

Framework for a Community Transport Delivery Strategy for Surrey 2014 - 2019

This document sets out a framework for a proposed new community transport delivery strategy for Surrey.

1. Introduction

The purpose of the community transport development strategy is to ensure that the County Council, boroughs and districts of Surrey, external agencies and communities develop a co-ordinated and collaborative approach to community and voluntary transport. This will ensure that funding which supports community transport is focused and delivers social benefit for communities, avoiding duplication and ensuring value for money.

The County Council plays a key role of supporter, influencer and promoter of community transport in partnership with Community Transport schemes/operators and other stakeholders.

2. What is Community Transport?

Community transport is typically run by the voluntary sector on a not for profit basis, however, the County Council and various other partners play a key role in supporting, funding and developing the sector. Community transport is for residents of Surrey who cannot use conventional public transport services due to accessibility issues, such as health or social exclusion, and works to compliment the local public transport network.

Typically community transport services are not commercially viable and are often outside of an authority's statutory remit. Services are very much needs led with local solutions and without the commercial profit element this often leads to unconventional approaches to a community's transport problems.

Community transport acts as a key tool in tackling social exclusion and works to complement rather than compete with the main public transport network. Community transport is a complex and varied market. The main types of community transport include:

- Dial-a-Ride (DAR)
- Community minibuses
- Voluntary car schemes
- Taxi voucher schemes

The strategy will set out and review the approaches to supporting and developing the community transport services in Surrey, as a means of responding to the transport needs of those individuals and groups who:

- find it difficult to use conventional public transport services due to physical impairment, sensory or learning disabilities.
- experience social exclusion in some way by way of geographical isolation, including young and elderly people or those on low incomes.

3. Aims and objectives of the strategy

The strategy will develop the direction of community transport over the next five years via the following measures:

- A Community Transport Business Development Officer (fixed term 2 year contract from Autumn 2014) will be in post to help develop the sector. The Officer will spend time developing the following:
 - Further develop partnership working between Surrey Community Transport operators
 - Identify business opportunities for the community transport sector e.g. MiDAS training project, Mainstream/SEN education transport contracts, Inter-library lending service, Health transport.
 - Develop capacity within the sector to ensure it is more resilient and robust and able to respond to business opportunities.
- A review of current community transport provision will be undertaken. This will include areas such as: Dial a Ride, Taxi Vouchers and Community Minibuses. The review will look at how each service is provided and how cost effective, efficient and fit for purpose they are.
- A review of the current community transport grant funding that is allocated by the county to various community transport providers will be undertaken. There will be a conscious move away from organisations being grant reliant to them becoming more income reliant.
- Enhance community transport information and mapping of provision to ensure that a comprehensive information set is available to internal/external partners and the public.
- Increase the awareness of community transport and raise the profile of the sector to ensure recognition and value.
- At a corporate level the way the county works in developing the voluntary sector and with volunteers is being looked at, therefore it is essential to engage in this process whilst respecting the individual delivery of community transport and therefore the local focus and flexibility.

4. Community Transport Funding

As noted in section 2 community transport is not commercially viable and as such public/grant funding is essential to support community transport schemes. Due to increasing financial pressure both at a county and borough/district level, it is important to recognise that levels of community transport grant support cannot continue. The aim is to move toward a cost neutral delivery to the public purse with a phased programme of change over several years to be delivered in partnership with borough/district councils and the voluntary and community sector. There is a need to help the community transport sector to become more resilient, moving to relying on income generation rather than grant support.

At present Surrey County Council grant funds the community transport sector approximately £600,000 per annum. This funding is allocated to community transport providers to assist them in the provision of Dial a Ride services, Taxi voucher schemes and Voluntary Car Schemes.

The boroughs and districts are the major funders of the Dial a Ride services and Surrey County Council contributes approximately 10% of the overall transport costs of a Dial a Ride service through its grant funding.

The way in which the County grant funds organisations is currently being revised and a new 'Grant Criteria and Funding Guide: Procedure and processes to be followed when awarding grant on behalf of Surrey County Council' has been produced. It is therefore essential that when the community transport grants are revised the new guidance is adhered to.

Existing grant funding allocation is based on historic fleet size. A new funding formula is needed to ensure equity across the county and to take into account various new elements such as: geographical rural/urban mix of service, partnership working and performance related indicators.

Any new funding formula and grant allocation will need to be consulted on as part of the Surrey Compact and it will be essential to ensure that the different views of the community transport sector are taken into account. The boroughs and districts of Surrey and the other community transport organisations that receive grant funding from Surrey County Council have been made aware of the proposed changes to grant funding as part of their annual review meeting which is a requirement of the current grant funding process.

Various different grant funding mechanisms will be explored including:

- Fixed grant allocation based on new formula
- Small and Large Funding grant pot which is open to all and requires a bid application to be made
- Vehicle replacement capital grant fund

5. Action Plan and monitoring and evaluation

An action plan will be formulated which will include robust monitoring and evaluation measures to ensure value for money and efficiency.

6. Next Steps

- A new community transport delivery strategy will be developed from the framework.
- The strategy will set out the vision for community transport for the next five years.
- The strategy will assist the community transport sector in moving towards a cost neutral delivery to the public purse. A phased programme of change will be delivered over several years in partnership with the community transport sector.
- All relevant partners and bodies will be consulted on the new strategy. The community transport sector is already being engaged in initial consultations regarding revisions to the community transport grant funding.
- The timescales for the community transport delivery strategy are contained within the overall Transport Review project delivery plan.