



<u>Committee and Date</u>
Environment and Services Scrutiny Committee
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<u>Item</u>
<b>8</b>
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## Community Transport in Shropshire

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### 1. Summary

Community Transport in Shropshire provides a key safety net service enabling those people for who public transport is not suitable or available, access to essential services and facilities. These services are dependant in the main upon volunteers to operate and meet the needs of the local communities they serve.

The purpose of this report is to set out how the Community Transport System is currently operating and the measures in place to deliver this service.

### 2. Recommendations

To consider the attached report on Community Transport in Shropshire.

# REPORT

## Strategic Context

### Bus Based Community Transport Schemes

Small bus Community Transport schemes in Shropshire operate under a number of different structures and have different operating objectives. However all of them provide a 'safety net' style service and have a strong community base, involving users in the design and delivery of its service.

All the schemes are independent of Shropshire Council in terms of their management structure and trading status. Shropshire Council retains an observer / mentor position on the board of each group. The sector as a whole is now formalised as a Community Transport Consortium. This has further strengthened the identity of the sector and provides additional options for development and integration amongst the community transport operators in the future.

The transport they provide is designed to meet local needs that conventional transport services leave unmet. This is usually due to non-availability of a conventional service or passengers mobility issues which makes traditional public transport unsuitable. The use of all Community Transport schemes is based on membership, this being based on meeting eligibility criteria. Although the criteria vary from operator to operator, this is a necessary part of the legal vehicle licensing framework under which they operate.

All of the schemes operate Dial-a-Ride style services where journeys must be pre-booked. Generally these journeys are essential in nature and provide access to local services and amenities such as healthcare appointments and shopping opportunities. Shropshire Councils' grant funding is given to support these journeys.

**Figure 1**

Group	Fixed Route	Multiple pickups to one destination	Multiple Destinations	Community Cars	Excursions* or Trips	Contracts
Bishops Castle Dial a Ride	Y			Y	Y	
Bridgnorth Bus	Y	Y		Y	Y	Y
Church Stretton Ring & Ride		Y		Y	Y	
Friendly Bus	Y			Y	Y	Y
North Salop Wheelers	Y	Y			Y	
Oswestry Dial a Ride	Y			Y	Y	Y
Corvedale Buzzard	Y	Y			Y	
Ludlow Traveller		Y		Y	Y	Y
Shrewsbury Dial a Ride			Y	Y	Y	Y

\*Not funded by Shropshire Council

As part of the Concessionary Travel scheme Shropshire Council provide a capped level of funding to allow schemes to offer free or reduced cost travel for passengers on their services. This fare reimbursement is for journeys accessing essential services only.

Following Shropshire Councils review of rural bus service provision, The Community Transport Consortium agreed to undertake service operation following the cessation of the ShropshireLink service. By undertaking these services through its members on a zero value, call off contract basis, Shropshire Council has been able to continue to offer a minimum level of rural accessibility to residents, but in a much more focussed and affordable way.

Other activities undertaken by the groups include group based and brokerage style journeys. The purpose of these is more social and leisure and as such the cost of these trips is borne entirely by the users on the day with no Council support.

The Community Transport schemes do not cover all areas of the County but are concentrated on the conurbations of Shrewsbury, Oswestry, Ludlow, Church Stretton and Bridgnorth or where a particular local need has been

identified by a group. Shropshire Council currently grant assists ten local Community Transport (CT) initiatives annually, each under an SLA.

## Financial Considerations

### Shropshire

The table below shows Shropshire Council's base grants to the CT schemes and the contribution towards their fare income taken from the budget for Concessionary Travel.

### Community Transport Grant Payments 15/16

	<b>Base Grant</b>	<b>Concessions</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Albrighton Flyer</b>	£5,000	£4,600	<b>£9,600</b>
<b>Bishop's Castle Dial-a-Ride</b>	£13,650	£2,000	<b>£15,650</b>
<b>Bridgnorth Community Bus</b>	£12,000	£5,425	<b>£17,425</b>
<b>Broseley &amp; Much Wenlock Friendly Bus</b>	£10,080	£9,000	<b>£19,080</b>
<b>Church Stretton Area Ring-&amp;-Ride</b>	£37,524	£20,400	<b>£57,924</b>
<b>Corvedale Buzzard</b>	£6,891	£2,000	<b>£8,891</b>
<b>Mamble &amp; Bayton Community Bus</b>	£250	£0.00	<b>£250</b>
<b>North Salop Wheelers</b>	£5,500	£4,000	<b>£9,500</b>
<b>Oswestry Dial-a-Ride</b>	£35,300	£6,000	<b>£41,300</b>
<b>Shrewsbury Dial-a-Ride</b>	£53,199	£54,400	<b>£107,599</b>
<b>Shropshire Link Replacement Budget "zero hour contract"</b>	£70,000	£70,000	<b>£70,000</b>
<b>CT Consortium</b>	£20,000	£0.00	<b>£20,000</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>£269,394</b>	<b>£177,825</b>	<b>£377,219</b>

As not-for-profit organisations, Shropshire's CT groups' annual expenditure is structured to match their annual income, and fares are set to ensure sufficient revenue for the service to continue operating whilst remaining affordable for passengers. In addition to fares, the CT groups receive income from other

sources. All groups receive an annual grant from Shropshire Council. The groups in Shropshire vary in size considerably and subsequently so do their turnovers, but their financial structures are broadly similar. Their total yearly income can be broadly split;

25% Shropshire Council grant

25% contracts (less or nil for the smaller CT groups)

25% fund-raising, Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG) , donations, bequests and sponsorship

25% fares and concessionary fares compensation

### **National**

During financial years 2011 / 2012 and 2012 / 2013 Shropshire Council received payments of £189,000 each year from the Department for Transport (DfT) to assist in securing and developing community transport in the County.

Projects have included vehicle replacement, Eco driver training and the purchase of an online booking management system for two operators, funding support towards the setup of an incorporated Community Transport Consortium and volunteer driver training events.

Community Transport continues to be on the national agenda and in 15/16 the Department for Transport are making further grants available to CT groups for vehicle purchases.

### **Local Transport Plan 4 (LTP4) – Revised Bus Strategy 2015/16 onward.**

Community Transport will continue to provide a key role within local communities going forward. Their role as non-statutory, locally managed and independent providers will be fully acknowledged within a revised Bus Strategy (a mandatory document supporting the wider ambitions of the LTP4 currently in preparation) due April 2016.

Much of the transport provided by the sector in many ways facilitates the delivery of key statutory services by Shropshire Council and other key local providers. These range from access to day-care and support services to non-essential medical and doctors' appointments.

A key challenge remains the recognition within many service providers of the true cross sector benefit of this Shropshire Council funded activity, and Shropshire Community Transport Consortium continues to explore options to allocate transport services directly to the commissioning body.

A number of local CT groups are already established on the Councils Framework of Operators and are operating under commissioned contracts

directly. Grant dependency could be reduced as CT groups enter into further contractual agreements with the council and other agencies.

Given the local volunteer involvement and the economies within their locally managed operations, it is acknowledged that Shropshire Council would not be able to replicate the current level of activity within the sector itself in a financially sustainable way. Based on coverage and availability, the sector provides transport to its users under the current grant arrangements in the most affordable and effective way.

### **Shropshire Community Transport Consortium**

The SCTC does not provide transport services directly but it is a countywide organisation made up of ten CT groups. The groups provide their members with services for children and young people, the elderly, the disabled and people with specific mobility issues, plus people in rural areas who cannot access services due to a lack of, or inability to use, PT (the SCTC's member groups are highlighted in figure 1).

### **Next 5 Years**

To further understand how the CT sector can develop, it is recommended that we engage directly with the Manager of the Community Transport Consortium.

### ***Conclusions***

Community Transport schemes in Shropshire provide an essential service to those people for whom public transport is not suitable or is unavailable. These services are only available to members of the scheme, this being based on eligibility.

Less than 50% of the CT sectors annual base funding is provided by Shropshire Council and the sector are also reimbursed for revenue foregone for accepting concessionary travel passes. The rest of their income is generated through fare income and contracts with other bodies including the PCT.

The CT sector have the ability to raise additional funding by providing contracted services for Shropshire Council or any other agencies with any surplus being used to offset the costs of their voluntary operations. The CT sector, through the Consortium, are looking to better position themselves to potentially provide these services, within the limits of their resources, legislation and local capacity. Shropshire Council continues to support them in doing this.

**List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)**

**Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) – Simon Jones**

**Local Member – All members**

**Appendices - None**