

REPORT TO: Environment and Urban Renewal Policy & Performance Board

DATE: 13th June 2012

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director, Policy & Resources

PORTFOLIO: Transportation

SUBJECT: Halton Community Transport Scrutiny Topic Group

WARDS: Borough-Wide

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 To inform the Board of the outcome of a review of the Council's arrangement in relation to Halton Community Transport (HCT) by undertaking a Scrutiny Topic group comprising Councillors A. Lowe, S. Edge J. Gerrard, G. Zygadlo, R. Hignett, P. Nolan and E. Cargill.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION:That

- 1) the report and review work undertaken by the Topic Group be noted; and**
- 2) the conclusions reached be used to guide future relationships with HCT.**

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 The HCT Scrutiny Topic Group was set up to review the operations of, and services provided by, HCT including identification of funding streams which contribute towards HCT's overall operations and service delivery. Another focus of the group was to consider the potential social inclusion benefits that the services operated by HCT provide to its users and the impacts on these users should services discontinue. Terms of reference was drawn up for the group and agreed at the first meeting. These are attached as Appendix 1 to this report.

3.2 Four meetings of the group were held. A brief explanation of the discussions that took place at each of these meetings follows:

- 3.2.1 10th February 2012; initial scoping out meeting to confirm to those members of the group why the group had been set up and the overall scope of the group, to discuss and finalise the terms of reference and consider a range of associated documents including: the Section 19/22 permitting system under which HCT's vehicles

operate under and are regulated, the Service Level Agreement held between HBC and HCT as well as an explanatory report that had been produced by the general manager at HCT describing the various services offered by them as an organisation.

3.2.2 24th February 2012; several witnesses were invited to attend this meeting to potentially bring forward evidence of anecdotal allegations of unregulated or improper conduct and operations by HCT that are not in line with the permitting system under which they operate. As part of this process, no evidence or allegations of inappropriate operations were brought forward and therefore the potential allegations were unsubstantiated.

3.2.3 9th March 2012; the General Manager of HCT was invited to attend this meeting to provide an in-depth overview of the services provided by their organisation and to answer a number of questions from Members present as well as providing clarity on a number of issues. This discussion took place with a satisfactory outcome, providing clarity and detailed information about how HCT operate the range of services they offer and what the aims, overall outlook and vision of their organisation is.

3.2.4 16th March 2012; at this final meeting a general discussion took place with regards to the information that had been discussed at preceding meetings. Some final clarifications were sought prior to the meetings of the group being brought to a close.

3.3 Following the above meetings and the information provided, the Topic Group agreed a number of recommendations in order to strengthen HCT's operations in a number of areas as follows:

3.3.1 Procedures to be put in place for restricting the number of hours to be worked by voluntary drivers. As volunteer drivers are not governed by the working time directive comprehensive paper records are required to be held as confirmation that excess hours are not being worked by volunteers. Overall recommendation is that volunteers should work to the same conditions (maximum allowed hours) as contracted/paid drivers.

3.3.2 Mileage log sheets should be issued on each vehicle and completed by drivers prior to and at the end of each shift. A book of log sheets should be issued to and retained on each vehicle in the fleet to ensure that accurate records are maintained.

3.3.3 Vehicle daily 'walk-around' check sheets should be issued and retained on each vehicle. Drivers should complete a check sheet prior to taking any vehicle out at the start of a shift. Each vehicle should be issued with a pad of numbered sheets to be used.

3.3.4 Vehicle scheduling system and vehicle tracking devices to be installed and used on all vehicles operating Council funded services.

This will ensure that routes are scheduled to maximum effect in terms of route planning and maximising passenger usage, it will also ensure that vehicles are tracked in real-time in order that each vehicle location will be known at all times.

- 3.3.5 An attempt should be made to establish a continual funding stream for the key accessible transport services provided by HCT and should endeavour to ensure that no further funding reductions are faced by this organisation in respect of these services, therefore recognising the importance of the specialised services operated by HCT and the impact on the most vulnerable people in the community should the services discontinue.

3.4 OUTPUTS

The agreed key outputs for the group were to gain a clear understanding of:

- 3.4.1 HCT's operations, the services it provides and its sources of funding.
- 3.4.2 The role Community Transport can play in helping the Council meet its statutory duties and its priorities.
- 3.4.3 The service level agreement that exists between Halton Borough Council and Halton Community Transport and its overall content.
- 3.4.4 The potential impacts on users of the specialised transport services provided by HCT should these services be withdrawn or significantly reduced.
- 3.4.5 Any other possible transport service alternatives available for users and/or potential alternative specialised transport service provision.
- 3.4.6 The Council's duty under section 63 (8) of the Transport Act 1985 when determining the need to consider the transport needs of members of the public who are elderly or disabled.
- 3.4.7 The requirement to produce a Community Impact Review and Assessment (CIRA) for any reduction of funding for specialised transport services.
- 3.4.8 The Local Sustainable Transport Fund bid application, HCT's role and how this and other forms of public transport fit with the overall aim of the LSTF bid.

It was concluded by the Topic Group that these key outputs were achieved.

3.5 OUTCOMES

The desired outcomes of the group were agreed to be as follows:

- 3.5.1 The identification of any significant risks and issues from the review of HCT's activities and operations.
- 3.5.2 The identification of any significant benefits and opportunities from the review of HCT's activities and operations.
- 3.5.3 To reach the conclusion on whether the subsidy provided by the Council to HCT is providing value for money and whether future support should be maintained (subject to availability of funding).
- 3.5.4 A clearer scope and direction for future provision of specialised transport services with knowledge of all of the relevant surrounding information.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 In connection with the goals and overall vision as set in Local Transport Plan (LTP3). LTP3 states:
 - The bus strategy should recognise the importance of providing a good network of local community services which provide convenient, attractive and affordable links to a range of local community facilities.
 - The Council will strive to continue to develop demand responsive "Door-to-Door" type services.

A further reduction in funding for the existing specialised door-to-door transport services would inevitably result in the current range of services being reduced or even being withdrawn entirely.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 The Council has a duty under Section 63(8) of the Transport Act 1985 which states 'it shall be the duty of any Council, in exercising or performing any of their functions to have regard to the transport needs of members of the public who are elderly or disabled'. Should the existing specialised transport services, operated by HCT, not be provided then the Council could be risk of failing in its duty.
- 5.2 As a result of the comprehensive spending review and current austerity measures, the Council's budget for supported local bus services has faced reductions resulting in increasingly difficult yet unavoidable decisions on scaling back or discontinuing certain subsidised bus services. The Dial-A-Ride service, provided by HCT, has and will increasingly become a fall-back position for passengers who are left with no alternative public transport service due to local bus services having been removed.
- 5.3 The Council has recently submitted a Local Sustainable Transport Fund (LSTF) bid to the Department for Transport. This bid is focussed on Economic Growth and Carbon Reduction (promoting sustainable travel modes and changing travel behaviours). The bid will, if successful, be worth £4.4 million to the Council over three years (£8.0 million including partner contributions) and HCT are a strong partner within this bid. If HCT

were not in existence then certain essential parts of the bid would not be deliverable placing the entire bid in jeopardy.

- 5.4 The Council has duties under the Equality Act 2010 in meeting the transport needs of the community, particularly groups under the listed protected characteristics. A Community Impact Review and Assessment (CIRA) has been produced for the general reduction in supported local bus services due to funding reductions, however in meeting its duties the Council has stated that the Dial-A-Ride service will remain available for the most vulnerable in society, particularly where alternative public transport services no longer exist and walking distances to connect with other service are excessive creating problems with those with mobility difficulties.
- 5.5 A Core grant is provided to HCT from the Council for the provision of the Dial-A-Ride daytime and evening transport. The level of core grant provided in 2010/11 was £122,630, this amount was reduced to £82,630 for 2011/12 with a further proposed 10% reduction for 2012/13 bringing the core grant down to circa £74,370. A detailed discussion took place during the group to identify how the funded services could be provided at less cost. The outcome of this discussion was that an alternative service could not be provided at similar cost. It was also raised that the service would not be able to continue following any further grant reduction.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

No implications

6.2 Employment, Learning, Skills & Community, key Objectives including:

- Developing a culture where learning is valued and skill levels throughout the adult population and across the local workforce can be raised.
- Promoting and increasing the employability of local people and removing barriers to employment to get more people into work.

This will continue to be achieved as a result of the availability of transport thus meaning that accessing learning and employment opportunities is not a barrier.

6.3 A Healthy Halton, Key Objectives including:

- Responding to the needs of an aging population, improving their quality of life and thus enabling longer, active and more fulfilled lives;
- Removing barriers that disable people and contribute to poor health by addressing the wider determinants of health;
- Improving access to health services, including primary care.

Continuation of the specialised transport services will ensure that these issues continue to be addressed and there are no significant barriers.

6.4 Halton's Urban Renewal, Key Objectives including:

- Providing a well-connected, sustainable and accessible borough and ensuring a variety of safe efficient travel and infrastructure options exist for people.

Should specialised transport services be reduced or withdrawn, this would have a major impact on the level of accessible transport services provided thus creating a gap in service and potentially not achieving the goals and vision as set in LTP3.

6.4 A Safer Halton

Increased provision of, and usage of, specialised door-to-door transport services by the most vulnerable members of the community will help to improve personal security and reduce crime and perception of crime.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

7.1 Should Halton Community Transport not be in existence or certainly not be provided with a Core Grant from the Council for the provision of community transport services for the most vulnerable members of the community, an alternative provider would be required to provide a similar service as otherwise the Council would be at risk of:

- not meeting its duties under Section 63(8) of the Transport Act
- jeopardising the current Local Sustainable Transport Fund bid which could be worth £4.4million to the Council over the next three years (circa £8.0million including partner contributions)
- not meeting its duties under the Equality act 2010
- should an alternative provider be sought this would almost certainly be at higher cost and could be of inferior quality to the current provision

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

8.1 Specialist passenger transport services provided by HCT on behalf of the Council are constantly monitored to ensure the operation of these services embrace equality and diversity issues in line with the Equality Act.

9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972

There are none under the meaning of the Act.

APPENDIX ONE – Terms of Reference

Topic title: HCT Scrutiny Working Group

PPB(s) responsible: Urban Renewal / Employment Learning & Skills

Officer Lead: Mick Noone Tel: 0151 471 7370

Support Officer: Jeff Briggs 0151 471 7381

Planned start/end date: Short series of meetings (3 to 4), mid February to late March 2012

Topic description and scope:

A review of the operations of, and services provided by, Halton Community Transport (HCT) including identification of funding streams which contribute towards HCT's operations and service delivery. To consider the potential social and inclusion benefits that the services operated by HCT provide to its users and the impacts on these users should service discontinue.

Terms of Reference

1. To consider the Council's duties and policies for securing the provision of public transport services, including community transport.
2. To consider the role community transport can play in helping the Council fulfil its duties and meet its priorities.
3. To consider the aims and objectives of HCT, the details of its current fleet, the number and type of passengers it carries, and the services it provides to the communities of Halton.
4. To consider the legislation governing the operation of CT services (permit systems, licences, etc.).
5. To consider the service level agreement that exists between Halton Borough Council and Halton Community Transport in terms of levels of service provision, standards of quality required and funding levels.
6. To consider whether HCT, or indeed other community transport operations that may be supported by the Council, can be deemed to be benefitting from an unfair financial and competitive advantage in relation to other transport providers.
7. To consider the potential impacts on users of the specialised transport services that HCT provide should any such service be withdrawn, wholly or in part i.e. less vehicles provided, reduced days/times of operation.
8. To consider other possible transport service alternatives available for users whom rely on existing specialised transport.

9. To consider other potential ways in which alternative specialised transport services could be provided by different transport providers more effectively and/or at reduced cost.
10. To consider the detrimental impact on the Council's duty under Section 63 (8) of the Transport Act 1985 'it shall be the duty of any council, in exercising or performing any of their functions to have regard to the transport needs of members of the public who are elderly or disabled' should specialised transport services be withdrawn in their entirety.
11. To consider the impact of cuts to the supported bus service budget and the impact this is having or could have on the provision of local bus services in certain areas. Demand responsive transport services such as the Council funded Dial-a-Ride provided by HCT, are a fall-back for residents (in meeting the duties as set out above) from areas where there is no alternative public transport provision.
12. To consider the Community Impact Review and Assessment (CIRA) for reduction of funding for specialised transport services and consequential impact on duties as part of the Equalities Act.
13. To consider the potential impact on the Local Sustainable Transport Fund bid application, which includes elements of provision by HCT and could be worth £4.3million over the next three years, should funding levels provided be discontinued.
14. To consider the existing passenger fares and other charge levels made by HCT for services provided for individuals and for affiliated groups.

Why this topic was chosen:

In the current financial climate where major savings are required and every budget line is being closely scrutinised, the HCT scrutiny working group aims to identify the overall effectiveness of the services provided by HCT and to review the current operations of HCT as well as funding levels provided by the Council.

Key outputs and outcomes sought

Outputs:

A clear understanding of –

1. HCT's operations, the services it provides and its sources of funding.
2. The role Community Transport can play in helping the Council meet its statutory duties and its priorities.
3. The service level agreement that exists between Halton Borough Council and Halton Community Transport and its overall content.

4. The potential impacts on users of the specialised transport services provided by HCT should these services be withdrawn or significantly reduced.
5. Any other possible transport service alternatives available for users and/or potential alternative specialised transport service provision.
6. The Council's duty under Section 63 (8) of the Transport Act 1985 when determining the need to consider the transport needs of members of the public who are elderly or disabled.
7. The requirement to produce a Community Impact Review and Assessment (CIRA) for any reduction of funding for specialised transport services.
8. The Local Sustainable Transport Fund bid application, HCT's role and how this and other forms of public transport fit with the overall aim of the LSTF bid.

Outcomes:

1. The identification of any significant risks and issues from the review of HCT's activities and operations.
2. The identification of any significant benefits and opportunities from the review of HCT's activities and operations.
3. To reach a conclusion on whether the subsidy provided by the Council to HCT is providing value for money and whether future support should be maintained (subject to availability of funding).
4. A clearer scope and direction for future provision of specialised transport services with knowledge of all of the relevant surrounding information.

Which of Halton's 5 strategic priorities does this topic address and what are the key objectives and improvement targets it will help achieve?

A Healthy Halton, Key Objectives including:

- Responding to the needs of an ageing population, improving their quality of life and thus enabling longer, active and more fulfilled lives;
- Removing barriers that disable people and contribute to poor health by addressing the wider determinants of health;
- Improving access to health services, including primary care

Employment Learning and Skills, Key Objectives including:

- Developing a culture where learning is valued and skill levels throughout the adult population and across the local workforce can be raised;
- Promoting and increasing the employability of local people and removing barriers to employment to get more people into work

Environment and Regeneration, Key Objectives including:

- Providing a well connected, sustainable and accessible borough and ensuring a variety of safe efficient travel and infrastructure options for people

Nature of expected/desired PPB input

Involvement by a small number of Members and officers in a series of working groups, involving approximately 3 or 4 meetings. Working group reports to be considered by PPB as appropriate.

Preferred mode of operation

As above.

Media/Communication implications/opportunities arising from examining this topic.

None at this stage.

Agreed and signed by:

PPB Chair Officer

Date Date