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<u>Item</u>
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Rural Transport Strategy – Review

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Summary

The aim of the Rural Transport Strategy is to improve accessibility for people in rural areas, providing better transport to help people reach essential local services and facilities.

The Strategy was launched on 29 November 2008 and involved more frequent inter-urban bus services, a move to demand responsive transport services in rural areas (ShropshireLink), better integration between these two types of service, and provide a more sustainable footing for community transport operations.

This report sets out the findings of a review that started after 6 months of operation. It proposes a number of improvements based on the findings of the review and sets out a detailed marketing and promotion strategy for increasing patronage and registered users.

Current patronage and registered user figures are used as a baseline and targets are proposed to enable the success and effectiveness of the service to be measured.

Recommendation.

That Scrutiny Committee approves the recommended service changes set out in the report and endorses the marketing and promotion strategy.

REPORT

Background

1. The Rural Transport Strategy is a product of a detailed review of rural transport services. The outlined strategy was approved in principle by Cabinet on 7 February 2006, and formed part of the wider Accessibility Strategy in the Local Transport Plan for Shropshire, published in March 2006.
2. A full description of the Rural Transport Strategy is given in the report to Cabinet dated 7 February 2006.
3. There are 3 key elements to the Rural Transport Strategy:
 - Improvements to core bus inter-urban frequencies
 - Implementation of demand responsive transport services in rural areas, ShropshireLink.
 - Address the funding difficulties for community transport operators.
4. This report focuses on ShropshireLink. This was the key element of the strategy and involved a significant change in travel behaviour across the county. A summary of other changes as part of the three elements of the Rural Transport Strategy is set out in Appendix 1 for information.
5. ShropshireLink was launched on 29 November and has been in operation for a period of 11 months. As part of its responsibility to continually monitor the service Shropshire Council undertook a review of the service after six months.
6. This review process involved significant engagement with stakeholders, both users and non-users, to establish whether the service meets its aims. Staff at the councils Customer Service Centre and Transport Operations Group were also involved in the study and provided feedback on key elements of the service.

ShropshireLink

7. The ShropshireLink bus service is the key element of Shropshire Councils Rural Transport Strategy (RTS). ShropshireLink is a flexible, demand responsive local bus service that is available on a pre-booked basis to all rural residents in the County. Following a competitive external tendering process, an absence of acceptable tenders led to the service being operated under a Service Level Agreement (SLA) by the Councils Transport Operations Group (TOG).

8. The booking and coordination line, managed through the councils Customer Service Centre (CSC) allows for up to 7 days advance booking. A minimum of 24 hrs notice is currently required before travel although in reality bookings can be made up to the closure time of the CSC the day before travel.
9. ShropshireLink operates 6 days a week, Monday to Saturday with a minimum of two days a week in each area. The service operates on the basis of 9 zones as set out below. The service generally operates from 09:15 with different finishing times dependent upon schools transport needs and location.

Zone	Area
1	Including Pontesbury, Minsterley and Bishops Castle
2	Including Bishops Castle, Bucknell, Clun and Craven Arms
3	Including Ludlow, Cleobury Mortimer and Burford
4	Including Bridgnorth, Shifnal and Sherriffhales
5	Including Ludlow, Church Stretton, Bridgnorth and Much Wenlock
6	Including Shrewsbury Rural Area
7	Including Whitchurch, Ellesmere, Wem and Market Drayton
8	Including Market Drayton, Woore and Hinstock
9	Including Oswestry, Nesscliffe and Ellesmere

10. ShropshireLink services offer an enhancement and replacement to existing one day a week services. Users on these affected services are now offered travel on a minimum of 2 days each week of service, across a much wider spread of operating hours.
11. The ShropshireLink services can also, on demand, connect with the improved core service network, allowing travel further a field across the County between the main towns.
12. There is a flat rate fare of £1.25 (£2.50 return) in place for any Shropshire Link journey, although use of the service by those who are eligible for a concessionary bus pass is free. Those aged under 16 travel at half fare.

Activity since Launch – Customer Bookings and Registration

13. From December to the end of September the councils Customer Service Centre has received a total of 10,059 calls. 8,127 of these were answered successfully giving an average abandon rate of under 24%. The average call length is just over 3 minutes.

14. The table below gives a detailed break down of these figures:

Month	Received	Answered	Call Length	Abandon Rate	Answers Rate
December	441	375	3:37	15	85
January	974	782	3:27	19.7	80.3
February	1035	810	3:10	21.1	78.3
March	1293	887	3:10	31.3	68.7
April	1138	774	3:27	31.9	68
May	929	732	2:54	21.2	78.8
June	1001	894	2:47	10.7	89.3
July	1219	976	2:40	19.9	80.1
August	914	827	3:00	9.5	90.5
September	1115	1070	2:46	4	96
Total	10,059	8,127	-	-	-
Average	1005.9	812.7	3.06	18.5	81.5

15. It should be recognised that leading up to the implementation of Shropshire Council the Customer Service Centre took on responsibility for a wider number of new services which put a significant pressure upon the service. This significant increase in the number of calls received at the CSC coupled with the additional time required for staff to understand the requirements of these new service users led to an increased abandon rate.
16. Since the service began and through the review process there have been a number of complaints and comments from ShropshireLink users regarding the unavailability of advisors and the length of time required to hold before calls are answered.
17. Additional advisors have been recruited to help meet the demand on the service area and a greater number have been trained in making bookings on the ShropshireLink service. Similarly we wrote to all registered passengers informing them of the extended opening hours of the CSC and times when call volumes are at their lowest in an attempt to reduce abandonment. The CSC also utilize an overflow system where calls will divert to other advisers to take details for call back where no ShropshireLink advisor is available. These systems were put in place from July and since then figures have improved significantly with an answer rate of around 96%.
18. Since launch to the end of August 2009 there have been 1121 passenger registrations for the ShropshireLink service.
19. ShropshireLink as part of its flexible offer can give users a doorstep pick up and drop off. On application and on the basis of either a users disability or rurality, where an existing bus stop or muster point is not accessible or appropriate for the user, the service will get as close as practicable to the doorstep. To the date of this report, there have been 12 approvals of this service on grounds of disability.

20. ShropshireLink operates within an advised 20 minute pick up and drop off "window" when journeys are booked by the user with the booking service. On any of these outward journeys where a customer was not picked up at the agreed time, when necessary, a local taxi (at the expense of the service) has been dispatched in line with the agreed operating protocols.

Activity since Launch – Vehicle Operation and Passenger Usage

21. ShropshireLink is forecast to undertake a total of 58,700 trips in this current financial year. This is forecast to be made up of 23,364 passenger trips and 35,340 trips for primary aged school children under the education contract.
22. To the end of September 2009, there have been 16,711 passenger trips (single) on the ShropshireLink services and 10,829 trips undertaken in the current financial year.
23. Of these trips approximately 69% are made using a concessionary travel bus pass which clearly reflects the demographic using these services. There have been just 104 trips made by fare paying children.
24. A full breakdown of usage is given in Appendix 2.
25. The services in 7 of the 9 operating zones are linked with education contracts for primary age children entitled to free school transport. These services carry 35,340 trips per annum. Vehicles in zones 2 (Bishop's Castle – Clun – Craven Arms) and 5 (Bridgnorth – Much Wenlock) are not currently assigned to undertaking school transport. Officers are exploring opportunities for operations by ShropshireLink.
26. It should be noted that before assigning ShropshireLink to an education contract the service is tendered to ensure this is the best value option available to the Council. Using ShropshireLink on these 7 services has saved Shropshire Council in the region of £92,000 per annum.
27. There are instances where the ShropshireLink service connects in a more planned way with the core network. Until July 2009, the Zone 1 service connected with the 553 local bus service (Shrewsbury to Bishop's Castle) at Pontesbury for onward travel to Shrewsbury. This has now been amended to feed all onward journeys via the Oxon Park & Ride service due to continuing issues over running times on the fixed route service as well as overcrowding issues, particularly during school holiday periods.
28. Zone 6 also connects at the 3 Shrewsbury Park & Ride sites for those rural areas immediately surrounding Shrewsbury for onward travel into the town. Hundreds of these connections have been booked and

successfully managed to date. On the very few occasions that there was late running from a commercial core route and therefore a missed connection, the ShropshireLink vehicle has continued on to Shrewsbury with all on board in line with agreed protocols, avoiding any inconvenience for the users.

29. The Shrewsbury Park & Ride service is subsidised by Shropshire Council with any fare revenues being retained. It is therefore possible, on this service, to allow through ticketing and enable ShropshireLink users to undertake the full journey without having to pay an additional fare.
30. Comparing average monthly ShropshireLink activity with the against usage reported on the outgoing subsidised fixed route rural services ShropshireLink averages 1671 trips monthly as compared with 1005 passenger trips (single) previously. **This is an increase of 66% in rural bus journeys.**

Vehicles

31. The nine ShropshireLink zones are operated using a fleet of 11 easily accessible low floor vehicles. 10 new vehicles were purchased for the launch of the service with an additional vehicle of the same specification coming from the 49-Link community transport service in Craven Arms which acted as a very successful trial for ShropshireLink. The Transport Operations Groups also have access to an 8 Seat Renault minibus with a rear tail lift to accommodate wheelchairs. This vehicle is used as an emergency spare.
32. The vehicles are based on the Volkswagen Crafter CR50 long wheelbase with a 136 PS, 2.5-litre turbo diesel engine which conforms to the Euro 4 emission standard. After a full European tender process the vehicles were supplied by CVI (Commercial Vehicle Innovation part of the Volkswagen Van Centre, Edinburgh) and converted by VDL Kusters who extended the wheelbase and lowered the floor to provide flexible seating for up to 16 passengers, plus a ramped entrance and space for up to three wheelchair users.
33. Total fleet mileage (km) is shown in the table below. This monthly average of c. 11,500 km per month is broadly in line with expectations at launch.

Month	Distance (km)
December 2008	10,433
January 2009	9,435
February 2009	10,251
March 2009	13,107
April 2009	11,187
May 2009	11,004
June 2009	11,790*
July 2009	13,627

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* faulty tachometer reading – 2350 deduction adjustment

34. The vehicles procured by the Council for the operation of ShropshireLink have performed extremely well in service. Small issues over the design of an original door system had led to grounding issues at its base on higher kerbs. Feedback to the manufacturer has now led to a redesign of the component, now retrofitted to all vehicles. This situation aside, vehicles have been popular with drivers, fit for purpose and extremely well received by passengers.

Activity since Launch – Publicity and Press Coverage

35. Pre and post launch there has been an ongoing process of publicity and press/radio coverage. On balance, this has been very positive. Although there have been a small number of high profile "hotspots" where there has been a prolonged process of discourse and where adaptation has taken time. Some examples of the specific cases are described in the following paragraphs.
36. Concerns were expressed by users of a former one day a week service from the Welsh border direct to Shrewsbury via Pontesbury. In view of the services available locally in Pontesbury itself, and the stated policy aim of "access to essential services in the closest market town on a minimum of two days per week", the initial set up aimed to give *direct* access twice a week to Bishop's Castle and Pontesbury. This was a change to the previous one day a week service which then travelled on direct to Shrewsbury. Where users of the ShropshireLink wished to connect for onward travel to the County town, this was set up at nominated interchange times within the booking system. Initial reaction to these proposed times were that there was not time at the Shrewsbury end of the journey before people were required to return. Following a number of meetings with users and local spokespeople, the booking system has now been amended to give more journey options that can give up to 4 ½ hours in Shrewsbury on request. To facilitate this the service now provides connections at Oxon P&R rather than Pontesbury
37. Users within the Burwarton/Ditton Priors area, following the replacement of a previous subsidised route with ShropshireLink, were dissatisfied with the local allocation of the area of the service and also the restrictive times of travel being offered. (It should be noted that these residents still had a 6 day a week service to Ludlow and Bridgnorth.) Following a request from the local Parish, officers from the Transport Policy team attended an evening meeting where discussions were held over local suggestions for improvements. Within 24 hrs of this meeting, arrangements had been made within the booking software to allow Burwarton residents direct access to their preferred destination of Bridgnorth (this had previously involved a change of bus). Within the operational confines of the system, Officers are also now looking at the way in which journey times are allocated in this

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area, in order to give users the wider choice of both in and outbound trip times that they also requested at the meeting.

- 38. From launch, the need to give equal access to the service had led to the requirement for a reasonably rigid journey framework in the area to the east and north east of Market Drayton. Following the first month of service, and in the light of emerging patterns of demand, the booking software has been "relaxed" slightly, again based on local requests and feedback, in order to give a wider choice of journey times. This process has also been undertaken in other areas where assumptions on demand and patterns of travel have been found to be inaccurate, leading to unnecessary booking refusals based on preset availabilities of the vehicle.
- 39. It should be noted that the ability of ShropshireLink to adapt quickly to users demands and feedback is one of the huge benefits of a demand responsive network. Caution is always needed when making changes however, in order to balance any resulting service restrictions on potential users elsewhere. All requests for service changes continue to be managed with this in mind.

Shropshire Link Stakeholder Feedback

Users – On Bus Survey

- 40. In order to gauge opinion on the present service and to asses in the eyes of the user where perhaps the service may be developed further, on board feedback forms have been available for completion since launch and returned via the driver or through a freepost address.
- 41. The full results are available on request and a brief summary is given in the table below.

respondents aged 60 yrs+	88%
respondents female	85%
travel purpose including "shopping"	83%
travel purpose including "appointments"	37%
found leaflet "very easy" to understand	75%
"excellent" or "good" on booking experience	69%
"very satisfied" with vehicle	88%
preferred time of travel available at booking	73%
booking completed in a single call	71%
ShropshireLink bus arrived on time	76%
"excellent" or "good" on ShropshireLink experience overall	73%

- 42. Common areas where the service has received praise from users include:
 - Driver service and customer care *"The drivers are very good, pleasant and polite and will help you all they can. The call centre is very helpful too. As is stands its working well for us!!! Thank you!!!"*

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- Vehicle specification “The buses are clean, tidy, and warm in Winter”
 - The overall booking experience and the CSC staff
 - The format and presentation of information in the ShropshireLink leaflet.
43. Common suggestions for areas where the service could be further developed:
- Increases in the size of zones/the market towns that can be accessed without an onward connection
 - Extensions to the operating day, particularly into the evenings
 - Changes to the bookings process allowing “block” and forward bookings

Users – Booking Line Telephone Survey Summary

44. In addition to the above user feedback process ShropshireLink advisors at the Customer Service Centre also undertook telephone surveys with users at the time of booking. Full results of this survey are available on request with a brief summary given in the tables below:

Question 1	Age		
Category	60	41-59	26-40
Response	46 (81%)	9 (16%)	2 (3%)

Question 2	Journey purpose					
Category	Work	Leisure	Shopping	Appointment	Visiting	Onward Connection
Response	4 (7%)	3 (5%)	46 (74%)	6 (10%)	1 (2%)	1 (2%)

Question 3	How easy was the leaflet to understand (1=hard, 5=easy)				
Category	1	2	3	4	5
Response	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	2 (4%)	6 (12%)	41 (84%)

Question 4	How satisfied are you with the vehicle (1=hard, 5=easy)				
Category	1	2	3	4	5
Response	0 (0%)	1 (2%)	0 (0%)	3 (5%)	53 (93%)

Question 5	Overall satisfaction with ShropshireLink (1=dissatisfied, 5=satisfied)				
Category	1	2	3	4	5
Response	0 (0%)	0 (0%)	6 (11%)	7 (13%)	42 (76%)

Stakeholder Focus Groups

45. A series of focus groups were commissioned through an independent external consultant, Community Based Transport Ltd (CBT), in order to gauge feedback and suggestions from the following interest groups.
- Shropshire Association of Senior Citizens Forums
 - Shropshire Association of Local Councillors (SALC)

- Community Transport organisations
 - Age Concern
 - Youth Forum
46. The focus groups included a balance of users and non users and the following areas of discussion were proposed for each group;
- Awareness of the ShropshireLink Service
 - Who uses the service, when, for what purpose, how convenient is the service?
 - The degree of passenger satisfaction with the service in the context of reliability, destination satisfaction, social convenience etc.
 - The Booking Centre Operation and Procedure
 - The effectiveness of the advertising and the promotion of the service, including the degree of awareness of these
 - The web site
 - Recommendations for improvements
47. As shown in the quantitative research, satisfaction amongst users was very high. Amongst non users there was a perception that the slightest obstacle or difficulty in potential use meant the overall service was dismissed as inadequate.
48. Amongst all groups, users showed a high level of satisfaction with Shropshire Council perceived to have tried to provide the best facilities. The vehicles were universally praised and were seen to offer a high level of comfort and allowed easy access for pushchairs and wheelchairs. The drivers were also highly praised and were deemed as being highly trained, polite and fully conversant with customer needs.
49. Areas of concern were shown around bus stops and the lack of shelter at some locations. There also seemed to be some confusion around the hours of operation and the availability of the contact centre.
50. Travelling in groups or the ability to meet friends on the bus was thought to be difficult or impossible. As shown on other services there is a social function from the operation of a bus service in checking on passenger well-being if a regular passenger was not on the bus.
51. Along with the advertising and promotion of the ShropshireLink the Booking Centre – its operation and management were criticised by the respondents. However it should be considered that since undertaking these focus groups a number of improvements, including additional resources, have been made to improve availability of advisors and to reduce delays. As described above in September 96% of calls were answered and the average call length was 2 min 46 seconds.

52. There was a level of dissatisfaction with the 24-hour, seven day limit on the booking of journeys with passengers wanting the ability to block book journeys for an extended period of time. There were also requests to allow journey bookings on the days people wished to travel.
53. The awareness of ShropshireLink varied amongst the individuals taking part from a precise and detailed knowledge to a complete lack of understanding of the system. Advertising and promotion of the service came under severe criticism. The leaflets and information that were available also came under criticism for being complicated and confusing.
54. This demonstrates the requirement for a comprehensive marketing strategy for the service and the production of simple marketing and promotional material.
55. A number of recommendations were made both from the groups and from officers at CBT. These included:
- Improvement and development of marketing and promotion of the service.
 - Generate awareness amongst interest groups, day centres, youth centres etc.
 - Use the education system for disseminating information
 - Use all media sources to maximise promotion
 - Improvements to the Booking Centre and a re-assessment of the Booking Centre procedure.
 - Development of internet & SMS booking facility
 - Access to Real Time Information
56. A full copy of this report is available on request.

Shropshire Council – Local Joint Committee Consultation

57. As part of the consultation process and to publicise the availability of Shropshire Link officers have undertaken presentations at a number of the Local Joint Committee meetings. Comments were invited from attendees and officers received a number of comments. It is uncertain whether respondents were from regular users or whether the comments are based on perceptions of the service.
58. In the Market Drayton and Whitchurch area it was commented that the days of operation in zones 7 & 8 do not match the market days in the towns. It was requested that the service be altered to reflect this. Also in Whitchurch residents of Calverhall and Ighitfield asked for consideration to be given to a fixed bus route to serve these areas on Friday to coincide with the Whitchurch Market Days. It is felt that altering the days of operation of zones 7 & 8 will address this issue.

59. Residents in Wem have continued to ask for a service to replace the outgoing 345 service to enable residents to travel to Market Drayton on Wednesdays.
60. The Clun area is in the same zone of operation as Craven Arms which previously had the widely used 49-Link. Passenger in this area are conversant in using Dial a Ride services and therefore patronage is very high. A number of comments were received in this area that journeys were not always available at the requested times, where this is the case passengers are always offered alternative journeys.
61. Also in Clun it was also asked if consideration could be given to extending the service to enable people to access services in Newtown, Powys, which is regarded by some people in this area as their nearest market town.
62. More generic comments were made over the complexity of the booking system and the inability to block book journeys for a number of weeks in advance of travel as was previously possible on the 49-Link Dial a Ride service. Similarly it was thought that the requirement to give 24hrs notice of travel was discouraging passengers, particularly the elderly, who may not be feeling well enough to travel at the requested time.
63. It requested that consideration be given to the wider availability of ShropshireLink during school holiday periods when they are not engaged in undertaking school contract work.
64. As part of the on-going process to promote and monitor satisfaction with the ShropshireLink service officers will continue to visit and work with the rural LJs. This is also an action within the marketing and promotion strategy included in Appendix 3.
65. Since the launch of ShropshireLink officers have continued to monitor the service to ensure it meets with the requirements of the travelling public. One of the advantages of flexible bus services is the ability to alter services when requested without necessarily having to give the statutory 56 days notice to the traffic commissioner.
66. Where this has been possible, and it is deemed to be in the best interest of the service, and there are no budgetary impacts officers have made changes at various stages prior to this formal review process. A number of these changes have been described in this report.

Drivers Focus Group Response Summary

67. A focus group was held with half of the drivers, as work schedules allowed. From the meeting, the following points emerged.

68. Concern was shown over bookings not being co-ordinated to provide the most efficient means of collecting passengers or grouping them together to limit mileage and trips and maximise capacity on the network
69. It was suggested that the operating areas could be 'opened up' and made completely flexible by removing some of the timetabled connections in the network. It was felt this would enable a greater number of journeys to be accommodated on the system. A number of specific examples were given where this would be possible.
70. Road speeds in the journey planning and booking software need to be altered to be more realistic for a rural environment. It was felt this would give greater confidence to the passengers and allow the bookings to be more accurate.
71. Comments were also made about the lack of promotion and publicity of the service.
72. The vehicles received universal praise and were seen as being fit for purpose. However some difficulties were being experienced in getting wheelchairs on to the vehicle when using the ramp. This was particularly so for heavier passengers where drivers have difficulty getting them up the ramp and over the lip used to accommodate the ramp. It was not felt that the vehicles would be able to carry the manufacturers advertised three wheelchairs due to a lack of space in the vehicle.

Customer Service Centre Booking Staff Focus Group Response Summary

73. All bookings for the service are managed via specially trained Customer Services Centre staff. In combination with dealing with general enquiries, there is trained staff available at all times of the opening pattern that are able to deal specifically with ShropshireLink bookings and enquiries. Handling bookings via a number of software licenses that allow up to 15 simultaneous bookings to be entered at any one time, the bookings are then managed by the Mobisoft software system in order to optimise journey times and patterns, within the limits of movement that are predefined by the 9 operating zones.
74. A number of staff involved in the handling of ShropshireLink bookings took part in a Focus Group following the first 6 months of the service in order to give feedback on both the bookings process and its role in the wider service.
75. Those areas that were deemed to have been working well include:

- The initial passenger registration process
- The management of individual bookings and cancellations via the software.

76. Those areas where there was scope for improvement and efficiencies within the system included:

- Some of the data entry systems seemed “clumsy”, although those operating the system were now very proficient and could work through these issues.
- From launch, a failsafe system of “backing up” the system through printed daily sheets was felt necessary. Despite isolated issues with access to data via the dedicated website, there should be discussions now as to whether the system is robust enough to remove the need for these.
- Late bookings, although managed under a policy that states “24 hrs at the latest before travel” have been managed through direct contact with the operator, rather than the on bus display units. Again due to concerns that passenger requests may be missed in such instances, the late bookings policy as a whole should be looked at in the light of the now more proven abilities of the software and hardware.
- The 20 minute “window” that is given in advice to passengers on pick up times has caused concern and some confusion/dissatisfaction with some passengers. A request to reduce this to a 10 minute period, based on the experience of the first 6 months has been requested. Trials of this in limited areas of the County at present are showing that this may be possible without undue compromise in the numbers of passengers carried overall.
- Where the system in certain areas has been set up based on an assumption of the pattern of passengers journeys, there have been instances where these have actually been an obstacle to use as opposed to managing passengers into a pattern. Again, with 6 months of operational experience now, there is a request to remove these unless operationally necessary
- Although rare, the need to use the booking system to manage passengers and vehicles is paramount. Where there are local deviations or arrangements made, almost always in the spirit of improving the service for the passenger on the day, these must not be allowed to compromise the service in terms of the accuracy of the Mobisoft information used as a reference by booking staff.

Future options for change and associated implications

Areas of Operation (Zones and Sub-zones)

77. From the feedback received in the review a number of options for change and areas of work to help develop the ShropshireLink service have been identified. These are summarised below along with issues that such changes could raise and a recommendation on whether the option is pursued.
78. **Option (a)** - The overlap operation of zone 7 and 8 looking to replicate the outgoing 345 service has led to the allocation of service days that don't necessarily match the market days in Whitchurch and Market Drayton that users aim to visit.
79. **Proposal** – by redrawing some of the operational areas within both zones and re-allocating days of service to them, ShropshireLink would then be able to offer a service across this area over 4 days whilst incorporating trips to Market Drayton and Whitchurch on market days (Tuesdays and Fridays respectively)
80. **Issues** – Despite the need to re-register some of the operating areas, this would be achievable within the current cost of operation and would act as a large incentive to continued growth in numbers of users in this area. This will also address feedback received through the focus groups and from the local joint committees. **Recommended.**
81. **Option (b)** – request for direct transport via ShropshireLink to town shopping facilities in Shrewsbury. Although this journey is already available to those willing to transfer to the existing service 70, a request for a direct service has arisen in Zone 9 (Oswestry).
82. **Proposal** – To operate ShropshireLink out of zone direct to Shrewsbury.
83. **Issues** –Issues would arise with the extension of the zone affecting the timing of journeys and conflicts in the availability of the service to those wishing to continue to use ShropshireLink to access Oswestry. More seriously, the approach to Shrewsbury itself could be seen as direct and subsidised illegal competition from the existing service 70. **Not Recommended.**
84. **Option (c)** – Merge the 5 day a week sub zones within Zone 3 and 4 back into the zones to give wider availability of service to residents. In what are very sparsely populated areas, feedback suggests that the current sub zone structure is in itself limiting availability. Although designed to fairly allocate the service to rural areas, many of the unmet requests are currently a result of a clash with another sub zone that may in itself have no demand at the requested time.
85. **Proposal** - A re draw of the areas, plus the removal of all of the “ghost” timing structures underlying the booking software will give potential users unfettered access to ShropshireLink. Much of the structures imposed on this are at the launch was to allow a continuation on request of 5 day a week travel to Bridgnorth via Ditton Priors. Demand for this route is low and the compromises elsewhere in availability are affecting take-up for those wishing to travel to Ludlow.

86. **Issues** – This can be achieved within the current costings. Re-registration may be necessary based on the re drawing of the operational areas, and there would be less availability conceivably for the few passengers looking to travel between Ludlow and Bridgnorth. It is worth noting on this issue however that this inter town service is very much a secondary activity for the ShropshireLink, access for rural residents to Ludlow being the primary purpose of Zone 3. **Not Recommended.**
87. **Option (d)** –To increase availability to users within zone 1 by re drawing operating areas.
88. **Proposal** - Remove the current central sub zone in zone 1. Due to existing high frequency through routes and a low level of rural residents off these routes, take up within this sub zone has been low. Use within other areas of this zone is strong and could benefit further from increased availability of the service.
89. **Issues** – Available within current operational costings, amendments to registration of service may be necessary. **Recommended.**
90. **Option (e)** – Feed back from users, particularly to the East of Shrewsbury in zone 6 who look to Telford and Wellington for their services has led to requests for more and direct connections to Telford. This journey request is currently managed via a connection made with through services at Madeley.
91. **Proposal** – That ShropshireLink be allowed to provide direct connections with Telford for users within zone 6
92. **Issues** – The opportunity cost for user within Zone 6 looking to access Shrewsbury would be considerable, plus the issue of directly and illegally competing with a number of commercial services in the area would also arise. **Not Recommended.**
93. **Option (f)** – To form a reciprocal service level agreement with Cheshire CC in order to work cross border in a more structured way offering services for Cheshire residents in to Whitchurch, and services for Shropshire residents into the Malpas area
94. **Proposal** – To explore options jointly with Cheshire, with the potential for joint use of a new vehicle to manage demand without compromising the current ShropshireLink operation in zone 7.
95. **Issues** – Although preparatory meetings between Officers have taken place, there must be a decision ultimately based on the cost – benefit to the ShropshireLink network. **Work in progress.**

Service Times

96. **Option (a)** – Comments from both the operator and passengers suggests that the mapping and road information on which the software plans routes and times at present is incorrect in the context of local Shropshire road conditions. This is being increasingly demonstrated by late running of vehicles against suggested route plans, unachievable

- targets for drivers and pick up and journey times that are confusing or frustrating for current users.
97. **Proposal** – There is the ability within the editable areas of the software to amend the road speed classes to values which more accurately reflect Shropshire conditions. This should be undertaken for each of the 9 operating Zones in order to get a more robust booking system
98. **Issues** – Until the revised speeds are tested against actual and current demand, there is the potential to reduce the number of passengers that can be accommodated. Once the new speeds have been tested however, a much more accurate booking and operational back up will be provided by the Mobisoft system. This work is now underway and is being tested in zones 2 and 8. **Recommended.**
99. **Option (b)** – To remove the school services from the ShropshireLink operational day in the 6 zones involved, so allowing more time for the service in zone, plus the ability to meet part time travel to work requests
100. **Proposal** – Remove the term time service transporting entitled children from ShropshireLink and offer the time gained to rural users of the service on demand.
101. **Issues** – The costing model for the ShropshireLink as a whole is based on this dual activity. Vehicle specification was similarly influenced by the need for a dual purpose vehicle. Driver recruitment and training has also been based on this dual role. The cost of the ShropshireLink service would rise beyond affordable levels. **Not Recommended.**
102. **Option (c)** – The removal of school holiday restrictions to allow passenger use by opening up the ShropshireLink service during those times usually allocated to the school service for entitled children.
103. **Proposal** – As trialled in a limited manner during the Christmas period, this will put the ShropshireLink into service and available to passengers for an uninterrupted whole day during school holiday periods. Demand has been found in some areas to date and a low key trial of this has proved worthwhile in maximising use of the vehicles and the drivers. To date this has been backed up by a manual re-definition of the service within the booking software. This is a matter being dealt with by the software suppliers at present.
104. **Issues** – this will increase the service take up across the network and do so with no increase in costs. The update to the booking software due soon is available to the Council at no cost and will allow all school holiday periods to be managed as complete ShropshireLink days with ease. This work is now **complete** and will be available for the Christmas holidays.
105. **Option (d)** – ShropshireLink vehicle to offer longer operating day.
106. **Proposal** –The ShropshireLink vehicles return to service after school run in all zones so providing early evening coverage.
107. **Issues** – The current network is staffed and operated to maximise efficiencies within the fleet and staffing. Although there may be

demand for such extensions to the operating day at present, the fact that this is a variation to the original operational specification will mean an appreciable increase in costs across the vehicle fleet and staffing requirements. **Not Recommended.**

108. **Option (e)** – To offer a service into Shrewsbury from all zones at the end of the operational day as the vehicles return to the Longden Road, Shrewsbury depot overnight
109. **Proposal** – To run the ShropshireLink vehicles on their evening positioning journeys “in service”. This would then give the potential for one way transport at least into Shrewsbury from rural areas. There is an acceptance at present that such trips are reliant on the use of a taxi in both directions. In running such trips, a promotional tie in push for Shrewsbury events and shows could also be coordinated.
110. **Issues** – There would be no direct impact on the driving rotas or requirements as the drivers hours are already managed to give these journeys as part of the working day. There may be cost benefits from this in that there would be extra fare income for currently “dead mileage” that is operationally necessary. There would be need to register these portions of the operating day. **Recommended.**

Booking Line and Process

111. **Option (a)** – The easing or complete removal of the registration process at the time at which a user uses the service for the first time.
112. **Proposal** – To remove the process of giving home and personal contact information as part of the initial set up on the ShropshireLink for new passengers.
113. **Issues** – The registration of the service requires auditable records to show times of journey, pick ups and drop offs. The records of users adds an important second level check on the network should there be a need to demonstrate that it is compliant with its registered activity. The ability to contact users in times of emergency/short notice service interruptions gives the service a unique advantage over a “standard” bus service. The ability to keep users informed of developments can mitigate against user dissatisfaction in such situations. The database of users also gives a valuable marketing opportunity as the service continues to evolve. ShropshireLink offers a door-to-door pick up service where people meet eligibility criteria. Without home address details this service could not be offered. **Not Recommended.**
114. **Option (b)** – To offer users the chance to forward book multiple trips/block book trips forward on a regular repeat basis.
115. **Proposal** – To remove the need for passengers to book every trip that they take on the ShropshireLink within the current “7 days before the day before” guidelines.
116. **Issues** – In offering a flexible, on demand service, the nature of passengers use is expected to be to a degree ad hoc and changeable. In restricting the ability of people to establish early on a very rigid

forward booking pattern, the service aims to offer new users the chance to get travel at or close to a desired time, rather than having to fit round existing users continually, or worse, find that capacity is such that they are rarely able to travel at all. The limiting of service development to new users should this option be taken up could have a very detrimental effect in the medium and longer terms. **Not Recommended.**

117. **Option (c)** – To create a stand alone dedicated booking team for ShropshireLink
118. **Proposal** – In order to answer some comments about both the unavailability of trained booking staff at times, there would be a stand alone team dealing with bookings.
119. **Issues** – The current integration of the booking line staff with the larger pool of CSC advisers gives beneficial crossovers between transport provision and other associated services (concessionary fares, support services etc). The peaks in demand for bookings and the associated quieter periods are also far more effectively covered with either management of overflow calls, or redeployment of the multi skilled staff into more general call handling. Based on the integrated approach at present, the cost of the booking line provision is accommodated within current directorate costings. To create a stand alone booking team would create a huge increase in the cost of the ShropshireLink overall, plus lose the current flexibility of staff in managing high and low level of activity. **Not Recommended.**
120. **Option (d)** – To modify the booking service and procedures to accommodate same day and last minute bookings
121. **Proposal** – To develop further the abilities of the booking software and operations in order to allow same day bookings, potentially up to 2 hours before travel.
122. **Issues** – The current day before cut off was a measure put in to prevent the service at launch becoming too pressured. The software has a proven ability to work much closer to the time of travel, but given the reliance on mobile phone coverage in communicating this to the vehicles, there was understandable reluctance to run with this at launch. The current trip times and patterns of use may become unduly compromised by this and overall loadings may suffer as a result. There are still operational concerns as well as to the impact of such a development on the integration of legal requirements such as driver breaks etc. Was this development to require more staff and/or vehicles, there would then be a direct cost implication. **Not Recommended.**
123. **Option (e)** – To widen access to the service by accepting online and text bookings
124. **Proposal** – To develop online and text bookings and registrations. Based on feedback, particularly from the user focus groups, there is

some demand for these alternative booking methods especially when trying to reach younger people.

125. **Issues** – Managing the incoming bookings would require extra systems and the creation of the web based bookings system. The forward marketing plan includes options for the development of these facilities. It is hoped to have a web based booking system in place by the end of November. **Recommended.**

Other Recommended areas for development

126. Although the current service specification and definitions within the booking software were defined based on research, consultation and patterns of travel based on outgoing fixed route services, there was an acknowledgement that these would need to be revisited at the point of this review. Based on the feedback shown in this report however, it would seem that many of the areas, days of operation and the times of travel available to users were correct from launch.
127. The adoption of a forward marketing strategy has emerged as a priority and detail changes to zones are also to be undertaken.

Finance

128. ShropshireLink is operated on a Minimum Cost basis meaning that the operator is paid a flat cost for operating the service with any fare revenue / concessionary fares reimbursement retained by Shropshire Council.
129. As described earlier in this report to get best use of the available resources the ShropshireLink service also operates education contracts in 7 of the 9 zones. It is estimated that this has created a saving of around £92,000 per annum for the Council. The cost of providing these education contracts is paid for by Children and Young Persons services and is offset against the total cost of providing the contract. The table below gives a detailed breakdown of the forecast cost for the financial year from April 2009 to March 2010.

Zone	Contract Cost (Gross)	Fares Reimbursement (Forecast)	Education Contract Reimbursement	Net Forecast (2009 / 2010)
1	£78,538.16	£1,760.49	£10,434.80	£66,342.87
2	£92,133.56	£4,356.04	£0	£87,777.52
3	£90,369.54	£1,729.35	£6,788.70	£81,851.49
4	£80,876.08	£2,377.60	£6,294.70	£72,203.78
5	£75,337.20	£1,481.54	£0	£73,855.66
6	£70,131.18	£648.00	£10,146.00	£59,337.18
7	£78,515.64	£1,025.94	£10,311.30	£67,178.40
8	£81,270.50	£1,825.93	£10,064.30	£69,380.27

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9	£56,632.30	£1,031.28	£9,982.60	£45,618.42
Total	£703,804.16	£16,236.17	£64,022.40	£623,545.59

130. The total forecast cost of the service in the current financial year is estimated to be in the region of £623,500. This is a forecast cost of £10.61 per passenger trip during the current financial year although it should be considered that actual passenger trips are above those forecast.
131. The cost of providing this service will decrease as more passengers continue to use the service. A further reduction for the passenger transport budget and a cost saving overall could also be gained with the operation of school contracts in zones 2 and 5.
132. Consideration could also be given to raising the fares on this service to generate extra revenue although this would have an implication on the concessionary fares budget and minimal overall increase in Council income as 69% of passenger trips are made using a concessionary fare pass.

Accessibility Targets

133. One of the key aims of the Rural Transport Strategy was to improve accessibility in-line with the Council's obligations to meet accessibility targets. The table below shows the accessibility results for the Shropshire Bus Network including the improvements implemented as part of the Rural Transport Strategy;

Indicator Definition		2007 / 2008 prior to implementation of the Rural Transport Strategy	2008 / 2009 following launch of the Rural Transport Strategy
% of people of working age 16-74 who are able to access key employment destinations within 45 minutes by a public transport service that operates at least hourly on 6 days a week.	Actual	68	72
	Target	68	70
% of all people of working age 16-74 in receipt of job seekers allowance who are able to access a key employment destination within 45 minutes by a public transport service that operates hourly on 6 days per week	Actual	73	77
	Target	73	75
Access to services and facilities by public transport, walking and cycling - % of rural households who are able to access a town centre by public transport or demand responsive transport services, that is available on at least two days each week.	Actual	57	97
	Target	57	69

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Access to services and facilities by public transport, walking and cycling - % of rural households without access to a car who are able to access a town centre by public transport or demand responsive transport services, that is available on at least 2 days per week	Actual	64	97
	Target	64	72

134. The results clearly show that the implementation of the Rural Transport Strategy has more than met the targets set.

Forward Marketing Strategy - ShropshireLink

135. Given the feedback during the review it is accepted that their needs to be a significant improvement in the marketing and promotion of the ShropshireLink service.

136. It is also accepted that the information available needs to be clearer, simpler, and brighter. The report from Community Based Transport (CBT) recommends a "Keep It Simple Stupid" approach to the marketing of the network.

137. One of the key aims to make ShropshireLink sustainable is to increase the number of registered users and the number of passenger trips undertaken. In order to do this a Marketing Strategy has been developed to promote the service generally and to develop targeted marketing at specific groups. The marketing Strategy is shown in Appendix 3.

138. The marketing strategy is intended to be a fluid document to grow with the scheme and The initial key actions from the strategy are as follows;

- County wide promotion of the service through a 'mailshot' signpost to ShropshireLink for all rural households.
- Development of a "Try it for Free" campaign for first time passengers.
- Shropshire magazine article promoting the "Try it For Free" campaign.
- Development of on-line registrations.
- Target marketing to school aged children for use during school holidays
- Automatic registration to ShropshireLink for concessionary travel bus pass applicants.
- Involvement with the Local Joint Committees (LJCs) to promote the service

139. Over the longer term it is proposed to engage with a professional designer to develop a family of promotional leaflets and products with

the aim of attracting more users to the service and generating patronage. Any publicity material will be 'tested' against various demographics to ensure it is easily understood and usable.

140. ShropshireLink is starting to gain national acclaim as an area of best practice for providing an all encompassing solution to rural transport. Whilst Demand Responsive Transport is not a new concept it is thought that no one has developed a County wide network. Officers at Shropshire Council have hosted visits from a number of other authorities and have been asked to speak at various conferences to people keen to learn from the Shropshire experience. This will be something to build upon in taking the service forward and show casing Shropshire as a progressive County.

Conclusions

141. From the information available from the first nine months of operation, the following conclusions can be drawn:
142. The decision to replace and enhance subsidised rural services previously provided by fixed route and once weekly services would seem to be vindicated, as the county wide rural passenger trip numbers now greatly exceed those from the previous services. The new services are available to nearly twice as many households.
143. The increase in usage from pre launch figures can be assumed to be a combination of previous users travelling into a market town more often than before at more convenient times, as well as new rural bus users using a service available for the first time. Anecdotally, and through the Customer Service Centre comments process, we have evidence and compliments being received from these new users.
144. The degree of familiarity and understanding of the service within the first 6 months that the team at the Customer Service Centre have shown has been no small part in the success of the service in the eyes of the users. Equal also to this has been the standard of service and customer care shown by the ShropshireLink driver team.
145. Where concerns were expressed by existing bus users perceiving the service to be an unacceptable change and downgrading from their service, there is now anecdotal evidence through the booking line, on bus user feedback and driver feedback that users have transferred on to the new service in the majority with a minimum of inconvenience.
146. Feedback from Community Transport (CT) operators across the county would suggest that there has been a small but noticeable increase in demand for their services since launch. Investigation has shown that much of this is simply due to a lack of understanding of the local availability of ShropshireLink, where it replaces a former fixed route

service. Efforts are now being made in association with these CT groups to mail shot directly those making these enquiries with the relevant ShropshireLink publicity.

147. ShropshireLink has generated a great deal of publicity, both as a result of our own press releases, and interest/stories generated by local users and communities. This has been spread across both radio and papers, and has been balanced and overall positive.
148. Predictably, there are a high percentage of concessionary pass users, although there are also already young users as well: On the very first day of service for example, a group of 6 under 16s from the Ludlow area booked the service to travel from their rural area on to Bridgnorth for the day to meet with friends.
149. Evidence from this report confirms that the adoption of a flexible Local Bus service has had enormous benefits for residents of rural areas. With the developments being carried through as recommended, there are opportunities to continue to develop passenger numbers in line with the 15% growth as anticipated in the initial proposal plans.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)
<p>Environmental Appraisal Transport measures, and traffic, can have significant effects on the environment. One of the LTP2 strategic aims is to 'protect and improve the... environment and reduce the impact of traffic on local communities'. This report demonstrates how in many instances the detrimental impact of speeding traffic on the environment can be dealt with through simple schemes with minimal signing and lining.</p>
<p>Risk Management Appraisal Risk assessments will be part of the development process for each speed limit scheme introduced through the Speed Management Strategy.</p>
<p>Community / Consultations Appraisal Consultation through the Local Transport Plan showed that dealing with speeding traffic was a key priority for the people of Shropshire. Consultation on a wider basis of Parish and Town Councils will be undertaken. Statutory consultation will be undertaken as recommended changes are brought forward.</p>
<p>Cabinet Member Martin Taylor Smith</p>
<p>Local Member All</p>
<p>Appendices Appendix 1 - Summary of issues on other elements of the Rural Transport Strategy. Appendix 2 – ShropshireLink passenger numbers Appendix 3 – ShropshireLink Marketing Plan</p>

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For information.**Summary of issues on other elements of the Rural Transport Strategy.****Inter-Urban “core” bus services**

150. Core bus services are those which operate between the larger towns, typically with an hourly or two-hourly frequency. Some are operated on a commercial basis, some subsidised by Shropshire Council.
151. Under the Rural Transport Strategy it was proposed to implement an improved network of core bus services. This would include upgrading the frequency of some services from two hourly to hourly. Some routes would be altered to reduce the journey times between key settlements, helping to reduce the growth of traffic on the county's main roads.
152. In establishing the RTS Shropshire Council removed subsidy from a number of fixed route services. However, the services listed below were deemed to be commercially viable by the existing or a subsequent operator and continue to be operated with no subsidy from Shropshire Council.

Service Number	Operator	Areas Served	Days Served
723	R&B Travel	Cleobury Mortimer – Knowle – Ludlow	Friday Only
745	Minsterley Motors	Pontesbury – Bishop's Castle – Clun – Craven Arms - Ludlow	Monday & Friday
751	R&B Travel	Cleobury Mortimer - Kidderminster	Thursday Only
773	M&J Travel	Bishop's Castle - Newtown	Every other Tuesday
860	M&J Travel	Bishop's Castle - Wellington	Every other Tuesday

153. Over time, where appropriate, it was proposed for the route infrastructure to be enhanced to “quality bus route” standards, with low floor accessible vehicles, enhanced waiting facilities etc.
154. Since the introduction of the Rural Transport Strategy (RTS) Shropshire Council have worked with operators to make a number of improvements to the core bus network.
155. Service 435 is operated by Minsterley Motors between Shrewsbury, Church Stretton, Craven Arms and Ludlow. Prior to the introduction of the RTS this service operated at a frequency of a bus every two hours. This service was improved to be operated using new easily accessible low floor vehicles on a clock face timetable at an hourly frequency. As a result of this patronage on this service has seen an increase of nearly 30% between April and August when compared to the same period last year. A number of bus stops and timetable information along this route have also been improved.

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156. Working with Arriva service 436, which operates between Shrewsbury – Much Wenlock – Bridgnorth, was improved following the re-tendering of the service in September 2008. Through increased subsidy from Shropshire Council Arriva now operate this service using new easily accessible low floor vehicles. Arriva also identified this service for improvements as part of their recent network review and altered the timetable in September 2009 to be operated on an hourly clock face, providing passengers with a consistent regular frequency. It is too early to measure the impact of these recent changes on passenger growth.
157. Since early September, as part of the recent Arriva changes, service 511 between Shrewsbury and Whitchurch, via Wem, has been upgraded. Prior to the launch of the RTS this service operated a circuitous route on a two hourly frequency providing 6 return journeys each day. The service is now operated using new easily accessible low floor vehicles on a more direct route at an hourly frequency. These improvements, including the addition of an extra vehicle into the service, have been undertaken at commercial risk by Arriva with no additional subsidy from Shropshire Council.
158. There was some initial controversy as a result of these changes particularly from the residents of Grinshill, Sansaw Heath and Weston-under-Redcastle which are no longer served directly by this bus service. However, early indications suggest that these changes have been successful in making the service more attractive and have generated additional patronage on this service.
159. Service 501 Shrewsbury to Ellesmere has recently been improved to operate on an hourly frequency and is now operated commercially by Bryn Melyn. Shropshire Council previously subsidised this service at around £40,000 per annum.
160. The improvement to these services has had an impact on the main aims and objectives of the Rural Transport Strategy and particularly the target, defined under LPSA9i (a) for increasing the % of people age 16-74 who are able to access key employment destinations within 45 minutes by a public transport service that operates at least hourly on six days each week. This has increased from 68% in 2007/2008 to nearly 72% following the implementation of these changes.
161. The introduction of a consistent, regular, hourly timetable and of low floor vehicles greatly assists with the physical accessibility of these services making them more attractive to the travelling public. Patronage on these services will continue to be monitored in-light of the recent changes.

Community Transport Services

162. There are 11 independent community-based bus schemes around the county, also known colloquy as Dial-a-Ride services. These generally use volunteer drivers to provide a service for people who are unable to use or do not have access to, conventional transport. Most community transport organisations had received relatively small grants from the County Council and the majority of their funding from other sources.
163. The community car scheme offers transport for individuals or small groups with volunteer drivers offering lifts using their own cars. The scheme caters for essential journeys for people unable to use conventional public transport. The Council meets half of the cost of each journey. This scheme provides an essential safety net and was not altered as part of the Rural Transport Strategy.
164. Prior to the launch of the Rural Transport Strategy it was clear that a number of community bus organisations were in financial when a number of time limited pump priming grants came to an end. Historically, funding was available from a number of sources e.g. lottery, Countryside Agency, DefRA and Rural Bus Challenge grants from the DfT. This led to an uncoordinated approach to the development of the community bus sector through the three rural transport partnerships within the county.
165. This funding was typically for 75% of the costs with the remaining 25% match funding coming from the Parish and the then District and County Council. At this time Shropshire County Council contributed £150,000 to the community transport sector county-wide, and this relatively small contribution represented value for money in terms of passenger numbers carried and accessibility provided.
166. As a result of the ending of this time limited funding the Council were approached to increase the funding available to support community bus services. In the short term the Council agreed to 'emergency' fund the sector to continue to provide existing levels of service. However, it was made clear that this level of subsidy was unsustainable in the longer term, and that community transport provision would have to be considered alongside the Rural Transport Strategy.
167. The ongoing cost of supporting these community bus services would have been an additional £350,000 bringing the total level of support to £500,000 per annum. One of the aims of the strategy was to place the community bus schemes on a more sustainable footing.
168. Even with the additional ShropshireLink services there is still a need for an additional layer of community transport to provide for essential transport on days when ShropshireLink services are not available, and

to cater for people with significant mobility problems who are unable to use ShropshireLink, and urban residents unable to use the conventional town bus services.

169. The level of funding for Community Transport Schemes was increased from the aforementioned £150,000 to £199,000 in this current financial year. Historically this subsidy was provided as a grant and is not related to passenger numbers carried. Under the Rural Transport Strategy a funding formula was developed to link the grant allocated to the requirements of each scheme. A number of factors are included as part of this formula including numbers of passenger trips, bookings taken and vehicle mileage.
170. The migration to this new funding method has meant some significant changes for community transport operators but has put them on a more sustainable footing.
171. The move to a unitary authority enabled the consolidation of the concessionary fares scheme. The concessionary travel policy was widened to provide free transport on community bus services making them more accessible at the point of access, generating passenger growth and therefore revenue and sustainability for these schemes. Shropshire Council have budgeted £99,500 for payments to operators for revenue foregone in taking part in this scheme.
172. At the time ShropshireLink was launched it was forecast that the number of journeys made on community bus services would reduce as the level of rural accessibility increased as many users would be able to use the ShropshireLink service.
173. Whilst there have been pockets of passenger movement from the Community Transport schemes onto ShropshireLink (with a notable example around Church Stretton) this migration has not been seen at the levels expected. It is thought that the roll out of free travel for the user of community transport services coupled with familiarity for the user and the more personalised service these operators are able to provide has been the cause of this.
174. Officers are currently working with the Shropshire Community Transport Forum and individual providers to promote ShropshireLink as a viable alternative especially for those who use CT because of rural isolation and not through mobility requirements. This will be beneficial for both parties by increasing patronage on ShropshireLink and releasing valuable resources on the Community Transport schemes.