

Agenda Item No. 4(a)

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**MEETING OF CABINET MEMBER – HIGHWAYS, TRANSPORT AND
INFRASTRUCTURE**

16 November 2017

Report of the Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Environment

**PETITION – CLOWNE AND DISTRICT COMMUNITY TRANSPORT
REQUEST TO CONTINUE FUNDING THIS BUS SCHEME**

(1) **Purpose of Report** To consider three separate petitions received about the future of Clowne and District Community Transport and the actions taken in relation to this issue.

(2) **Information and Analysis** At the meeting on 14 September 2017, the Cabinet Member acknowledged receipt of three petitions related to the future of Clowne and District Community Transport and asked the Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Communities to investigate the matter. (Minute No. 84/17 refers). The first petition says:

“The reason for this petition is to make Derbyshire County Council aware of the devastating effect the withdrawal of funding to the Community Bus scheme will have on elderly and disabled people. We, the undersigned, are urging Derbyshire County Council not to withdraw the funding from the Community Bus Scheme.” The petition was signed by 104 people. The Lead Petitioner also sent a copy of the petition to the Office of Dennis Skinner MP who in turn forwarded it to the Council.

The second petition was forwarded from the Office of Dennis Skinner MP and says:

“The reason for this petition is to make Derbyshire County Council aware of the devastating effect the withdrawal of funding to the Community Bus scheme will have on elderly and disabled people. We, the undersigned are urging Derbyshire County Council not to withdraw the funding from the Community Bus Scheme.” The petition was signed by 53 people.

The third petition was also forwarded from the Office of Dennis Skinner MP and says:

“The reason for this petition is to make Derbyshire County Council aware of the devastating effect the withdrawal of funding to the Community Bus scheme will have on elderly and disabled people. We, the undersigned are urging Derbyshire County Council not to withdraw the funding from the Community Bus Scheme.” The petition was signed by 34 people.

Background

Clowne and District Community Transport (CDCT) is an independent charity that has operated a variety of different transport services for the last 28 years in the Bolsover, Chesterfield and North East Derbyshire area. These include providing transport to day care centres under contract to Derbyshire County Council and using the grant funding from the Authority to operate the Dial-a-Bus and aCTive Travel access to health services.

In the past year, CDCT's financial position has deteriorated. In early 2017, its board of trustees decided not to tender for the new contracts issued by Derbyshire County Council to provide the Derbyshire Connect shopping and access to health services to replace the Dial-a-Bus and aCTive Travel services from October 2017. This was because it was unable to expand its scale of operations to include the larger areas which the new services would cover.

In June 2017, County Council officers were asked to attend a meeting of the CDCT board. At this meeting it became clear that in the light of its financial position, CDCT was unable to continue operating beyond the next few months and its board made a decision to close from the end of September 2017.

Local Members Comment

Local Members have been consulted and have made the following comments:

Councillor Dale *“The demise of Clowne Community Transport has left a vacuum in Shirebrook, Pleasley and New Houghton for many of my constituents that use it on a regular basis; some of whom are aged and disabled. The proposed solution however is proving to be too expensive and unreliable.”*

Councillor McGregor *“The residents whom I represent who used this service are very upset at the demise of the service and are requesting is there any way that the Council can assist in trying to save the service.”*

Councillor Western has expressed concern that the closure of CDCT should not adversely affect people who use local community groups. She asked that the new operators should make adequate provision for their needs, by keeping buses at a base in Clowne, by employing some of the CDCT drivers and volunteers to ensure a familiar face for vulnerable service users and by keeping charges at an affordable level.

Officer Comment

Grant funding to the various Community Transport schemes across Derbyshire had been provided for many years in return for them operating the Dial-a-Bus and aCTive Travel services. Following concerns about State Aid issues, it was agreed by Cabinet, on 26 January 2016, that grant funding would finish at the end of September 2017 (Minute No.19/16 refers). Public consultation on the future funding of Council bus services took place between February 2016 and April 2016, and, following this, Cabinet agreed at its meeting on 22 November 2016:

- *“To implement the proposals to withdraw support for the existing grant funded Dial-a-Bus service from October 2017.*
- *To mitigate the loss of Community Transport services by providing a new “Derbyshire Connect” service, which would be of particular benefit for current users of Community Transport, using funding previously earmarked for ‘Door to Door Plus’ (previously referred to as ‘aCTive travel Plus’). This would continue to provide all areas of the County with a weekly shopping service. To provide a level of service comparable to that currently provided, top-up funding of approximately £0.25m will be needed from savings in spending on supported services to provide a total of £0.350m a year.*
- *To integrate the “Derbyshire Connect” and “aCTive travel” services into single contracts.*
- *Procure the new service through a competitive tendering process.”* (Minute No. 368/16 refers).

As a result, a tender process was undertaken to find operators for the new services across Derbyshire, including the area served by CDCT. Contracts to the successful operators were awarded following Cabinet approval at the meeting on 4 April 2017.

While County Council officers are able to provide advice to CDCT as an independent charity, the board is free to make its own decision on the future direction the organisation should take. In this case, the board decided that, in the light of the financial situation, it wished to cease trading and stop operating services. It should be noted that this decision reflected CDCT’s overall financial position, rather than the withdrawal of grant funding. CDCT’s board was well aware of the planned change in funding arrangements and had taken this into account in developing its future plans, including exploring alternative funding opportunities.

The County Council Adult Care Transport contracts which CDCT had operated were retendered in August and are now being operated by Community Transport for Town and County. Since the beginning of October 2017, the Derbyshire Connect shopping bus service, which replaced the Dial-a-Bus services, is also now being operated under contract by Community

Transport for Town and County. The replacement aCtive Travel services are being provided by a specialist medical transport company called Carry Care.

Community Transport for Town and County will be keeping several of the vehicles it uses on these contract services at the Clowne depot site. These are being made available to local social groups which want to use them during the middle of the day between the contract hours and in the evenings and weekends. The former manager of CDCT has been working with the various groups who used its services to make them aware of these arrangements.

(3) **Financial Considerations** The services which CDCT formerly operated on behalf of the County Council have been retendered and are now being provided by other organisations. This has resulted in a modest increase in costs.

Other Considerations

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: legal, prevention of crime and disorder, equality and diversity, human resources, environmental, health, property, social value and transport considerations.

(4) **Key Decision** No.

(5) **Call-In** Is it required that call-in be waived in respect of the decisions proposed in the report? No.

(6) **Background Papers** Held on file within the Economy, Transport and Environment Department. Officer contact details – Chris Hegarty, extension 36721.

(7) **OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATIONS** That the Cabinet Member:

- 7.1 Rejects the petitions as Clowne and District Community Transport (CDCT) has made the decision to close and the County Council has no powers to require an independent charity to continue to operate.
- 7.2 Notes the actions taken to provide alternative services to those formerly operated by CDCT.
- 7.3 Informs the Local Members and lead petitioners accordingly.

Mike Ashworth
Strategic Director – Economy, Transport and Environment