

WOKING COMMUNITY TRANSPORT (TOWN CENTRE BUGGY) – APPLICATION FOR FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

Executive Summary

Woking Community Transport has applied to extend its revenue funding of £18,000 in the financial year ahead towards the continuation of the service provided by the Town Centre Buggy. The Buggy service is much valued by its disabled or elderly users. The Group highlights that the ongoing expansion of the Town Centre, along with changing demographics, will increase the demands on the Buggy as the number of passengers and distance covered will also rise. The new Buggy vehicle was introduced in December 2015, replacing the previous vehicle which was 17 years old.

The maintenance of the existing Town Centre Buggy service is essential for those with mobility difficulties enabling them to maintain independence and access the services and outlets that they require in the Town Centre. Alongside the Dial-a-Ride service, the Buggy provides an integrated channel whereby Dial-a-Ride users arriving in the Town Centre can be met by it for onward transport to their destination.

The Town Centre Buggy carried approximately 978 passengers last year, a reduction of 1,518 based on the previous twelve months. The Group states this is explained by the significant disruption caused by Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdowns. The Town Centre Buggy passenger number have steadily started to rise as restrictions gradually ease and usage figures are expected to increase as life gradually returns to normal, and more of the Town Centre build work is completed.

This year, the Group has provided the Council with two options for funding:

Option One: WCT continues to provide a Buggy service as per previous years, absorbing all inflation increases and the shortfall in the full cost of operating the vehicle. It is requesting a grant of £18,000 as a substantial contribution to cover the total costs of providing the service.

Option Two: The hours of Buggy operation are reduced from 4 hours per day to 3 hours per day, 09:30am to 12:30pm. It is requesting a lesser grant of £15,500 as a substantial contribution to cover the total costs of providing the service.

Due to the aging demographic in Woking and extensive changes in the town centre with the opening of the new shopping centre, it is anticipated that there will be increased demand for the buggy service in terms of passenger numbers and distance covered.

Woking Community Transport have updated the Quartix tracking device on the buggy. This will improve the vehicles security, and also enables them to pinpoint its location at any time and maximise efficiency if any requests for pick-ups are received.

Their grant request has remained static for 5 years with WCT absorbing all inflational increases. It is recommended that a grant be awarded of £18,000 for 2022/23. Any reduction in grant would result in a reduction of hours of availability of the service which remains vital to enable access for all when the new shopping area opens. No reduction is proposed due to Woking Community Transport submitting an application for its Bustler service at a significant level less than the amount awarded last year (£175,757 applied for against £205,000 awarded last year).

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Recommendations	
The Executive is requested to:	RESOLVE That , subject to the outcome of the Council’s budgetary process, a grant of £18,000 be awarded from the Community Grants Budget to assist towards the costs of the Town Centre Buggy service operated by Woking Community Transport.
Reason for Decision	To enable Woking Community Transport to continue to provide the Town Centre Buggy service in Woking.
Confirmation of funding	This award is provisionally made on the expectation that the Council’s budgets for revenue and capital projects remain at the same level allocated for the current financial year. The Council’s overall budget, including the sums allocated for community grants, will be determined by Council at its meeting on 10 February 2022. In the event the grant budgets are set at the anticipated levels, confirmation of the Council’s support will be sent to successful applicants. Groups should not plan for the 2022/23 funding until this confirmation has been received.
Conditions	<p>Accounts. The Organisation must submit audited accounts for the year in which the grant is awarded, including an income and expenditure account and balance sheet. Please note that accounts for other years may also be required.</p> <p>Monitoring Information. The Organisation must submit quarterly monitoring information as a measure of its achievements. Failure to provide details will jeopardise the award. E-mail requests will be sent to the applicant on a quarterly basis.</p> <p>Publicity. Where possible, the Organisation is required to publicise the support received from Woking Borough Council, including on all literature and leaflets produced.</p> <p>Payments. Unless exceptional circumstances exist all invoices must be received quarterly with details of the costs incurred and monitoring information for the previous quarter.</p> <p>Payment Period. Final quarter claims must be made by the second week in March. Unclaimed awards will not be available at a later date unless exceptional circumstances can be demonstrated to the Council before the end of the award year.</p> <p>Joint Working. WBC expects the Organisation to engage positively on health and wellbeing multi-agency joint work affecting Woking. Groups which refuse may place their Council support at risk, e.g. grant, concessionary rent and other assistance.</p> <p>Homelessness Reduction Act 2017. With the introduction of new legislation from April 2018, the Council will expect the support of partner agencies in identifying people at risk of homelessness as early as possible to maximise the opportunities to prevent such. Partner agencies / organisations will be expected to be engaged in joint working arrangements to assist in finding suitable housing and support solutions, and where appropriate to undertake and respond to the new ‘duty to refer’. Groups which do not support this new legislation and way of working positively, may put their Council support at risk.</p>

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Performance Indicators	<p>Users. The Organisation to provide a breakdown of the users in the past quarter.</p> <p>Publicity. The Organisation to advise how the Council's support has been publicised over the last quarter.</p> <p>Statement of Use. The Organisation to provide a statement stating the use to which the grant money has been put.</p>
Future Support	<p>The financial pressure on the Council's budgets is expected to continue in the coming years and accordingly the overall level of support available in future years may be reduced. The applicant is therefore to be advised that the award of funding for 2022/23 does not imply that a similar application in 2023/24 would be supported. In particular, it is emphasised that the Council is unlikely to be in a position to award any sums above the 2022/23 levels.</p> <p>In view of this, the applicant is to be advised to ensure that contingency plans for the Group's operations for 2023/24 have been drawn up in the event that the Council is unable to continue its support beyond April 2023. All applicants are strongly recommended to pursue alternative sources of funding and are encouraged to approach Woking Borough Council's Community Support Team for advice and support.</p>

The Executive has authority to determine the above recommendations.

Background Papers:

2022/23 Application Form.

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1.0 Summary of Application	
1.1 Status and Aims	<p>Woking Community Transport (WCT) was founded in 1991 and is a registered society under the Cooperative and Community Benefit Societies Act 2014 regulated by the FCA. It is accepted by HMRC as having exempt charitable status. The Group provides accessible door to door transport to those who would otherwise be socially excluded because of poverty, disability or age.</p> <p>It is based in Woking and relies upon grants from Woking Borough Council and Surrey County Council to provide Dial-a-Ride, Centre and Group transport services. Additionally, under contract, the Group provides services to SCC (Home to School (Send) and Adult & Community Care) and is working with the North West Surrey Clinical Commissioning Group and the South Central Ambulance Trust in respect of Hospital related non-emergency patient transport.</p> <p>WCT also delivers transport services for Woking Community Hospital, the Bedser Hub and similar Hub services at Ashford and Walton Hospitals, and transport on behalf of Woking Adult Social Services. The Hubs provide proactive and reactive care for older people with frailty and multiple long-term conditions who are registered with a Woking GP. The service is provided by an integrated team of health, mental health and social care staff. It is an innovative, multi-disciplinary model that has received local and national praise for the benefits it has delivered for patients and the local health system overall.</p> <p>The Charity also manages the Town Centre Buggy.</p>
1.2 Employees	<p>84. 45 of the staff are employed as drivers, with 19 as Passenger Assistants, 15 as Office Staff and 5 as Garage Staff. 16 members of staff are full-time (over 35 hours), 50 are part-time (10-35 hours) and 18 are on casual contracts.</p>
1.3 Volunteers	<p>4. There are two types of volunteer at the Charity:</p> <p>Directors take an active role within the organisation, travelling on vehicles to monitor the service, producing policies, accounts and general governance of the society.</p> <p>Drivers work on group transport to provide reduced cost services to local groups including schools, sports teams, assisted living home groups, local Charities, Centres for the Community (day trips for the elderly or to the Centres for activities) and occasional ad hoc requests from the Borough Council.</p>
1.4 Clients/Users	<p>3,298, comprising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1,029 male 2,269 female 2,318 disabled 3,298 resident in Woking 7 aged 11-18

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	<p>331 aged 19-65 2,957 aged 65+</p> <p>The Town Centre Buggy is provided to users free of charge.</p> <p>In 2020/21 978 passenger trips were completed in and around the Town Centre, a reduction compared with the previous year's number of trips due to the COVID-19 outbreak and subsequent lockdown. The Buggy has continued to operate throughout the extensive building work being undertaken within and around the Town Centre, and a large increase in passenger numbers is foreseen once the work has been completed.</p>
1.5 Members	The users of the service are also stated to be Members.
1.6 Sum Requested	£18,000 (Revenue)
1.7 Project	<p>With the demands of changing demographics and the extensive changes to the shopping area in the Town Centre that are currently in hand, Woking Community Transport expects that the demands on the Buggy in terms of the numbers of passengers and distances covered will increase. The Group is therefore requesting to extend its existing grant of £18,000 as a substantial contribution to cover the revenue costs of providing the service (after deducting expected fundraising).</p> <p>The Town Centre Buggy is operated for five days a week (Monday to Friday) between 9.30am and 1.30pm. It provides an integrated service whereby Dial-a-Ride users arriving in the Town Centre can be met by it for onward transport to their destination.</p> <p>It is worthy of note that a Quartix tracking device has been installed on the Buggy, which improves vehicle security and enables its location to be pinpointed should telephone requests be received for a pick up. Additionally, ease of access has been improved through a second telephone number through which the Buggy can be reached. These improvements have been funded by Woking Community Transport and have not been included within the grant request.</p> <p>This year, the Group has provided the Council with two options for funding:</p> <p><u>Option One:</u> WCT continues to provide a Buggy service as per previous years, absorbing all inflation increases and the shortfall in the full cost of operating the vehicle. It is requesting a grant of £18,000 as a substantial contribution to cover the total costs of providing the service.</p> <p><u>Option Two:</u> The hours of Buggy operation are reduced from 4 hours per day to 3 hours per day, 09:30am to 12:30pm. It is requesting a lesser grant of £15,500 as a substantial contribution to cover the total costs of providing the service.</p>
1.8 Cost breakdown:	The budget is set out at section 2.1.
1.9 Community Benefit	The Town Centre Buggy carried approximately 978 passengers last year. This is a reduction of 1,518 based on the previous twelve months. The Group sees this as being explained by the significant disruption caused by Covid-19 and the subsequent lockdowns. The Town Centre Buggy passenger number have steadily started to rise

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	<p>as restrictions gradually ease and usage figures are expected to increase as life gradually returns to normal, and more of the Town Centre build work is completed.</p> <p>Users vary greatly in age, ethnicity and disability but all have significantly reduced mobility and welcome the help they receive in accessing the Town Centre and its facilities. For many, it enables them to shop and bank independently as well as accessing other amenities. Population trends, along with the Bustler's increasing membership, means that the need for the service is likely to increase.</p>
<p>1.10 Covid-19 Impact</p>	<p>Throughout the pandemic, WCT has continued to provide a Dial-a-Ride and Community Centre service at a reduced level due to an initial reduction in demand resulting from the national lockdown, which led to a lower than normal operating cost. However, during the crisis many of the most vulnerable members of the community have found it extremely difficult to get out. This may have been due to shielding, reduced mobility, or not having the means to travel. The Group recognised the difficulty many of its Dial-a-Ride members would have getting to hospital appointments and shops, and introduced a free Dial-a-Ride service to members throughout August and September 2020.</p> <p>There have also been increased costs for PPE and the purchase of monitoring devices to check staff and customers' temperatures. It has also invested in a machine to deep clean vehicles, with extra costs from the costs of the chemicals used within the machine.</p> <p>In addition to the above, WCT was called upon under the emergency callout provision, and has provided several vehicles to SCC for use on the (7 days a week) emergency food delivery service, which included delivering food boxes to Woking residents. It has provided PPE delivery across Surrey, along with home to school transport for key worker children. Its vehicles were also used on NHS staff transport, clinic transport, transporting people for Covid-19 testing, and for the delivery of NHS electronic devices to care homes.</p> <p>The Group has provided drivers for the Woking Meals on Wheels service, and transported homeless people from the York Road Project to the St Mary's Centre for the Community to undertake project work there. It has supported the Woking Foodbank by collecting supplies from supermarkets, and completed numerous ad hoc requests from WBC, SCC, and the NHS.</p> <p>Woking Community Transport has also provided free shuttle transport in Woking Town Centre from the car park to the vaccination centre and back; assisted the County Council in the delivery of almost 8,000 activity bags to 214 primary schools across the county; and supplied vehicles in liaison with NHS vaccination staff to provide mobile vaccination centres for the travellers' community.</p>

<h3>2.0 Financial Background</h3>	
<p>2.1 Budget</p>	<p>At the time of the application, the Group held £277,578 in the bank.</p> <p>Three new electric vehicles not purchased during the pandemic are</p>

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	<p>awaiting delivery at a cost of £82,611 to £98,556 each.</p> <p>The Group has submitted an expenditure budget for the Town Centre Buggy during 2022/23 for 25 hours each week which shows a total cost of £19,200 (including £500 of external fundraising awarded).</p>
2.2 Accounts	<p>The Group has submitted accounts for 2020/21. The Income and Expenditure account shows a surplus for the financial year of £463,478 (£71,287 in 2019/20). The sum of £1,160,478 was carried forward at the end of the 2020/21 year.</p>
2.3 Support over the past five years	<p>2021/22 – £18,000 2020/21 – £18,000 2019/20 – £18,000 2018/19 – £18,000 2017/18 – £18,000</p>

3.0 Assessment of Application		
3.1 Key Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Constitution ○ Registered Charity ○ VAT Registered ○ Equal Opportunities Policy ○ Safeguarding Policy ○ Reserves Policy ○ Quality Mark ○ Other funding sources pursued ○ Other support by the Council ○ Fundraising ○ Two quotes ○ Regular monitoring provided previously <p>* In the past WBC has purchased one vehicle each year to support the services, however due to the expected electric vehicles from SCC, this will not be requested this year.</p>	<p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>Yes *</p> <p>Yes</p> <p>N/A</p> <p>Yes</p>
3.2 Assessment	<p><u>Officer Comments</u></p> <p>Due to the aging demographic in Woking and extensive changes in the town centre with the opening of the new shopping centre, it is anticipated that there will be increased demand for the buggy service in terms of passenger numbers and distance covered.</p> <p>Woking Community Transport have updated the Quartix tracking device on the buggy. This will improve the vehicles security, and also enables them to pinpoint its location at any time and maximise efficiency if any requests for pick-ups are received.</p> <p>Their grant request has remained static for 5 years with WCT absorbing all inflational increases.</p>	

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It is recommended that a grant be awarded of £18,000 for 2022/23. Any reduction in grant would result in a reduction of hours of availability of the service which remains vital to enable access for all when the new shopping area opens.

Comments from Councillors Appointed to Group (Councillors Josh Brown and Deborah Hughes)

The grant for the town centre buggy supports this valuable service which is otherwise a cost pressure.

The Councillor observers are confident that the Council's grant funding of WCT is well spent and constitutes good value for money, and therefore fully support their application for this grant. The feedback from service users is positive, the transport provides a life line to many in the Borough.

REPORT ENDS