

REPORT TO ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT COMMITTEE

COMMUNITY TRANSPORT SCHEMES



Report Reference ET-23-20
Meeting Date 5th February 2024
Agenda Item 8
Prepared by Town Clerk

1.0 BACKGROUND

The committee identified a current year action under objective T6 of the council's strategic plan to better understand the community transport schemes in Knutsford and identify if any support is required.

There are two community transport schemes operating in Knutsford, the Town Clerk has met with the volunteers leading each scheme and a summary of the schemes is provided in section two. Additionally, there is a Cheshire East Council flexi-link scheme which is also overviewed in section two.

2.0 EXISTING COMMUNITY TRANSPORT SCHEMES

2.1 KNUTSFORD COMMUNITY TRANSPORT ASSOCIATION

The Knutsford Community Transport Association (KCTA) was established in 2002 and operates a 16-seater minibus which is available to member organisations to use for their services. The bus is accessible and can accommodate up to three wheelchairs (which reduces the standard seating at a 2 seats for 1 wheelchair ratio).

KCTA is managed by volunteers. Its current bus was acquired in 2016 at a cost of c. £50,000 through funding secured by then MP George Osborne through a government scheme. It is expected the existing minibus will be operational for a further 8-10 years; as the group does not generate funds to build a fund for a replacement it would be reliant on securing grants for a new vehicle.

The minibus can be used by community organisations which are members of KCTA for the purposes of transporting their users, it cannot be used for the 'general public'. Any non-profit organisation can join KCTA subject to acquiring a s19 permit¹ and KCTA will then arrange training for the drivers– no additional license is required. Current members are the Canute Lunch Club, Knutsford Stroke Club, St John's Church, The Welcome, Knutsford Methodist Church, Knutsford Lions, Stanley Centre Cycling and Connecting Chelford.

The bus is currently underutilised. It does approximately 3-4k miles per year and organisations using the bus pay £1.10 per mile to do so (inclusive of fuel). In 2023-24 the KCTA income was £3.4k with costs of £3.6k; it has fixed costs of c. £2.1k pa.

There is one main need for the KCTA – more organisations using the bus. This will both increase the

¹ Transport Act 1985 s19. This is a permit to carry passengers who are members of an organisation or people the organisation exists to help.

income for KCTA but also members of KCTA are involved in the management of KCTA and the group needs more active users to support management of the scheme.

2.1 KNUTSFORD AND DISTRICT GOOD NEIGHBOURS

The Knutsford and District Good Neighbours (KDBG) was established in 1999 and provides access to medical appointments for residents in Knutsford and the surrounding villages. It is operated by volunteer drivers who will transport someone who needs to access NHS medical services (doctor appointments, specialist appointments, dentistry etc), customers are invited to make a donation to KDBG but not obligated to do so. The service is predominantly used by those who are unable to drive but have the means to make a donation (i.e. it is not well used by those without the means to afford donations). KDBG will transport members to appointments within and outside Knutsford (e.g to Macclesfield Hospital, or on one occasion as far as Oswestry), but users must be registered with the Knutsford Medical Partnership with the majority of customers being referred by the surgery.

Volunteers use their own cars and are able to reclaim mileage costs, although most elect not to. The scheme is supported by a team of co-ordinators who, on rota, take calls from customers and arrange drivers. KDBG currently provide around 600-650 journeys per year, approximately half the pre-COVID levels; the organisation has lost drivers and coordinators since COVID and has increasingly had to decline requests due to lack of drivers.

The two core needs for the organisation are increased publicity and the recruitment of new drivers and coordinators.

2.3 FLEXILINK SCHEME

The Cheshire East Council FlexiLink scheme operates between 930 and 1430 Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays). The FlexiLink bus does not operate to a timetable, it is a responsive shared service that provides a custom pickup/drop-off for passengers. Passengers are required to book in advance (via phone or the internet) between 1 month and 48hrs before travel, the bus then plans the most efficient route for passengers wishing to travel.

Use of the FlexiLink service is for those aged 80 or over, those with disabilities or those beyond the reach of any other public transport and all journeys are £3 or free for those with concessionary bus passes. Information on update from within Knutsford is awaited.

3.0 DECISION REQUIRED

The report is primarily for information and no decision is required.

Subject to any direction from the committee, it is intended that the council will support the promotion of both organisations by:

- a) Featuring both organisations in community newsletters to promote them to potential users/volunteers
- b) Creating a poster for KDBG to display in noticeboards to promote the scheme
- c) Creating a section on the town council website to promote both schemes and support this with scheduled social media posts about the schemes

The council will then follow up with both organisations routinely to see if these have helped and assess the ongoing vitality of the organisations.