

# Community Transport Grants Process – Rural Impact Screening Report

## Rural Impacts

### Background

The Highland Council supports twenty-two Third Sector organisations to provide community transport services across the Highlands. This enables the provision of transport services in areas where there is little public transport and/or enables particular groups of people to be supported where there is a lack of suitable transport provision. During 2015/16 the Highland Council budget for supporting community transport was £416,961.

Applications are being made for community transport grants for the 3-year period 2016/17 – 2018/19. Community Services Committee of 5<sup>th</sup> November 2015 approved a budget of £376,000 for each of the three years. Existing grant recipients and new applicants are entitled to apply – there is no presumption that existing recipients will be supported ad infinitum.

Community Services Committee of 4<sup>th</sup> February 2016 will make the formal decisions on which projects are to be supported and at what grant level.

#### **1. Describe what the change will mean in rural communities – positive and negative.**

E.g. centralisation, re-location or closure of service, change in sector provision e.g. third sector or private sector model, is this different in different rural areas?

Features of the community transport grants process are:

- **The annual level of funding will be lower:** this may put pressure on some project proposal delivery intentions should they not be awarded the entire sum being sought.
- **Grants will be awarded for a 3-year period:** traditionally The Highland Council has awarded one-year grants. Longer term awards will facilitate planning and service delivery, as well as providing a stronger basis for approaching other potential funders.
- **New applicants and existing community transport grant recipients can apply:** as it is an open competition for grants there is an opportunity to extend the benefit to new communities and groups, just as there is the possibility that existing grant recipients may not be as extensively supported.
- **Funding will be prioritised to support project proposals which seek to deliver practical transport solutions for their communities:** the principal aim is to support transport services being delivered which address gaps in an area's transport provision – whether this be a geographic issue or concerned with the suitability of other transport options to convey certain groups of passengers.

## **2. How will people in rural communities be affected? Both positive and negative impacts.**

Accessibility of service - travel time to the service, higher costs of goods/services, new costs of goods/services, energy costs, public access to internet, impact on seasonal or part-time workers, self-employed people and people on low wages, impact on land based business and on tourism business, concerns about sustainability of the service, is there variable impact across different rural communities?

- The Highland Council's grant support for community transport services has many positive effects for individuals, groups and communities. Amongst other benefits, it assists with access to local shopping and leisure services, the maintenance of social contact, help with reaching health appointments and with continuing to live independently.
- The volunteers needed to support most of the community transport service delivery across the Highlands are also perceived to benefit – for some it is work experience, for others a way of maintaining contact with people after retiring, and for the majority a sense of contributing to their communities' well-being.
- Some of the community transport providers create paid employment – drivers, administrators, and service co-ordinators are common posts.
- Clearly, with a reduced budget and an open competition for funds, there is the possibility that currently funded groups may not receive future funding at previous levels. The level of funding sought by an applicant is, however, based on various factors and a lower award may not necessarily be too detrimental if the funding is being better focused on transport service delivery or other funds are also supporting the service.
- Many of the current grant recipients have been operating for many years. Their services are much appreciated within the local communities. Whilst it would seem unlikely to occur, withdrawing the Council's grant funding altogether from any of these groups is likely to be keenly felt. Each application, however, will be assessed to ensure that best value is achieved from the funding available, and that the projects which are successful in securing funding are those which will achieve the most effective outcomes for their communities. Realistically, given the lower level of funding available, it may be necessary to support these and other applicants at levels below their ideal preferences. This may result in some transport delivery plans being revised.

## **3. Are any other public services changing locally as well?**

Is there cumulative impact from partners' services?

The Highland Council will be tendering for home-to-school and public bus services during 2016 with contracts due to commence in January 2017. The outcomes of this significant undertaking may impact particularly on the range of public bus services available across the Highlands.

## **4. Have other options or adjustments been considered?**

E.g. co-location, mobile services, telephone/internet access, new transport links, re-location of some centralised functions to off-set local impact, transfer of assets, local groups providing the service instead.

The key value of community transport provision is that the service delivery proposals are generated by and for the communities – they are very well targeted to provide maximum impact. Alternatives to community transport provision tend to involve contracting for either fixed route public bus services or for dial-a-bus services. Both of these options are typically far more expensive to implement and would result in a reduced level of service being

available in rural areas across the Highlands.

**4 options – please detail which of the 4 options relates to this proposal**

1. No impact
2. Negative impact but mitigation identified – please state nature of mitigation - or positive impact identified, again state what this is
3. Potential rural impact – further consideration required
4. Other – under development, rural impact assessment required at later stage

Option 3, 'Potential Rural Impact' is most likely to pertain, as the true impact cannot be accurately ascertained until the grants have been awarded and the resultant impact assessed.

Option 2 'Negative Impact' would also be relevant, the mitigation being the fact that new applicants are likely to benefit and there will be a focus on grant supporting as extensive a set of community transport services as the budget will permit.

Mitigation is also served by Community Services Committee making the decisions on the range of project proposals to support and the level of funding to be committed to each.