

EAST HERTS COUNCIL

EXECUTIVE – 23 OCTOBER 2018

REPORT BY EXECUTIVE MEMBER FOR ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

DRAFT COMMUNITY TRANSPORT STRATEGY 2018 - 2021

WARD(S) AFFECTED: ALL

Purpose/Summary of Report

- This report introduces, in draft form, the council's first Community Transport Strategy. The report outlines the proposed vision for community transport in East Herts along with the council's three key priorities; to provide practical support and advice to those considering the need for community transport in their locality, to assist with funding new and existing services and to promote the importance of community transport.

RECOMMENDATION FOR DECISION: That:

(A)	the Executive endorses the draft Community Transport Strategy 2018-2021 and recommends it to Council for approval.
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1.0 Background

1.1 East Herts Council has been working in partnership with a number of local organisations including a number of Town and Parish Councils, Community Voluntary Services Broxbourne and East Herts (CVSBEH) and the Community Development Agency to develop and provide community transport schemes

across the district. The current schemes have developed over a number of years drawing on different evidence bases and motivations, thus it now felt imperative to devise an overarching strategy to outline the council's vision for community transport and how the council will work with existing and new partners to support such schemes in the district.

2.0 Report

- 2.1 East Herts has high levels of car ownership. This is likely to be a reflection of relatively high incomes in much of the district and somewhat patchy public transport links in some areas, especially the more rural parts of the district.
- 2.2 Despite good rail links into and out of London from the district's major towns, except Buntingford, and some high frequency bus routes, most typically around Hertford, Ware and Bishop's Stortford, many rural communities have very limited transport options other than car use. Thus, community transport can be considered a key way to 'plug gaps' in provision.
- 2.3 The definition of community transport is quite broad. It generally refers to transport provided by voluntary and community sector organisations using a mixture of volunteers and paid staff, often supported with subsidies.
- 2.4 There are currently a number of community transport schemes in place across East Herts serving our towns and villages. These include a volunteer-staffed Community Car scheme lead by Community Voluntary Services Broxbourne & East Herts and several bus services linking towns and villages with essential services such as shops and medical centres across the district run by or in conjunction with town and parish councils.
- 2.5 The council is keen to promote and further enhance community transport across the district. Priorities and an

action plan aimed at achieving this are set out in section 3 of the draft Strategy. It is proposed that the council's approach be represented in three key priorities:

- to provide practical support and advice to those considering the need for community transport in their locality
- to assist with funding new and existing services and
- to promote the importance of community transport.

2.6 Of particular note, it is understood that an element of subsidy is likely to be essential for community transport schemes, both at the start-up stage and on an ongoing basis. The aim is that the council provides financial support to assist schemes to develop as viable a business model as possible to ensure the longevity of the scheme. It is felt that should the council provide the majority or all of the funding required, this may curtail the incentives for partners to seek their own funding, including income from fares. Therefore, within the overall budget held by the council for community transport – currently £88,000 a year – the council proposes to provide funding of up to a maximum of 50% of start-up and initial running costs. The aim is to then work with the community transport provider to reduce the reliance on East Herts Council funding over time with a view to moving each service towards a greater level of self-sufficiency.

2.7 At present, for all but one community transport scheme, council funding represents a maximum of 50% of costs. One scheme has already reduced the council's contribution to 42% of its total funding requirement. Officers are working with the provider relying on more than 50% funding to reduce this level of subsidy.

2.8 As new proposals come forward from town councils, parish councils or other groups, officers will assess the case for funding in terms of (a) how well the proposal matches the council's strategic aims and (b) the robustness of the proposed

business plan. At present, it is felt that there are sufficient resources to support the existing schemes, subject to the 50% subsidy cap, and the anticipated level of new proposals. Should demand for resources outstrip the budget held, officers will seek member guidance. Such a situation could require a reduction in the subsidy cap and/or an increase the overall community transport budget. Members approval will be sought on the approach to take such this situation arise.

2.9 The Community Transport Strategy was considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its meeting of 18th September 2018. Members of the Committee support the draft Strategy and made the following suggestions:

- that the Strategy should make greater reference to the range of potential uses/markets for community transport, including services running into the evening, commuter shuttle services to stations and possibly transport routes to schools. The draft Strategy has been amended accordingly
- that officers publicise the Strategy more widely among town and parish councils. Officers have committed to do this pending approval of the Strategy by Council.

2.10 Executive Members' views are now being sought on the content of the draft Community Transport Strategy, in particular the draft aims and action plan.

3.0 Implications/Consultations

3.1 Officers have consulted all current providers of community transport in the production of this report. Full details of the implications and consultation are given in **Essential Reference Paper A**.

Background Papers

None

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