

**Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Briefing Note**



**DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE**

Subject:

Community Transport and Dial-a-Ride

Head of Service /
Officer Responsible

Head of Community Services

Background and Reason for Briefing Note	<p>To provide the committee with an overview of voluntary and community transport provision in the district.</p> <p>To inform the committee of potential changes to Dial-a-ride and Non-Emergency Patient Transport (NEPT) which may impact on voluntary and community transport.</p> <p><u>CDC Business Plan objectives:</u> C4 - Work to promote and support health and wellbeing across the district. C6 - Provide support to the voluntary and community sector. C8 - Work to ensure rural areas are connected to local services and the retail centres provided in the two market towns.</p>
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	<p>‘Community transport’ describes passenger transport schemes owned and operated on a not-for-profit basis by local community groups. It encompasses a range of transport services including voluntary car schemes where drivers use their own cars, community minibus services which run to a published timetable and dial-a-ride providing door-to-door journeys for people unable to use conventional public transport.</p> <p>Community transport is important to isolated people, as it facilitates social inclusion and allows them to access vital services. Isolated people are found in both urban and rural areas and include disabled people, older people, unemployed people and those on low incomes.</p> <p>Cherwell is currently served by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • OCC Dial-a-Ride service • Volunteer Connect volunteer car service. • Banbury Volunteer Bureau volunteer car service • Royal Voluntary Service volunteer car service • Village schemes • CCG Non-emergency Patient Transport <p>As far as officers are aware, there are no community minibus services in the district.</p>
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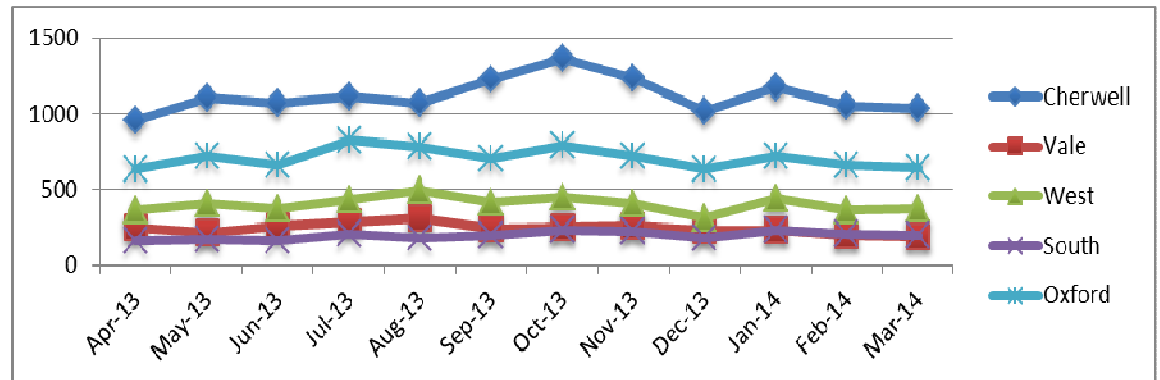
Dial-a-Ride

Before April 2012 Dial-a-ride in Cherwell was funded by CDC and provided by Banburyshire Community Transport Association (BCTA). The service was comprehensive, but unaffordable (£187,000 in 2011/12).

From 01 April 2012 Oxfordshire County Council took over responsibility for running dial-a-ride services throughout the county, providing a reduced service (one bus, serving different parts of the district on different days).

In order to partially offset the reduced service CDC has “topped-up” OCC funding by £29,484 each year. This has meant that on three days a week Cherwell is served by two buses rather than one. Cherwell was the only district to take up this “top-up” option.

Usage figures show that passenger numbers in Cherwell are consistently more than all the other three districts put together, and 40% higher than Oxford City. During 2013/14 dial-a-ride provided 13,430 journeys in Cherwell (see chart). OCC estimates the cost of each person/journey as £10.09.



Dial-a-Ride Journeys per month in 2013/14

Oxfordshire County Council is reviewing the provision of all supported transport, including dial-a-ride services. OCC has offered for a senior transport manager to address the next Overview & Scrutiny Committee Meeting (on 14 October).

Volunteer
Connect

Volunteer Car Services

Volunteer Connect:

This district-wide service is commissioned by CDC from Banbury Citizens Advice Bureau (see accompanying report “Commissioning of Services to Banbury CAB”).

Most journeys are for medical or health related reasons, but journeys are also provided for a variety of other reasons related to wellbeing and reducing isolation.

Journeys are primarily within the district (or very close to its borders) and from the district to hospitals in Oxford.

There are 317 scheme members and 40 active volunteer drivers on the books. The annual contract cost to CDC is £33,611. During 2013/14 Volunteer connect provided 1,833 journeys (avg £18.34/journey).

<p>Banbury Volunteer Bureau</p>	<p>Banbury Volunteer Bureau- Journeys are provided primarily for medical appointments within the district and to hospitals in Oxford and London. Around 45% of journeys are for appointments at Oxford Hospitals. Clients are charged a fixed fee (£5) for journeys under 10 miles 47p per mile for longer journeys. Service is provided in Banbury & surrounds and Bicester & surrounds but the stronger presence is in the Banbury area. There are 60 regular clients and an “open book” of occasional clients. There are 26 active volunteer drivers on the books. During 2013/14 Banbury Volunteer Bureau provided 2,200 journeys. The scheme is run by volunteers, with no paid staff. BVB’s chairman considers the service could expand, but only with increased administrative support, including office volunteers and a professional office manager for at least one day per week (c£5,000 p/a). Currently all staff are volunteers.</p>
<p>Royal Voluntary Service</p>	<p>Royal Voluntary Service- This “good neighbours” service provides journeys for people over 70 years of age. Many journeys are to get clients to and from the RVS Cornhill Centre, but journeys are also provided to surgeries, the Horton, Oxford hospitals and town centre shops. There are 40 regular clients. RVS has 15 volunteer drivers on the books but only 5 of them are available regularly. Clients are charged £4 for a return journey to the Cornhill Centre, or 60p/mile for journeys over 3 miles. In 2013/14 around 2500 journeys were provided. The scheme is run by a professional administrator (25 hours/week) and an office volunteer. The scheme is centred on Banbury, but could expand if it had more volunteers. The RVS manager considers that the service would struggle to cope with increased demand as it is very difficult to find new volunteer drivers <i>“particularly since the organisation whose role is to find volunteers for us have been funded to set up their own transport service”</i></p>
<p>Village based schemes</p>	<p>There are four small, locally organised volunteer driver schemes to take residents to medical appointments: Horton cum Studley, Kirtlington & Bletchingdon, Wroxton & Balscote, Yarnton. Deddington surgery provides a minibus service to bring patients in its catchment to medical appointments.</p> <p><u>Non-Emergency Patient Transport</u></p> <p>This service is commissioned by Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group (OCCG) and provided by South Central Ambulance Service NHS Trust. The service provides transport to patients to get to out-patient appointments or home from hospital. Clients of the service are people whose illness or disability makes it impossible or medically inadvisable for them to travel by car or public transport.</p> <p>In order to save up to £1million OCCG is proposing to tighten the application of its client eligibility criteria. This will mean that up to 6200 patients are deemed ineligible to use the NEPT service for a total of 37000 journeys per year over the OCCG area.</p>

The Cherwell Community Partnership Network has responded to OCCG's consultation, expressing several concerns about potential transport difficulties for patients and the as yet unquantified additional strain on voluntary and community transport services (see attached letter, appendix 1).

Conclusions

A lot depends on the future of dial-a-ride, as by far the largest provider of community transport journeys in the District. Until we know what OCC's proposals are it is difficult to decide what direction to take.

Currently Dial-a-ride, Volunteer Connect and BVB are all operating near capacity, but rarely have to decline a request for transport. The level of remaining unmet demand is difficult to gauge accurately. However, the district's ageing population profile suggests that demand is more likely to increase than decrease.

Members may wish to consider whether it is best to focus on developing one provider of volunteer driver services or to create conditions that allow several providers to co-exist and operate co-operatively.

Completed by: Kevin Lerner

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Presented to: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date:02/09/14