

Portfolio Holder Decision – Submission of a Bid Application to the DfT Rural Mobility Fund

Portfolio Holder	Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning
Date of decision	19 February 2021
	Signed

Decision taken

That the Portfolio Holder for Transport & Planning gives approval for officers to submit a bid application for external funding to the Department for Transport's Rural Mobility Fund for the sum of £1.020million.

Reasons for decisions

The submission of bids for external funding must be signed off by the relevant WCC Cabinet Portfolio Holder.

Background information

In September 2019, the Government announced details regarding a £220million programme of commitments in 2020-21 towards transforming bus services in England, including a National Bus Strategy. Subsequently, in February 2020, the Department for Transport (DfT) invited local authorities to submit Expressions of Interest (EOI) regarding a £20million Rural Mobility Fund to assess the benefits of on-demand services to improve existing bus provision in rural and suburban areas. The DfT expects much of the fund to be awarded in chunks of between £0.5-£1.5million.

In June 2020, County Council officers submitted an EOI focused on a new demand responsive transport service serving residents in rural settlements situated to the west of the Warwick urban area and parts of Kenilworth. This represents a population below 10,000 residents in accordance with the DfT eligibility criteria, including Beausale, Budbrooke, Haseley, Hatton and Leek Wootton. The proposed new service would operate on Mondays to Saturdays between 0600 – 1930 and replace part of the conventional Service 16 bus service between Warwick – Kenilworth. The service would

provide residents with an improved service, enhanced accessibility, and greater flexibility, including catering for journeys to work.

This area was selected to be the focus of our Rural Mobility Fund bid due to the following key considerations:

- Service 16 is operated under contract to the County Council and Section 106 developer contributions have been secured to fund provision of a new demand responsive transport service that will replace the service;
- Patronage on the Service 16 has not met its full potential, and thus, the cost of providing the service in its current form does not provide Best Value; and
- Transforming the bus service provision to a sophisticated demand responsive transport service should provide greater flexibility for residents, boost patronage and reduce bus subsidy costs in real terms.

Provision of the new demand responsive transport service includes the launch of a mobile phone app enabling residents to book their journeys, like Uber when booking taxi journeys, albeit, residents will need to walk to the nearest bus stop to be picked up by the service. Residents will also be able to book their journeys online and via telephone through use of an existing call centre.

The demand responsive transport service would provide residents with access to major employment and training sites, e.g. Warwick Technology Park, schools and other education sites, Warwick Hospital, Warwick and Kenilworth Town Centres, Warwick, Warwick Parkway and Kenilworth Rail Stations, medical centres, leisure amenities and other public transport interchanges such as Warwick Bus Station.

In January 2021, the DfT confirmed that after receiving a large volume of EOIs, the County Council submission was included in a list of 17 bids selected to progress onto Phase 2 – submission of a formal bid application (business case) to be submitted by Friday 19 February 2021 including the Financial Case being signed off by the Section 151 Officer at the County Council. This is not a competitive bidding process, and therefore, the County Council will receive the funding pending submission of the formal application. The DfT is aiming to discharge the funding by 31 March 2021.

Financial implications

The total cost of setting up and operating the proposed pilot demand responsive transport service would be £1.752million over a 5-year period. The County Council is seeking a £1.020million contribution from the DfT towards this cost and will contribute our own partnership funding to the sum of £0.732million over this period.

The £0.732million County Council funding contribution will comprise the following elements:

- A Section 106 developer contribution of £150k relating to Planning Ref No. W/19/0933 (land on north side of Birmingham Road in Hatton), which was granted planning consent on 19 February 2020 and the 'Bus Service Contribution' is set for the enhancement of the existing bus service or setting up a new demand

responsive transport service to Warwick Parkway, Hampton Magna, Warwick Town Centre, Warwick Hospital and Warwick Technology Park, however, the Developer has yet to discharge the funding to the County Council;

- A Section 106 developer contribution of £224k relating to Planning Ref No. W/19/0691 (land off Arras Boulevard in Hampton Magna), which was granted planning consent on 13 November 2019 and the 'Bus Service Enhancement Contribution' includes the enhancement of the existing bus service, which the WCC Infrastructure Team has confirmed can be directed towards the new demand responsive transport service as this will replace the existing Service 16 which serves the site, however, the Developer has yet to discharge the funding to the County Council; and
- The remaining contribution will arise from the revenue support fund managed by the WCC Passenger Transport Team, including savings made from the withdrawal of the Service 16.

After expiry of the 5-year funding period, WCC Passenger Transport Team will take a decision as to whether to continue with the Scheme in full, or alternatively, adapt the Scheme to suit the available funding at the time.

Upon the County Council receiving the £1.020million Rural Mobility Fund grant from the DfT, officers will take a report to the Deputy Leader (Portfolio Holder for Finance and Property) seeking approval to add the capital elements onto the Capital Programme.

Depending on the success of the pilot demand responsive transport service over the 5-year funding period, County Council officers will be considering other areas for roll out including the introduction of mobile phone app journey booking features on existing demand responsive transport services in Rugby, Stratford-upon-Avon and North Warwickshire operated under contract to the County Council.

Environmental implications

The new demand responsive transport service would support economic growth in the area by enhancing access to employment sites, training, apprenticeships, education, retail centres and public transport interchanges.

The new service would promote social inclusion and encourage use of sustainable transport which would help improve the environment, including contributing towards helping the County Council and Warwick District Council achieving the targets set for the Air Quality Management Areas in Warwick and Kenilworth town centres.

The new service would also contribute towards the County Council's aspirations of reducing transport emissions and promoting public health set in the Warwickshire Local Transport Plan, in addition to supporting Warwick District Council in achieving their sustainability and Climate Emergency target of ensuring total emissions in Warwick District as a whole are as close to zero as possible by 2030.

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Assistant Director	David Ayton-Hill Assistant Director for Communities
Lead Director	Mark Ryder Strategic Director for Communities
Lead Member	Cllr Jeff Clarke Portfolio Holder for Transport and Planning

Urgent matter?	Yes or No
Confidential or exempt?	Yes or No
Is the decision contrary to the budget and policy framework?	Yes or No
List of background papers	
None.	

Members and officers consulted and informed
<p>Portfolio Holder – Councillor Jeff Clarke</p> <p>Corporate Board – Mark Ryder</p> <p>Legal – Ian Marriott</p> <p>Finance – Purnima Sherwood</p> <p>Equality – Keira Rounsley</p> <p>Democratic Services – Helen Barnsley</p> <p>Councillors – Golby, Shilton, Holland and Kondakor</p> <p>Local Member(s):</p> <p>Cllr Les Caborn (Budbrooke & Bishop's Tachbrook)</p> <p>Cllr Alan Cockburn (Kenilworth St. John's)</p> <p>Cllr John Cooke (Lapworth & West Kenilworth)</p> <p>Cllr Wallace Redford (Cubbington & Leek Wootton)</p> <p>Cllr Dave Shilton (Kenilworth Park Hill)</p>