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# NORTH AYRSHIRE COUNCIL

30 May 2023

## Cabinet

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**Title:** North Ayrshire Community Transport Pathfinder

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**Purpose:** To set out initial proposals for a Community Transport Pathfinder project in North Ayrshire.

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**Recommendation:** That Cabinet approves the next steps for the Community Transport Pathfinder set out at paragraphs 2.11 to 2.14.

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### 1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The Community Transport Association defines community transport as “providing flexible and accessible community-led solutions in response to unmet local transport needs.” There is no fixed model or vehicle used for community transport, however it can serve a vital role in addressing loneliness and social isolation, and in providing access to services, training and employment opportunities.
- 2.2 The cost and availability of transport within North Ayrshire has been confirmed as a concern for local communities through recent engagement activity. An allocation of £0.100m for a community transport pathfinder project was therefore agreed as part of the Council’s budget setting approach in March 2023.
- 1.3 Officers have undertaken initial discussions with Coalfield Community Transport (CCT), a registered, Ayrshire based community transport charity. CCT are interested in exploring a potential partnership with North Ayrshire Council to provide community transport services in our area. As such, the initial proposals are to test demand for CCT’s community transport services in North Ayrshire.
- 1.4 It is recommended that further survey work be undertaken during summer 2023 to assess travel needs and identify priorities and locations for the community transport pilot. This will be informed by consultation with communities and stakeholders and take account of existing public transport opportunities to identify gaps in provision. This will ensure that the pilot project meets identified needs within communities.
- 1.5 This survey work will be undertaken in parallel with a proposed soft-launch of CCT’s Dayhopper service in North Ayrshire over the summer period, which would involve CCT recruiting and registering members in North Ayrshire and provide a series of scenic tours and shopping excursions.
- 1.6 The feedback from the survey work and Dayhopper launch, along with ongoing engagement through Locality Partnerships, will then inform a set of recommendations for the wider community transport pilot for Cabinet consideration later this year.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 The Community Transport Association defines community transport as “providing flexible and accessible community-led solutions in response to unmet local transport needs.” There is no fixed model or vehicle used for community transport, however it can serve a vital role in addressing loneliness and social isolation, and in providing access to vital services, training and employment opportunities. Often those who utilise community transport opportunities are those who are vulnerable or isolated in some way and it can help them to maintain or develop independence. Community transport schemes are usually supported by volunteers within communities and they may provide services such as hospital transport, vehicles available for lease by local groups, or community bus schemes.
- 2.2 Following budget engagement activity undertaken earlier this year, coupled with mini-enquiries which took place around various themes associated with the cost of living and child poverty, transport was again confirmed as an issue for many North Ayrshire communities. The cost and availability of both public transport and vehicles for hire meant that vulnerable and more rural residents in particular were limited in their abilities to get from place to place, and it was reported that this in turn limited their ability to be involved in community life, get to vital appointments or take up learning and employment opportunities.
- 2.3 The provision of transport at the right time and right cost can provide benefits to communities by reducing social isolation, enhancing wellbeing, and providing access to learning and employment opportunities, as well as reducing carbon emissions.
- 2.4 Community Transport is an enabler and has an impact across a number of policy areas including access to health, preventative measures in relation to health and social care and social isolation and loneliness. Users of community transport can include older people, people with mental, physical or learning disabilities, people travelling to and from health services and people living in rural areas.
- 2.5 The community transport sector could play a key role in the provision of transport services in North Ayrshire. Community transport can be used as an alternative to public services to reach those most isolated in rural locations, or as a partner alongside it.
- 2.6 In terms of demand for community transport, within the Garnock Valley locality, the Locality Partnership worked with Planning Aid Scotland and the Sustaining Places project to carry out engagement with communities that helped to develop a body of evidence that demonstrates the changes they would like to see in their area regarding walking, wheeling, cycling, and public transport. This took place in the second half of 2022 and the report was published in January 2023. Feedback provided noted gaps in transport provision including lack of affordable, reliable and frequent bus services, and timetabling gaps between different transport modes. The wider mini-enquiries undertaken in other localities noted similar feedback.
- 2.7 In response to this feedback from communities, and in recognition of the importance of transport links in helping achieve the aspirations of communities and the Council, North Ayrshire Council in their 2023/24 budget agreed to an allocation of £0.100m being earmarked for a community transport pilot.

- 2.8 The pilot will, as far as possible, operate on a cost-recovery basis, in order to provide access to transport at reasonable cost, while providing opportunities for scalable and sustainable models for longer-term delivery to be identified. It is envisaged that the pilot will run for an initial duration of twelve months.
- 2.9 Officers have undertaken exploratory discussions with Coalfield Community Transport (CCT), a registered Ayrshire based community transport charity, operating since 2002. CCT provide a range of community transport services from their fleet of vehicles and drivers, including for shopping and excursions. These discussions have led to a set of recommended next steps for a community transport pilot in North Ayrshire.
- 2.10 One of the most important requirements is to better understand the demand for community transport services.
- 2.11 The next steps therefore include the facilitation of surveys in the locality areas to gauge potential demand, focusing on current gaps in provision. An in-depth Travel Needs Analysis is being commissioned by the working group for the Garnock Valley Locality Partnership, funded by the Community Investment Fund. This will provide an evidence base to currently anecdotal transport challenges experienced throughout the Garnock Valley. The engagement will identify barriers to accessing local transport, identify patterns and make recommendations to overcome these barriers including, it is expected, the potential for community transport provision.
- 2.12 In addition, a community engagement exercise will be conducted in parallel with the above study across North Ayrshire. This will identify local transport needs alongside the barriers to and gaps in local provision which could be met through community transport. This will establish the demand for a community transport service and what form this could take to meet the needs of local communities. External funding opportunities will also be considered as part of this process to maximise the reach of the funding and scope of the pilot project.
- 2.13 In light of existing community engagement feedback to date, there is a desire to undertake an early provision exercise. This would involve Coalfield Community Transport advertising and recruiting members in North Ayrshire and offering their 'Dayhopper' services through a series of excursions over the summer period. This could include scenic tours or day trips, for example to our tourism destinations including Largs, Arran and Cumbrae, helping to support our local economy and reflecting a Community Wealth Building approach. A support model would be agreed with Coalfield Community Transport to help deliver this expanded offer.
- 2.14 The survey work and feedback from the Dayhopper soft launch over the summer will then inform the scoping of wider potential provision, alongside ongoing engagement with local people through Local Partnerships. Future pilot provision could include, for example:
- Door to door minibus transport for home-to-town trips for people who find public transport difficult to use and for outings to help people stay socially active and independent.
  - Group minibus transport for local charities, community groups and clubs.

- 2.15 Any future pilot community transport provision would seek to align with Council priorities alongside affordability within the wider £0.100m funding envelope allocated. Opportunities to complement that budget with external funding are also being investigated.

### **3. Proposals**

- 3.1 That Cabinet approves the recommended next steps for the Community Transport Pathfinder set out at paragraphs 2.11 to 2.14.

### **4. Implications/Socio-economic Duty**

#### **Financial**

- 4.1 A total of £0.100m was allocated for the community transport pathfinder project as part of Council budget setting in March 2023. Officers will seek to augment this through investigation of other external funding opportunities.

#### **Human Resources**

- 4.2 None.

#### **Legal**

- 4.3 Legal Services have been consulted on the proposals and will continue to advise as required.

#### **Equality/Socio-economic**

- 4.4 The proposal is designed to provide socio-economic benefits through the provision of low-cost transport particularly to vulnerable people on low incomes and/or who are experiencing the effects of social isolation.

#### **Climate Change and Carbon**

- 4.5 The provision of community transport can help reduce carbon emissions by reducing reliance on private transport.

#### **Key Priorities**

- 4.6 The proposals contribute to the Council's key priority that North Ayrshire has 'active and strong communities' and is 'well connected with effective infrastructure'.

#### **Community Wealth Building**

- 4.7 The proposal reflects community wealth building principles, for example through a potential partnership approach with an existing Ayrshire based community transport provider, and scope to offer excursions to our own tourism destinations to help support the local economy.

## 5. Consultation

- 5.1 Consultation feedback from budget engagement sessions and cost of living mini-enquiries held earlier in 2023 was used to inform the proposals within this report. It is proposed that priorities for the pilot project will be identified through community and stakeholder consultation through the survey work detailed in the report.

RUSSELL McCUTCHEON  
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For further information please contact **insert officers name, Insert officer's designation,** on **Insert author's phone number.**

## Background Papers

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