders the ability to not agree to trigger the full four year extension. There is the option of agreeing an extension to the current contract for part of the four year extension. Given the level of uncertainty with forecasting and to give Unity the ability to respond to a potentially different model of delivery it is proposed to extend the contract for a single year (2021/22). This would also give the Councils time to decide what is needed post 2021/22, if required. A one year extension would also be consistent with the approach the Council has applied to other grant recipients. Hampshire County Council as co-funders of community transport are supportive of this approach.
- 6.3 The Council's proportion of funding for 2021/22 would be £19,458. This would comprise £11,503 for Call n' Go; £4,601 for Group Hire and £3,354 towards vehicle maintenance.

7 Resource Implications

- 7.1 The proposed recommendation can be met from within existing budget.

8 Legal Implications

8.1 There are no legal implications for the Council in the recommendations.

9 Equality Issues

9.1 An EQIA screening had been completed in accordance with the Council's EQIA methodology and no potential for unlawful discrimination or negative impact has been identified, therefore a full EQIA has not been carried out.

10 Other Issues

10.1 Community Safety - none

10.2 Environmental Health Issues – none

10.3 Sustainability and Addressing a Changing Climate – the potential to reduce trips by private car.

10.4 Property Issues – none

10.5 Wards/Communities Affected – all

11 Conclusion

11.1 The pandemic has affected the community transport service within the Borough. The pandemic has come during the last of the two year contract period where a decision needs to be made on triggering the extension to the current contract and for how long.

11.2 Given the level of uncertainty with forecasting future requirements and to be consistent with the approach the Council has applied to other grant recipients it is recommended that the contract be extended for one year. This is to be funded from existing budgets.

Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)

None

Confidentiality

It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.

No of Annexes:

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File Ref:

Pt7

Report to:

Cabinet

Date:

13 January 2021