

Agenda item 6

For decision – an update on Frome Community Cars

Author: Anna Francis, Resilience Manager

Summary

Frome Community Cars provides 130 journeys a month to enable people to access the services they need. Following Mendip Community Transport's decision to stop running the service, it has been decided to return the project to Frome.

Frome Community Cars is recruiting a freelance co-ordinator who will run under Sustainable Frome CIC. Anna is fundraising to support the role for six months while a sustainable business model is developed. In the meantime, Cllrs are asked to approve the allocation of the projected shortfall of £1000 in 2019/20 utilising the agreed Sustainable Transport budget.

Background

Frome Town Council set up Frome Community Cars in 2016 to enable people without access to transport to access the things they need. The closure of Lock's Hill surgery and cuts to local bus services added to the need for an affordable flexible local transport solution. A freelance co-ordinator was employed, and a team of volunteer drivers recruited. A steering group comprising Frome Town Council, Mendip Health Connectors, Frome Medical Practice and Somerset's Clinical Commissioning Group was set up.

In 2018, it was decided that the project needed to be spun out and Frome Town Council passed over the management of the project to Mendip Community Transport (MCT) who run other volunteer driver schemes. MCT ran the scheme until January 2019 when, following a change of management, it was decided that the project cost too much for them to continue to run. Frome Town Council was given three weeks' notice to find an alternative.

The scheme has 300 members and conducts 130 journeys a month. 80% of these trips are for medical appointments. It also enables people to access services they need, such as shopping or visiting friends and family. Benefits have included: isolated people being introduced to local networks such as lunch clubs, a much-needed ramp being fitted in one day rather than waiting 6 months for an assessment, and members making friends through lift-sharing and/or with drivers who then help them with other aspects such as doing their shopping. Driver feedback is also very positive, and many have been involved since the outset.

The future of the service

Following discussions with Somerset County Council's Transport Commissioner and Mendip Health Connections we initially thought that South Somerset Community Transport would run the service. However, on further investigation their high admin charge meant that local journeys would become prohibitively expensive.

We therefore decided that bringing the scheme back to Frome was necessary. Frome Community Cars is recruiting a new freelance co-ordinator. The service will be run under Sustainable Frome CIC. Frome Town Council will provide initial guidance and support and the co-ordinator will report to the steering group regularly.

Anna is currently fundraising to support the co-ordinator role for at least 6 months. By this time, we will have developed a sustainable model, combining paid co-ordinator time with volunteer help in managing the service. This will ensure that the scheme remains affordable and that it brings in enough income to cover its costs. Part of this involves doing more outreach and promotion of the scheme to increase usage and recruit more volunteer drivers. Anna has already secured £1000 external funding for the scheme and is applying for £3500 from other grant funders. In order to support the initial development phase, it is proposed to use £1000 from the sustainable transport budget. The table below outlines the costs for the first year and in year two.

Year One Costs	
Total expenditure	£11,420
Income	£4,920
Grant funding (tbc)	£4500
Difference (from FTC)	-£1,000

Year Two Costs	
Total expenditure	£7,152
Income	£7,440
Difference	£288

Recommendation

Frome Town Council contributes £1000 towards the development costs of the project to enable the scheme to continue, develop a sustainable business model and transition away from the need for grant funding.