

Overview of Responses and Recommendations

Budget Proposals 2024/25: Reduce contributions to community transport		Service Director: Jon Winstanley Author: Peter Walker		8 February 2024 Version 1 (Scrutiny Commission)	
Proposal:	To reduce the annual funding for community transport operator revenue grants by £10,000, from £55,280 to £45,280 from 2024/25.				
Total budget 2023/24:	£55,280	Initial proposed saving 2024/25:	£10,000	Recommended saving 2024/25:	£10,000
No. of responses:	<p>In total, 84 responses were received through the survey, although 13 were clearly aimed at ‘restructure funding for Adult Social Care transport services’ and included within that paperwork. The breakdown of responses for the remaining 71 responses is as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 13 - A user of the service • 62 - A resident of West Berkshire • 0 - A visitor to West Berkshire • 1 - A West Berkshire business owner • 7 - Employed by a West Berkshire business • 4 - Employed by West Berkshire Council • 2 - A Parish/Town Councillor • 0 - A District Councillor • 2 - A partner organisation • 0 - A West Berkshire Council service provider • 10 - Other <p>We also received direct responses from Reading West & Mid Berkshire CLP and Newbury CLP and Tilehurst Parish Council. We received no petitions.</p>				
Key issues raised:	There appeared to be confusion between this proposal and that to restructure funding for Adult Social Care (ASC) transport services, with at least 13 responses relating to the ASC proposal. Because the proposals are different,				

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	<p>comments specifically relating the ASC transport have been excluded as they are not relevant to the funding of community transport. Some respondents also appeared to confuse community transport with rural bus services.</p> <p>The main point raised was that this proposal would impact the more vulnerable residents of West Berkshire – the elderly, disabled, and those living in rural areas. Reduced access to transport could lead to more isolation.</p> <p>It has been suggested that this reduction could be made up by community transport providers seeking contributions from other parties, or that users could pay more. The Council could even review how it spreads the funding amongst the groups. It was noted that this affects only low numbers in comparison to the population of West Berkshire.</p> <p>The alternative view is that a funding reduction could lead at least one provider to stop operations, and that the level of savings sought from this proposal is insignificant compared to the £14.2m required, but it could have huge implications for those affected.</p> <p>It is noted that only a relatively small percentage of service users have responded to the survey.</p>		
Equality issues:	No issues were raised during the consultation, that weren't already included in the EqIA stage one. An EqIA stage two has been completed to explore the previously identified equality issues.		
Suggestions for reducing the impact on service users:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Community transport providers could seek alternative funding.	Community transport providers already do this and are not dependent solely on Council funding. Further details on funding opportunities for voluntary sector organisations can be found through https://www.westberks.gov.uk/voluntary-organisation-grants and/or for community organisations through Connecting Communities in Berkshire through https://ccberks.org.uk/2024/01/04/new-year-funding-opportunities-for-community-groups/ .	

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	Users (who are able to) could contribute more.	That would be a matter for the individual community transport providers. They would be unlikely to reject higher contributions from users able, and willing, to make them, and would be able to confirm to users how those donations could be made.	
	Remaining Council funding could be tailored more to individual groups based on their customer needs.	The Council revised how it allocated funding to groups in 2019 to ensure that providers received funding in line with the service that they were delivering. The model allows for tweaking of values if appropriate.	
Alternative options for applying the saving in this area:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Cut could be made for one year only.	There is no specific information to indicate that West Berkshire Council will be in an improved financial position in one year's time.	
	Funding could be used to improve bus services.	The Council treats community transport as part of the overall transport solution for West Berkshire, and it is included in the Bus Service Improvement Plan and Enhanced Partnership Scheme. For many users of community transport, bus services are not appropriate due to accessibility issues. Community transport provides greater benefit than could be achieved for the same level of funding of bus services. The Council are introducing on-demand bus services that may become a suitable alternative for some community transport users.	
Suggestions for income generation:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Contributions sought from town and parish councils.	Many town and parish councils already provide contributions to the community transport providers.	
	Grants sought for environmentally friendly vehicles.	Grants are not available for environmentally friendly community transport vehicles. The Council's capital funding for community transport providers has been used to support Downlands Volunteer Group to upgrade their minibus with an electric, wheelchair-accessible minibus.	

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	Increase fees for large developers.	This is a matter for Development and Regulation to consider.	
	Encourage increased compost through free garden waste collections to be able to sell on.	Plans to phase out the green bin charge form part of the Council Strategy.	
	Means-test free bus passes.	This is a national scheme and the Council are unable to charge for applications (only replacement passes).	
	Increase council tax. Receive adequate government funding.	Levels are set by government.	
Officer conclusion and recommendation as a result of the responses:	The impact of this proposal would be a reduction in funding (based on this year's allocations) of between £3 and £37 per group each week, or 29 pence per passenger journey provided. Although the overall view of this proposal was negative, measures suggested by respondents should enable providers to recoup lost Council funding. It is therefore recommended to accept this proposal.		

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