

Commissioning of Advice, Volunteering and Car Volunteering Services

Questions/comments from Cllr Cartledge

July 2011

Please note the questions/comments from Cllr Cartledge are in italic and the officer response is in normal font and highlighted.

1. *The paper has 3 aims:*

1. *To cut the Council's spending on advice services and community transport*

The paper does refer to an overall reduction of 24% however as the most significant reduction in spend is on Dial-A-Ride there is no actual reduction in spending on advice services. The aim of the paper is not purely about 'cutting spending' but about equitable distribution of cost effective, strategically relevant services.

2. *To transfer resources from Banbury and Bicester (and their surrounding villages) to Kidlington and its surrounding villages*

The paper does propose an equitable re-distribution of resources but this is based on both population and housing benefit take up as one indicator of deprivation.

3. *To transfer the responsibility for community transport from collective provision to the voluntary sector and thus transfer some of the cost to volunteer drivers and (potentially) the users themselves.*

The paper does state that the County Council have taken on responsibility for concessionary fares and are taking a lead role in the planning and procurement of community transport. As Community Transport is not a statutory duty of the District Council it makes financial and strategic sense to work collaboratively with the council on this. We could, as a District Council chose to do as other district councils have done and 'do nothing'. However we do value the role of community transport and it is for that reason we are recommending that we a) support the growth of volunteer car driving schemes and b) work with the County Council to develop a more cost effective model of delivering Dial-A-Ride.

Regarding the issue of transferring cost to users and volunteer drivers, it is worth noting that there are systems in place for reimbursing transport costs to and from the hospital. At a national level we are moving towards 'personalised budgets' which will mean that people have their own budget to spend on care and transport so actually a more personal approach is in line with the national 'personalisation agenda' and therefore 'collective provision' may no longer be required at the same level as it has been previously. There will however still be the base line provision funded by the County Council and enhanced by the District Council to safeguard services to the most vulnerable.

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To cut the Council's spending on advice services and community transport Section 3.1 contains the statement that CDC are planning a cut of 24% in the combined budget for these services. This is a cut of £120,000.

When did the Council/Executive agree to cut this budget by 24% as stated in the paper at section 3.1?

What was the reasoning behind this decision?

Did the Executive look at the hard ship this would cause?

The 24% reduction in spend was in relation to the final settlement on the Council's grant from central government under the Comprehensive Spending Review. We could have just simply reduced the funding on each grant by 24% however this would have not addressed the issues of equitable distribution, strategically relevant services and improved performance. We actually believe that even with the reduction in spending, this commissioning proposal has the potential to develop, over time improved service provision which is more cost effective. As far as hardship goes, the targeting of resources is at the heart of the proposal:

- equitable distribution, taking into account housing benefit take up
- stronger focus on debt and money advice
- survey of customers of Dial-A-Ride to ensure County provision is delivered to the most vulnerable
- increased focus in volunteering on progression into employment

In relation to hardship to actual organisations, officers have worked hard to support local voluntary organisations. This has included:

- organising training events on applying for funding from different sources
- sending out each organisation a 'health check' form and offering to help complete them. This helps organisations see areas that they may need to develop (e.g. by having the right policies in place and procedures such as financial procedures, correct governance etc). We have also said that if organisations are struggling we can connect them with people who can help with business planning etc.
- meeting with each organisation individually (some on a number of occasions) who is currently in receipt of funding to discuss the impact of the commissioning.

Section 2.4.6 admits that some existing advice services and Dial-a-Ride will become unviable as a result of this cut. Which advice services would become unviable?

The rest of 2.4.6 reads "Therefore an important role for the Council should this proposal be approved will be to work with service providers to identify additional funding streams to increase capacity and resilience." It is this piece of work that we have been trying to do through the input outlined above. We have directed organisations to alternative funding sources and given options to reduce overheads such as shared buildings, which some organisations have considered. As a result, it may be that some organisations are no longer as at risk as at the time of writing the paper. However, where organisations are heavily reliant on Council funding (such as BCTA) the risk of closure still exists unless they chose to bid for the funding available through the commissioning process, secure alternative funding or significantly reduce their overheads.

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	Banbury 54% of overall budget	Bicester 28% of overall budget	Kidlington 18% of overall budget	TOTAL
Debt & Money Advice 75% of overall budget	£136,128	£70,585	£45,376	£252,089
Volunteering Opportunities 15% of overall budget	£27,226	£14,117	£9075	£50,418
Volunteer Car Driving 10% of overall budget	18150	9411	£6050	£33,611
TOTAL	£181,504	£94,113	£60,501	£336,118

To transfer the responsibility for community transport from collective provision to the voluntary sector and thus transfer some of the cost to volunteer drivers and (potentially) the users themselves. Compared with advice services, the paper gives very little information about the proposed "voluntary car driving schemes" which would replace Dial-a-Ride.

Some of our response to this is detailed on page one, but a key point to note here is that the voluntary car driving schemes are intended to compliment Dial-A-Ride, not replace it.

How much would be paid to the volunteer drivers to cover costs (fuel wear & tear etc)? If it is less than the actual cost, this proposal would transfer some of the cost from CDC to the volunteer driver.

As we are looking to bid competitively we would expect service providers to come up with an appropriate costing. However we know that some schemes reimburse within the tax threshold and others pay over and above this. Anecdotal evidence suggests that tax payers prefer just to be reimbursed to the tax threshold as they do not want the hassle of entering information into tax returns. We have looked at Volunteer Car Driving Schemes which are considered to be 'leaders' in best practice such as Wantage, who make the process of reimbursement as simple as possible to take pressure off volunteers.

Is it feasible to rely on volunteer drivers to provide the same level of service as Dial-a-Ride? At present, the maximum fare for Dial-a-Ride is £2 per single journey from a village to Banbury. At 40p per mile, this equates to 5 miles. Many villages are more than 5 miles from Banbury.

No, it is unlikely that this will provide the same level of service as Dial-A-Ride, but it may be more responsive and as said above will be complimentary to the County Wide Dial-A-Ride Scheme being proposed.

Would users pay more under this proposal if so, it is transferring some of the cost from CDC to the users? Note: according to the website for Oxfordshire Rural Community Transport, there is a limit of 40p per mile for a volunteer driver in practice because he/she becomes liable for tax if he/she receives more than 40p per mile. ORCT also say (on website) that it costs more than 40p per mile for a volunteer driver so that if the

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driver is only paid 40p per mile, he/she is not being reimbursed for the full cost. As a result, ORCC say that volunteer drivers are being forced to stop volunteering because they cannot afford to continue. Have you considered this?

As said in page one, with the move to personalised budgets people will be free to make their own choices about how they spend their money, so flexible approaches are necessary. ORCC have not established any volunteer driving schemes in Cherwell so we are unsure where they have obtained this information from and indeed did not raise it during their consultation with officers. Certainly for Banbury CVS Scheme and Wroxton Scheme this is not the case. There are some additional findings which suggest that volunteer drivers can claim an extra 5p per mile for passengers tax free.

Lack of Consultation: According to the paper (sections 4.1 - 4.3), CDC Officers have had discussions with some Councillors, Banbury CAB, Bicester CAB, KADIC, ORCC and BCTA. Why no consultations with the users of these services?

Officers consulted with the Equalities panel whose feedback helped inform the proposal. Over and above this it was deemed inappropriate that officers should first speak to service users about the commissioning process before seeking the authority of Executive about the strategic direction. Intelligence has been gathered about the use of the service, although this information has been received by organisations that are recipients of grant under the current system.

Why no consultations with the people who depend on Dial-a-Ride?

It was deemed inappropriate that officers should first speak to service users about the commissioning process before seeking the authority of Executive about the strategic direction. Council officers are now working closely with County Officer to undertake a survey of all service users of BCTA to establish service take up and the profile of service users. This in turn will be used to ensure service continuation to the most vulnerable through the County arrangements from April 2012.

Why do Officers regard the urban communities as less important than rural communities?

Officers do not. The specification will make this very clear. The emphasis on rural needs has been placed to respond to feedback on the importance of rural-proofing the plans. Urban communities are also important, albeit the type of need may vary in different locations.

What will happen if there are not enough volunteers to ensure that a rural (or urban) community is not well served?

The new arrangements will ensure that outcomes are achieved i.e. number of car volunteering schemes stipulated within the contract. Schemes may not be workable in some locations – this reinforces the approach of having both car volunteering and supporting county provisions as part of the plans. It is partly in recognition of the challenge of recruiting volunteers that the proposal brings together general volunteering with volunteer car driving as it is hoped there will be some cross over (as is the case with Cherwell CVS and South Northants Volunteer Bureau).

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Why is there nothing in section 2.20 about monitoring the performance of volunteer car driving schemes?

Car volunteering scheme outcomes will be monitored – an important principle of the commissioning arrangements.

*Does Banbury Community Transport submit an annual report to CDC?
is it available to Councillors?*

The BCTA submits annual accounts to CDC for inspection and data on service utilisation. This can be made available to members

Why is there no information about the Volunteer Transport Scheme run by CCVS?

The CCVS volunteer transport scheme comprises two of the four schemes in the District – delivered through the Banbury CVS and the Resource Centre in Bicester.

How will it fit with the Volunteer Car Driving schemes proposed by the paper?

The CCVS could bid for the proposals – so we could consider the links with them. Their scheme could complement any other arrangements, and we should avoid any duplication.

Dial-a-Ride vehicles are wheelchair accessible. Many (most?) private cars are not wheelchair accessible.

-How is it proposed to cater for the needs of the most disabled wheelchair users under volunteer car driver schemes?

Most car volunteering schemes cannot accommodate wheelchair users as the vehicles are not large enough or suitably equipped to take them. The needs of these users will need to be met through the countywide Dial-a-Ride proposals. Moving to the personalisation agenda/budgets, the opportunity will exist for disabled customers to use local taxi firms and their mpv's (multi purpose vehicles).

According to ORCC, there are 60 volunteer car driving schemes in Oxfordshire. How many are in CDC? Have the Officers contacted any of them?

There are four formal car volunteering schemes in the Cherwell District – although there could be other, less formal, neighbour activities that take place. Cherwell has the lowest level of car volunteering in the County, which could be due to the extensive Dial-a-ride provision.

Officers have worked with partner organisations. It was not deemed appropriate to consult service users at an earlier stage as Executive had not at that stage considered the proposals. Consultation is planned with service users, and it will be required that the organisation(s) appointed for car volunteering will develop services based on the experiences of existing successful car volunteering schemes.

Response to Proposal

The paper identifies 3 options. There is another option: test the feasibility of Option 3 in a pilot area (say Kidlington and surrounding villages) - this would also have the

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advantage of being able to take into consideration the outcome of the County Reviews before taking a final decision.

This commissioning exercise is urgent and a pilot would cause a delay and would not only be a considerable cost in officer time, but would also reduce the efficiency savings delivered by the commissioning and delay the other outcomes that the commissioning will deliver:

- Equitable geographical distribution of funding and a greater consistency in service provision
- Debt and money advice focus for advice services ~ which needs to be in place as a matter of urgency to contribute to the homelessness prevention agenda, as temporary accommodation use is at risk of increasing
- The urgency to commission strategically relevant cost effective services
- The discussions with Oxfordshire County Council officers to explore a county wide Dial-A-Ride service

Monitoring. How would CDC monitor client satisfaction (as proposed in section 2.20)? (Note: CAB have strict rules about confidentiality and should not allow CDC to contact their clients.)

The contract will be monitored by Cherwell District Council. The detail of the performance measures will be agreed at the contract award stage of the procurement. However, the following measurements and tools are likely to be used in assessing the performance of the services:

- Service User Feedback
- Feedback from referring services
- Case Studies (particularly useful to process map any issues)
- Service Visits
- Outcomes monitoring

Reporting mechanisms may include the following:

- Quarterly* monitoring reports on an agreed form layout
- Six monthly* monitoring meetings between the service provider and the District Council representative. This may result in an action plan to rectify any deficiency in the quality of the service identified through the report and or meeting.
- Monitoring of complaints, their progress and outcomes.

* This may be more frequent in the early stages of the contract or during times when there are service performance concerns.

It is hoped that the dialogue will be two-way to enable feedback to the Council on trends, local issues etc as well as monitoring service performance.

Services will need to demonstrate that you have the appropriate systems in place for:

- Receiving, responding to, recording and monitoring service user complaints and customer feedback.
- Computerised outcome and output monitoring ~ management information systems which can be interrogated and used to provide intelligence for service improvement and development.

Other Advice Services. *What advice and information is provided in Cherwell District by other organisations which are not listed in Appendix One (e.g. Age UK)? What effect on these organisations will this proposal have, and has this been investigated? A properly planned provision of advice services would take account of other providers.*

Information on other advice services can be found in the Community Directory on the Council Website. All local organisations have been sent a form to complete so that they can be included and this is updated regularly. Organisations bidding for funding will need to demonstrate a commitment to partnership working with other organisations.

Volunteering. *To what extent are the existing services listed in Appendix One already promoting volunteering? What are results of these efforts? Why do the CDC Officers think that such efforts will be more successful as a result of commissioning?*

This is a very relevant question as all of the services listed in Appendix One are promoting volunteering with the exception of BCTA who run purely on paid staff. As this service is in receipt of a large percentage of the funding it likely that the commissioning will result in an increase in volunteering.

Advice Services

(1) What services are provided by the organisations receiving grants at present (that is, the organisations listed in Appendix One)? How do these services differ from what is proposed for commissioned services?

The CAB Services provide advice on a range of issues ~ including debt, housing, relationships, employment and consumer issues. KADIC are more of an information providing service as opposed to advice and this information includes tourist information. The key change is the focus on debt and advice ~ as explained in the Executive Report.

(2) What conditions are attached to existing grants? How do these conditions differ from what is being proposed for commissioned services?

Conditions are applied which include access, governance etc within a Service Level Agreement. The commissioned services will be managed through a contract with agreed service levels, outcomes etc.

(3) Section 2.20 sets out the data which would be required for monitoring performance. What data is currently available? (Essential in order to establish the base lines, set targets and monitor progress)

Data on outputs is provided by organisations in receipt of grant in their annual reports. Organisations will use this data to help inform their bids for funding.

**Information produced by Martyn Swann and Helen Town, Strategic Housing Team
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