

Committee: **Executive**
Date of meeting: **29th January 2020**
Report Subject: **Progress report - Social Services Assisted Transport provision**
Portfolio Holder: **Councillor John Mason, Executive Member for Social Services**
Report Submitted by: **Damien McCann, Corporate Director of Social Services**

Reporting Pathway								
Directorate Management Team	Corporate Leadership Team	Portfolio Holder / Chair	Audit Committee	Democratic Services Committee	Scrutiny Committee	Executive Committee	Council	Other (please state)
31/10/19	12/11/19 & 17/12/19	13.01.20			13.01.20	29.01.20		

1. Purpose of the Report

1.1 The purpose of the report will be to provide:

- a. An update on the outcome of assessments undertaken during 2019, for eligibility to Assisted Transport.
- b. Outline further options to determine the future Assisted Transport model including the potential consideration to implement a charging mechanism for those who continue to access the in house transport provision.

2. Scope and Background

2.1 In January 2019 the Social Services Assisted Transport policy was approved by Council. This included a recommendation that the Social Services department progress the phased assessments of citizens currently accessing the Community Options transport.

2.2 In addition, members requested that the department return the report in the Autumn of 2019 with an update of the outcomes of the assessments including information on:

- a. Details of any citizens who have ceased attending Community Options as a direct result of the implementation of the policy;
- b. Options and costings in relation to the potential for the Local Authority to develop charges for those citizens who are eligible to continue to access transport;
- c. Details of the proposed future model of Assisted Transport in Blaenau Gwent.

2.3 At the time of the meeting in January 2019 Social Services transported approximately 190 citizens 'to and from' Community Options (Day Services) venues. On average this equated to approximately 120 citizens each day. The current arrangements for providing transport meant that none of the

citizens transported paid towards the costs of the Community Options transport.

2.4 Members were also informed that the budget allocation for transport within Community Options Service was £366,000. Prior to the conclusion of the eligibility assessments, the service identified efficiencies from April 2019 as demand had reduced and therefore the service relinquished 1 vehicle. This had resulted in voluntary redundancy of a driver and the reduction in management arrangements through the redundancy of the Passenger Service Officer.

2.5 However, the costs of providing assisted transport remains high, the budget allocation for transport within Community Options Service is currently £321,235 (gross) inclusive of staff costs.

2.6 The remaining £11,840 is budget allocation for vehicle licencing/ maintenance/ supplies and services.

2.7 During the past 8 months staff from across Adult Services Care Management Teams and our Community Options Service has undertaken all of the 149 reviews with citizens and where appropriate their carers. Section 7 below – (supporting evidence), provides a comprehensive analysis of the outcomes of the reviews.

2.8 As a reminder to Executive, the assessments were based on the following principals as set out in the Assisted Transport Policy which has recently been updated to reflect current legislation in line with the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014, and also to introduce a process to be undertaken if a citizen disagrees with the findings of the assessment.

- a. Assisted transport will only be provided to meet an assessed need, and where there are no other reasonable means for accessing the service.
- b. The principle of promoting individual's independence should be the starting point of any transport requirement.
- c. People who qualify for concessionary travel, or have access to DLA/PIP (benefits provided to support mobility costs) which includes a transport element, have a Motability car or their own car should use these to travel to and from Community Options facilities.
- d. For those passengers deemed ineligible, but who are unable to access public transport or use other reasonable means to attend

Community Options, a charge **may** be made for using the Local Authority assisted transport

- 2.9 As a direct result of these assessments 87 citizens are no longer accessing our transport and on conclusion of the reviews, a further 16 will cease to access from January 2020 as alternative options will have been sourced.
- 2.10 Of those assessments that have been completed, we can report that only 1 citizen who was identified as no longer eligible for transport, has chosen to withdraw from the Community Options Service. This individual had previously attended Community Options Outreach Service (Vision House) 1 day per week. Alternative taxi share options along with a travel buddie (Community Support Worker) were offered as a potential solution but the Service User and their family refused any alternative solutions.
- 2.11 Of the 149 assessments completed to date, we have received 6 objections to the policy following the social work visit and information provided to them that they would be ineligible to receive assisted transport in line with the policy. However, it is pleasing to note that following further clarification and a visit from the Community Options Manager where the policy was discussed in greater detail in the main concerns have been addressed and 5 of the outstanding cases are being considered via the exceptional circumstances clause within the policy and 1 has chosen to purchase a mobility vehicle.
- 2.12 **Public Transport/ Taxi costs**
- 2.13 For the purpose of this report potential charges for accessing Community Options are compared to the cost of citizens accessing public transport although it is recognised that the citizens accessing Community Options are utilising their bus passes and therefore are not paying the cost of the journey.
- 2.14 The costings below have been provided via Stagecoach (prices correct as of 10th October 2019). It is suggested that should members not wish to proceed with a full cost recovery model, then a cost model could be based on comparable costs of similar public transport journeys.
- 2.15 **Stagecoach Travel (table 1)**

Journey / Route From	To	Single	Return
Abertillery High St	Pond Road Nantyglo	£2.30	£4.00
Ebbw Vale Bus Station	Pond Road Nantyglo	£2.90	£4.90
Tredegar Bus Station	Pond Road Nantyglo	£4.80	£6.50
Tredegar Bus Station	Ebbw Vale Festival Park	£5.30	£8.70 Dayrider
Swffryd	Ebbw Vale Festival Park	£5.40	£7.00 Dayrider

Swffryd	Brynmawr	£4.80	£5.10
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2.16 **The table 2 below illustrates the average cost of taxi's as paid by citizens accessing a taxi to attend at present:**

Journey / Route From	To		Return
Abertillery	Brynmawr	Seated passenger	£20.00
Abertillery	Pond Road Nantyglo	Based on 1 wheelchair user-unable to transfer	£30.00
Ebbw Vale	Nantyglo	Based on 4 sharing	£8.00 per person

2.17 The Assisted Transport Policy remains a priority in not only ensuring that the service is efficient but also in ensuring that our support is provided in line with the key themes of the Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014.

2.18 The Assisted Transport Policy has a key principle that the decision to provide assisted transport should be based on assessed needs, the balance of personal risks, achieving personal outcomes and on promoting citizens' independence.

2.19 In addition, the Transport Policy suggests that those citizens who are ineligible continue to access transport and would be asked to pay a charge towards the cost of travelling on Social Services assisted transport.

2.20 For the purpose of the report members have previously been informed that we currently operate Assisted Transport on Section 19 and 22 of the Transport Act 1985. These permits cover options for charging. The regulations stipulate that when charging, no profit can be made however we are able to recover the costs of running the vehicle inclusive of any driver/escort salary – full details are available at www.gov.uk/government/publications/section19.

2.21 The Council's Income Policy 2014 recommends full cost recovery. The total cost of a service (defined as the level of activity at which a charge is made) should include all expenditure required to deliver the service, including all central overheads. The Council will seek to achieve full cost recovery where appropriate unless there are legal, strategic or contractual reasons for not doing so whilst having regard to current market value and benchmarking.

2.22 Based on the numbers of citizens who are currently eligible for transport as outlined in section 7 below – a total of 24 will continue to access assisted transport free of charge and a further 13 who are deemed ineligible could be charged for transport due to exceptional circumstances. The new model also includes a recommendation to reduce the current fleet from 8 to 4 vehicles, - and reduce the staffing structure from 8 to 5 drivers with 2 escorts which will enable the department to achieve an approximate saving of £116,563

2.23 The proposed new model is based on 2019/20 and the figures are;

- Direct vehicle Costs £79,597
- Employee costs £115,075
- Additional costs £10,000

Total £204,672

2.24 The approximate £10,000 additional costs as indicated above are made up of vehicle licencing/ maintenance/ supplies and services.

2.25 The table below demonstrates a full cost recovery model based on 2 vehicles which will support the transportation of the 18 paying passengers per day, based on the proposed future model however the full cost recovery model does not include the cost of collecting the charge or collecting any unpaid charges.

Full costs recovery across service	Based on 18 paying passengers per day / across service (250 days per year)	
Cost of Vehicles (2)	£33,758	Full cost recovery: Daily cost per passenger - £18.26 (£ 9.13 per journey)
Staff costs	£48,390	
Total	£82,148	
Average weekly cost to pay:	£ per week	
	2 days	£36.52
	3 days	£54.78
	4 days	£73.04

2.26 The 4 vehicles can potentially provide a total of 48 seats per day however seat numbers are reduced where wheelchairs are needed to be accommodated.

2.27 Members have been previously informed that in the event of agreement being made for any of the above charges being introduced, the department will need to implement a mechanism for collecting the income. This could include invoicing service users. A system will also need to be put in place to collect unpaid debts and pursue non-payments. Additional digital mechanisms for collecting the payment will also be explored including potential to collect the charge alongside any current invoicing for domiciliary care / community options invoices, online payments etc., pre-paid cards etc.

2.28 In the event of any of the above charges being imposed, colleagues in the Corporate Finance department have confirmed that the preference would be to collect the income as an “upfront fee” either at pick up/day care facility, or by utilising all existing payment options, online payments etc. Upfront payments will negate the need to produce invoices, or establish an account debt monitoring process.

Members are asked to consider the content of this report and progress to the recommendations below.

3. **Options for Recommendation:**

3.1 The report was considered by the Social Services Scrutiny meeting on 13th January and the Scrutiny Committee agreed to recommend an alternative option, as detailed below (Option 3).

3.2 **Option 1** – Executive note the progress made in assessing the needs of citizens in line with the Assisted Transport Policy including the outcomes of the assessments. **Plus,** Executive recommend that only those citizens who remain eligible for assisted transport continue to receive support **free of charge**. And that those citizens who are deemed **ineligible** but have **exceptional circumstance** continue to receive support but at a charge based on a **full cost recovery model**. The full cost recovery charges will be based on the configuration of transport required to deliver the future model of Community Options services.

3.3 **Option 2** - Executive note the progress made in assessing the needs of citizens in line with the Assisted Transport Policy including the outcomes of the assessments. **Plus,** Executive recommend that only those citizens who remain eligible for assisted transport continue to receive support **free of charge**. And that those citizens who are deemed **ineligible** but have **exceptional circumstance** continue to receive support but at a charge based on similar costs illustrated earlier in the report reflecting public transport rates. The charges will be based on the future configuration of transport required to deliver the future model of Community Options services.

3.4 **Option 1** is the preferred option for direction of travel if the service is to be sustainable moving forward however further work to ascertain the actual charges based on the reconfiguration of the service including review of demand and capacity.

3.5 **Option 3** Community Options revert back to the previous situation (i.e. the status quo prior to the implementation of the Assisted Transport Policy in January 19) and that all citizens accessing Community Options who are assessed as requiring transport, are offered Local Authority Community Options Transport, free at the point of contact.

4 **Evidence of how does this topic supports the achievement of the Corporate Plan / Statutory Responsibilities / Blaenau Gwent Well-being Plan**

4.1 **Expected outcome for the public**

Citizens of Blaenau Gwent have been appropriately assessed in line with the policy (adopted in January 2019) since February 2019. The assessments have been undertaken by Social Workers / Support Workers independently

of the Community Options staff team using the principles of Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

4.2 **Involvement (consultation, engagement, participation)**

Consultation, engagement and participation are evidenced throughout this report and attached documents. To capture citizen's thoughts on becoming more independent in accessing services the department approached a number of citizens who have chosen to taxi share their comments were:

4.3 **Quotations from independent travellers-**

- *I enjoy coming to Lake View in the taxi, I can come when I want to and go home when I want to.*
- *I can come in late and get up later – better, better.*
- *I love it, I come in with my butty love.*
- *I love it, it's warmer and quicker, better than the bus.*
- *I get home earlier, it's better than the bus.*
- *I like coming in the taxi it's better than the bus, I haven't got to travel all over the place. I get on with the taxi driver, we have a laugh and a joke.*
- *I don't think I should have to pay for my taxi.*

4.4 **Thinking for the Long term (forward planning)**

The overriding principles within this report focus on maximising and promoting independence wherever possible. It ensures that where transport is required by citizens, that the service is sustainable and cost effective to meet the future model of Community Options.

4.5 **Preventative focus**

The Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014 clearly identifies that Local Authorities should take a preventative approach to the delivery of traditional service provision. It supports the principles of the department undertaking a strengths based approach and that where possible citizens are supported to access their own strengths to meet their care and support needs e.g. utilise their own Motability vehicles etc. or are supported to develop personal skills through travel training to promote their own independent travel.

4.6 **Collaboration / partnership working**

A partnership approach has been developed within the consultation process with the inclusion of third sector organisations, advocacy groups etc.

4.7 **Integration (across service areas)**

The development of the policy has been as a result of discussions across colleagues from health, local authorities and the third sector.

5 Implications Against Each Option

5.1 Impact on Budget (short and long term impact)

5.2 There is a significant cost in providing assisted transport to all citizens who access Community Options and the implementation of the Assisted Transport Policy has enabled Community Options Service to redesign the model of transport required (see 2.13 above). It is anticipated that the reduction in fleet and staffing from 8 to 4 vehicles will result in a saving of £116,563. Additional income will also be achieved should members decide to support the recommendation to achieve full cost recovery wherever possible. It is important to note however that if this is the preferred option then some citizens may be charged a fee at a rate higher than the equivalent public transport cost.

5.3 As indicated within the report; in the event of any charges imposed for travelling on assisted transport, the department will need to implement a cost effective mechanism for collecting the charge.

5.4 Legal

There are no identified legal concerns in relation to this report and recommendations. The recommendations are in line with the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Act 2014.

5.5 The Social Services and Well-being (Wales) Act 2014 is the legislative framework for Social Services to identify an individual's outcomes and assess their need for care and support services. The Local Authority does not have a statutory duty to provide transport, but will have a duty to meet that need if the need cannot be met by the person's own resources or community resources.

5.6 Human Resources

5.7 The implementation of this policy has resulted in a reduction in demand for transport as citizens' access their own transport or use public transport. This will result in a reduction of staff required to provide transport and full staff consultation on the implementation and consequence of the policy has started. Both Organisational Development and Trade Unions will form part of any potential downsizing of the work force and potential redundancy situation.

6 Risk including Mitigating Actions

6.1 Risks identified in the previous report include the risk that vulnerable citizens may not choose to attend Community Options due to the charge and that this may increase their vulnerability at home. However, of the 149 assessments completed to date only one citizen has ceased attendance, their previous attendance was for one day per week only. The Community Care Team is supporting this individual and it is not felt that vulnerabilities have increased as a result of their decision to not attend.

6.2 Assessments completed have been strength based assessment 'what matters' conversations utilising on their personal resources including their access to their own Motability vehicle, bus pass or benefit entitlement. As a department we have and continue to support citizens with 'transport training' which promotes safe travel to and from the venues.

6.3 A further risk in implementing any charging for transport is that of potential non-payment of charges and accruing of debt to the Local Authority. This risk will be monitored by colleagues on the Corporate Resources Team and debts recovered as per current arrangements.

7 **Supporting Evidence**

7.1 As stated in 2.7 above during the past 9 months 149 assessments have been undertaken. At the time of Members approving the Assisted Transport policy there were approximately 190 citizens accessing the service via our transport but this number has reduced during the time of the assessments as citizens needs have changed, some citizens are unable to attend due to declining health, some have moved into Care Homes and sadly some attendees have passed away. All new referrals to Community Options have been assessed via the policy and therefore transport demand has reduced.

7.2 The outcome of these 149 social work assessments are as illustrated below:

7.3 A. Eligible for transport:

Following the assessments:

- ✓ 24 citizens have been assessed as eligible for assisted transport; this figure mainly consists of our older citizens and those citizens living with Dementia.

7.4 B. Ineligible for transport:

Following the assessments:

- ✓ 87 citizens are now supported by family/friends/carers to attend Community Options and have begun to access services through alternative means of transport (Motability vehicles/ personal cars etc.). One of the outcomes of this has been that we are seeing an increase in families/carers taking advantage of the flexible opening and closing times within the Community Options provision and this is having a positive outcome for all parties. Of these:
 - 13- are using their own vehicle
 - 3 - access via a taxi (sole occupancy)
 - 15 - access via a shared taxi arrangement
 - 12 - citizens are accessing services via stagecoach travel
 - 43 - access with transport provided by their care provider
 - 1- is transport funded via health

- 7.5 ✓ 11 tenants of the BG Supported Living – have received an assessment and deemed as not being eligible for Assisted Transport and the service is arranging for the transportation of these citizens as part of the scheme rota as the tenants have access to Motability vehicles.
- 7.6 ✓ 10 citizens have been assessed as being ineligible for transport but have been assessed as requiring additional support as defined within the policy (exceptional circumstances category). This means that they have been assessed due to their complexity of need, and inability to access public transport or use other reasonable means. These assessments are being reviewed via a formal process, independent of the original decision maker to clarify that they meet the criteria for exceptional circumstances.
- 7.7 ✓ 8 citizens have been assessed as being ineligible for transport and staff are continuing to work with them to identify potential taxi / public transport options although this is proving challenging due to the low availability of taxi services who are able to support people with mobility issues or require wheelchair access.
- 7.8 ✓ 5 Citizens have received a review under the exceptional circumstances process which has determined that exceptional circumstances do not apply. Therefore, they are not eligible to access Social Services Assisted Transport
- 7.9 ✓ 3 citizens currently access the Community Options Community Support provision whereby staff support in staff cars due to their assessment of needs.
- 7.10 ✓ 1 person has decided not to continue to attend Community options

8. ***EqlA (screening and identifying if full impact assessment is needed)***
A full equalities impact assessment has been undertaken and can be found in **Appendix 2**.

9. **Monitoring Arrangements**

9.1 The impact of the new policy is monitored via an overarching Assisted Transport Project Board and the Adult Services Department Management Team. It is recommended that regular progress reports will be presented the Social Service Scrutiny Committee. In addition, the Social Services Assisted Transport Policy will be subject to an annual review.

Background Documents / Electronic Links

- Appendix 1 Transport Policy
- Appendix 2 EqlA Assisted Transport Policy