South Holland District Council

Review of Community Transport

An Overview and Scrutiny Review undertaken by the Community Transport Task Group on behalf of the Policy Development Panel

October 2012
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1.0 Introduction

1.1 The Policy Development Panel (PDP) established the Community Transport Task Group on 26th September 2007. The scope of the Task Group was agreed as the following:

To examine: -

- the need for suitable transport linking villages with towns and all areas within the District, to complement the use of private cars; and
- to examine the shortcomings and benefits of the present service

1.2 The members of the Task Group were Councillors M G Chandler (Chairman), R M Rudkin, S G Marthews and G K Dark. The lead officer for the Task Group was the Community Development Officer, Karen Johnson.

1.3 At a meeting of the Policy Development Panel on 29th July 2008, consideration was given to the Task Group’s final report and recommendations. Some minor amendments were made to the report and the Chair and Vice Chair of the Policy Development Panel met with the Task Group on 18 August 2008 to finalise and agree the changes. The recommendations in the report were approved by the Panel for submission to Cabinet in September 2008.

1.4 The Policy Development Panel, at its meeting on 30 August 2011, received a presentation from Lincolnshire County Council’s Senior Accessibility Project Officer. As a consequence of this, it agreed to re-convene the Community Transport Task Group for the purpose of undertaking a short review of the new community transport projects developed by Lincolnshire County Council and to identify any areas where support was required.

2.0 Scope of the Review

2.1 The review was required to examine the current position in relation to the following projects:

- Voluntary car scheme (including as a model for young people);
- Wheels to work; and
- Minibus brokerage scheme;

and make recommendations to Cabinet, if necessary, on how South Holland District Council (SHDC) could support the schemes.
3.0 Membership of Task Group

3.1 The membership of the Community Transport Task Group is composed of Councillors G R Aley, G K Dark, A M Newton and A Puttick.

4.0 Method of Review

4.1 After Task Group members had acquainted themselves with various community transport issues in South Holland District, the activities of their review focussed on seeking information from Nina Lightfoot, the Senior Accessibility Project Officer at Lincolnshire County Council. Accordingly, Nina Lightfoot was invited to, and attended, the meeting of the Community Transport Task Group held on 21st August 2012.

5.0 Summary of Findings

5.1 The following information was obtained through the meeting with Nina Lightfoot.

South Holland Car Scheme

5.2 Currently, the scheme does not cover the whole of South Holland District, but efforts are being made to fill the gaps. There was a small scheme operating in the Surfleet, Gosberton, and Pinchbeck areas which was coordinated by a Mr Tom Redden from Holbeach. The scheme was administered through the Louth Car Scheme. New drivers were always required.

5.3 Gedney has returned to the scheme and Cowbit has recently joined it.

5.4 The Task Group felt that the Scheme was a useful resource to the public, and the Chairman of the Task Group had written out to those parishes not part of the Scheme to provide more information about it and to explain the benefits to parishioners.

Wheels 2 Work

5.5 The Wheels 2 Work scheme provides the loan of mopeds for people wanting to access education, training and work. The moped can also be used to access leisure and social facilities. There are currently over 200 mopeds available County-wide. Individuals aged under18 are offered a 50cc moped, and those over 18 can potentially have one of the larger 125cc motorcycles depending on experience and competency assessed through the Compulsory Bike Training (CBT).
5.6 The CBT plus an additional 3-hours motorcycling has to be undertaken unless the rider already has a full motorcycle licence. The CBT and the cost of insurance and tax are included as part of the weekly loan fee. The rider also has to pay a small deposit. The initial loan period is 6 months, which can be renewed until the rider finds an alternative solution. An individual has the option to purchase the motorcycle after renting it for a period of approximately 18 months. Approximately 50% of those using the scheme are aged under 24 years.

**Minibus brokerage scheme**

5.7 The minibus brokerage scheme is a relatively new project and the County Council is working to encourage minibus owners to put their vehicles into the scheme for usage during the vehicles' 'down time'.

5.8 There are no hiring-group members at the moment. To start the scheme Age UK was asked to distribute leaflets for the County Council to gauge potential membership of hirers. As there were no applicants in response to this initiative, the project has since been promoted through parish councils and village hall committees.

5.9 To encourage minibus-owning groups to join the scheme two £25,000 grants were awarded at the launch of the project. The first grant went to Holbeach Community Minibus, and the second went to Birkbeck School in North Somercotes.

5.10 It has proved very difficult to get schools engaged and only three schools have joined so far. A possible explanation for this is that participating schools need to provide a contact person and phone number for hiring groups to be able to book the vehicle (this only needs to be for a minimum 2-hour slot each week). They then need someone to hand over the vehicle and check it back in on its return. It appears that teachers were not interested in these additional tasks. However, it was never foreseen that this activity has to be a teaching role. It perfectly in order for volunteers to undertake this vital income-generating role to help offset the ever-increasing running and maintenance costs.

5.11 Each potential hiring group can apply to become a member through the www.a2blincs.org.uk website. A hiring group has to be a not-for-profit organisation with a constitution or set of rules and a bank account with sufficient funds to pay the hire fees. A hiring group needs to apply for its own 'Section 19 permit' which allows not-for-profit hire with a volunteer driver. The group must nominate one of its members to drive the minibus. Any nominated driver is required to attend a familiarisation session with a minibus-driver trainer who will check the trainee’s licence to ensure eligibility to drive a minibus. Only minibuses with a capacity not exceeding 16 passengers are permitted in the brokerage scheme.

5.12 As minibuses can be only be hired when not in use by the owning group, an availability-diary sheet is provided on the website.
5.13 It appears that use of the brokerage scheme is being held back by a lack of volunteers to take on the associated responsibilities.

5.14 It is considered that minibuses are expensive vehicles to run and are not doing any good by ‘sitting idle’ in schools or community-owned driveways. The income from hire alone can help to offset the ever-increasing costs of servicing, repair and ongoing running expenses. The scheme represents a ‘win-win’ initiative and, to date, 5 community-owned minibuses are involved in the scheme but attracting the involvement of schools is proving difficult.

5.15 In respect of charging, each organisation has the ability to set its own rates. Lincolnshire County Council can provide examples of charges and hiring policies. Many schools are charging anything from £50 to £100 per day or around £25 per half-day. Most of the community-owned minibuses charge a mileage rate, of around £1.10 to £1.50 per mile.

5.16 It is understood that the minibus brokerage scheme works very well in other rural areas. School vehicles are often standing unused for long periods during school holidays which are just the times when groups are seeking to hire transport for leisure trips.

5.17 There is no financial commitment to being in a minibus brokerage scheme and the benefit lies in the ability to generate income to support the general costs of running vehicles.

5.18 More accurate information is required on which schools have minibuses and there is a role for District Councillors in promoting the minibus brokerage scheme when visiting various organisations. However, the main issue is not the lack of user groups, it is the shortage of minibuses available for hire. Until more are made available, there is little advantage to be gained in promoting the scheme more widely.

5.19 The new Holbeach minibus should be delivered around September 2012, and there should be spare capacity for groups to hire it.

5.20 There is an opportunity to promote the Minibus Brokerage Scheme and Wheels to Work in the South Holland Now magazine.

**Youth Transport**

5.21 During the meeting with Nina Lightfoot, there was some brief discussion on the subject of youth transport. There had been some consultation with the Youth Council on this matter and Nina advised that a few issues remained to be clarified. The Youth Council has been working on a youth transport scheme in Sutton Bridge with a view to setting up a pilot voluntary car scheme just for young people. The County Council had been working with Graham Scorthorne (now retired) at SHDC and a consultant (John Potter) working for SHDC in support of the Youth Council. However, since Graham Scorthorne’s retirement, there has been no further contact with John Potter and nothing has happened to move the project on.
5.22 Following the meeting with Nina, the situation with Youth Transport and the Youth Council had been clarified by John Potter. The Youth Council had been interested in the issue for some time, but unfortunately without much progress. Initially, it had looked at trying to organise a scheme for the Long Sutton/Sutton Bridge area. Meetings had been held with local people and schools had been visited to speak to young people. There was a lot of interest in the scheme, but limited commitment. Some drivers were recruited (although not enough), detailed costings undertaken, and some advertising done. However, a significant plank of the proposed scheme was taken away (the use of the Long Sutton Youth Centre as a single point of coordination for calls/requests) and therefore no further progress had been made. The Youth Council was still interested in helping to resurrect the scheme as they were disappointed that it had never got off the ground.

5.23 Nina advised that there is an issue with transport for young people as a number of youth clubs have closed down. Transport is a problem generally for the 13-16 age group living in rural areas. This group is obviously not covered by the Wheels 2 Work scheme.

6.0 Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1 In terms of the three projects which form the subject of this review, the general feeling is that these initiatives are proceeding reasonably well. However, there is a need to undertake more promotion of the services that are available.

6.2 Accordingly, the Task Group recommends that all three projects should retain the support of South Holland District Council.

7.0 Financial implications of recommendations

7.1 There are no financial implications relating to the recommendation.

8.0 Main Sources of Information and individuals contacted during the Review

8.1 A presentation by Nina Lightfoot, Senior Accessibility Project Officer, Lincolnshire County Council followed by questions submitted to her by members of the Task Group formed the main source of information.