

HEALTH, SOCIAL CARE & WELLBEING SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 25TH MARCH 2014

SUBJECT: ADULT SERVICES MINI BUS FLEET

REPORT BY: CORPORATE DIRECTOR SOCIAL SERVICES

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report provides information on the fleet of specially adapted minibuses providing transport for adult social care service users, and updates the Scrutiny Committee on proposals to replace 4 of the vehicles.

2. SUMMARY

- 2.1 The responsibility and budget for the operation of the minibus fleet for Adult Care transferred to the Integrated Transport Unit (ITU) from Social Services in April 2011, as part of the centralisation of passenger transport provision for education, social services and public transport. Since that time reports and business cases have been presented to the Corporate Management Team (CMT) identifying the financial and operational issues associated with operating an aging fleet and proposing a replacement strategy based on contract hire.
- 2.2 In the current financial climate it is recognised that resources are scarce. CMT agreed to a priority replacement proposal based on health and safety and operational issues. This identified replacing 4 wheelchair accessible minibuses initially on a contract hire basis. Contract hire requires additional revenue funding, although any investment in the fleet (through capital or revenue funding) will reduce expenditure on maintenance and other running costs associated with the operation of an elderly fleet.
- 2.3 Each minibus costs circa £67,000, so the total cost to replace four vehicles is £268,000. New vehicles have an extended warranty (of up to 7 years for the body, including lifts and doors, and 3 years for the chassis). The investment would therefore result in reduced ongoing repair and maintenance costs and address some of the most significant health and safety concerns for service users, drivers and escorts by allowing the replacement of the vehicles identified as priorities.

3. LINKS TO STRATEGY

- 3.1 This report links directly to the following objectives in the Community Strategy: -
- To expand and develop community-based health and social care services to enable people to live safe, fulfilled lives that are as active as possible.
 - To enable independent living in local communities, through appropriate support mechanisms for individuals, families and carers.
 - To develop and strengthen preventative work and service provision for vulnerable children, adults and their carers.

4. THE REPORT

- 4.1 A fleet of 16 minibuses is used to transport clients to day centres and activities throughout the county borough. The average age of the fleet is over 9 years old and this results in high maintenance costs and frequent breakdowns. The age of the minibuses ranges from 13 years old to the two newest bought almost 6 years ago. Indeed, 11 of the minibuses were registered between 2000 and 2004 or earlier. There is no agreed replacement strategy in place. Prior to the transfer from Social Services to the ITU, funding for upgrading the fleet depended on surplus capital funds being made available and the most recent purchases were secondhand minibuses, dating from 2004 and 2005. The last vehicles purchased new in 2008 have proved unsuitable for much of the work undertaken, being van derived conversions, rather than coach built. This compromises their flexibility and suitability for certain service users, particularly for those with larger, powered wheelchairs.
- 4.2 To put things into context, the average age of the fleet in the Authority is currently 3 years and 1 month and this is across all departments (excluding Social Services). The average age of Social Services fleet is 9 years and 2 months, the oldest vehicle being 13 years and 6 months, and the youngest being 4 years and 11 months. This results in high maintenance costs and frequent breakdowns due to the age of the fleet.
- 4.3 Much of the fleet is now at or beyond its economic life and significant investment will be required. In addition to the health and safety concerns outlined and the increasing maintenance and repair costs, this lack of investment to date is compromising the effective and efficient delivery of the service.
- 4.4 The Corporate Management Team (CMT) has agreed proposals to replace 4 of the minibuses in 2014/2015 on a contract hire basis, subject to funding being identified. It is intended that 2 of the vehicles being replaced will be retained for engineering spares.
- 4.5 The Authority has recently been given the opportunity to purchase a low mileage two year old minibus to the specification required at a cost of £46k. Approval has been granted for the ITU to purchase this vehicle, which will be funded from underspends in the 2013/14 Social Services budget.
- 4.6 It is proposed that the 3 remaining new vehicles will be acquired in the 2014/15 financial year. Rather than proceeding on a contract hire basis it is proposed that the vehicles will be purchased outright and funded from Social Services reserves at a total cost of circa £201k. Procurement of the new vehicles will commence early in 2014/15, with delivery anticipated within 6 months of the procurement process starting.

5. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The equalities impact would be positive as service users could be more inclusive, could cater for a wider group of service users particularly those who use powered wheelchairs.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 The budget transferred to the ITU in April 2011 has been insufficient to cope with the significant maintenance and repair costs arising from the age of the fleet and is currently projected to overspend by circa £150k in the current financial year.
- 6.2 It is estimated that the investment in the 4 minibuses will reduce maintenance and repairs costs by between £8,000 and £12,000 per annum in total. One-off income will also be received from the sale of the mini-buses being replaced (albeit that 2 will be retained for spares). It should be stressed that whilst investment in 4 new minibuses is the priority identified, the rest of the fleet is elderly and will continue to accrue increasing maintenance and repair costs.

6.3 Whilst the purchase of the 4 vehicles will have some impact on managing the current transport overspend further measures will be required, including developing a sustainable vehicle replacement strategy for the remaining fleet and reviewing eligibility criteria for transport provision. These issues will be subject to future reports.

7. PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 None identified with this report

8. CONSULTATIONS

8.1 All comments have been included in this report

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Members note the content of the report

10. REASONS FOR THE RECOMMENDATIONS

10.1 To ensure that Members are updated on the progress that has been made on the replacement of minibuses used to transport adult social care service users.

Author: Jo Williams Assistant Director
Consultees: Social Services Senior Management Team
Cllr Robin Woodyat,t Cabinet Member Social Services
Stephen Harris, Acting Head of Corporate Finance