

Audit and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting held at County Hall,
Colliton Park, Dorchester on 25 November 2014.

Present:-

Trevor Jones (Chairman)
Mike Byatt (Vice-Chairman)
Deborah Crony, David Harris and Peter Wharf.

Peter Finney (Cabinet Member for Environment and the Economy) and Rebecca Knox (Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Families) attended under Standing Order 54(1).

Ronald Coatsworth, Chairman of the Dorset Health Scrutiny Committee, attended by invitation.

Officers:

Andrew Archibald (Head of Adult Services), Jonathan French (Corporate Policy and Performance Officer (Complaints)). Mike Harries (Director for the Environment and the Economy), Steve Hedges (Group Finance Manager), Sam Fox-Adams (Head of Policy, Partnerships and Communications), Ann Salter (Head of Strategy, Partnerships and Performance), Jan Stevenson (Passenger Transport Service Manager), Mark Taylor (Head of Internal Audit, Insurance and Risk Management), Sue Warr (POPP Manager) and Helen Whitby (Principal Democratic Services Officer).

Guest Speakers

Simon Fraiz-Brown (Participation and Engagement Manager, Children's Services) and Charlotte, Grace and Kieron representing the Dorset Youth Council Enables (DYCE)
Mike Bateman, Beaminster Area Community Cars
Sally Falkingham, Maiden Newton Area Community Cars
Patrick Jeffery, Winterborne St Martin Parish
Hugh de Lough, Community Led Development Officer, North Dorset District Council
Karen Rose, Community Transport Officer, Devon County Council
Faye Ashton, Tiverton and District Community Transport Association
Andrew Wickham, Go South Coast
Jane Pike, Director of Service Delivery, Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group

(Note: These minutes have been prepared by officers as a record of the meeting and of any decisions reached. They are to be considered and confirmed at the next meeting of the Audit and Scrutiny Committee on **16 December 2014**.)

Apologies for Absence

174. Apologies for absence were received from Andrew Cattaway, Lesley Dedman and Ian Gardner.

Code of Conduct

175. There were no declarations by members of any discloseable pecuniary interests under the Code of Conduct.

Minutes

176. The minutes of the meetings held on 16 September and 16 October 2014 were confirmed and signed.

Public ParticipationPublic Speaking

177.1 There were no public questions received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(1).

177.2 There were no public statements received at the meeting in accordance with Standing Order 21(2).

Petitions

177.3 There were no petitions received in accordance with the County Council's petition scheme at this meeting.

Review of Community Transport

178.1 The Committee considered a report by the Chief Executive which reminded members that they had agreed to carry out a review of Community Transport at their meeting on 10 June and considered a scoping report for the review at their meeting on 22 July 2014.

178.2 The Chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting and explained that community transport was a significant issue for the County Council. For those unfamiliar with the Committee he explained its membership and how it operated, and highlighted that it had no decision making powers but could make recommendations to the County Council's Cabinet. Unusually the meeting had not been prompted by something going awry but because the County Council needed to develop an alternative to conventional public transport. The purpose of the meeting was to use the key lines of enquiry within the report and listen to invitees and their experiences in order to make recommendations for the Cabinet to consider once the way forward was clear. Invitees would receive a copy of the agreed findings.

Rebecca Knox, Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Families

178.3 The Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Families welcomed the review. She had been concerned about the direction community transport was taking following the Cabinet's decision to allocate funding to it, yet no progress had been evidenced. She had become even more concerned when a community car scheme in her division was given an ultimatum to close, particularly as she thought such schemes should be encouraged. She confirmed that Community Transport affected the finance of each of the County Council's Directorates and everyone from young to old, including children and young people. Although the County Council provided £100,000 for community transport, she felt this was little compared to the overall Council transport budget of £22m. She hoped that the Committee would learn from those present and their experiences so that successes and best practice could be shared and incorporated into the Holistic Review of Transport which was due to be implemented in 2016. She recognised that for many people community transport was essential to allow them to remain at home, but she also recognised that each community was different and that some might not have any community transport needs.

Simon Faiz-Brown (Participation and Engagement Manager, Children's Services) and Charlotte, Grace and Kieron, Dorset Youth Council Enables (DYCE)

178.4 The Participation and Engagement Manager explained the role and the work of DYCE. The Young People then explained that DYCE had been campaigning for better transport for young people since 2007, leading to a Transport Summit which was held in April 2012 involving young people, professionals, elected members and public transport providers. This identified several key issues and led to the creation of the Dorset Young People's Transport Forum (the Forum) which had met quarterly since that time to address the identified issues. Details of the Forum's membership were given.

178.5 The Young People informed the Committee that it was not transport itself which was the issue, but the access to help and support that young people needed, particularly if they lived in rural areas. The Forum had been involved in the creation of Think Access Standards for services, improving access to vehicles owned by schools and voluntary sector groups, exploring different community schemes to improve access for young people, including the Bopper Bus and moped schemes, the organisation of a workshop with First Bus to try and improve relationships between drivers and young people, and liaison with community car schemes to see whether they would transport young people.

178.6 The Participation and Engagement Manager explained that the Council had commissioned Dorset Youth Association to run a scheme which would make use of the Youth Service's vehicles. However, poor publicity of the scheme, driver assessments, additional driving licence requirements and the costs involved meant that take up had been poor. There had also been issues with regard to accessing vehicles and the collecting and returning of keys. Transport was an issue for many as it provided access for people to undertake activities, attend appointments and visit places, family and friends. He also highlighted the need for people to be able to access specialist services and the difficulty this posed for people who lived in rural areas.

178.7 With regard to what community transport was, the young people explained that this included anything which would enable access. When asked about what would improve the current situation, the young people stated that measures such as subsidised transport, bus and train timetables that fitted together, more car share and community transport schemes would help.

Mike Harries, Director for Environment and the Economy

178.8 The Director for Environment and the Economy distributed a handout which provided facts and figures of specialist transport provided by the County Council, the budget available, what the Council was currently doing, how it was working with community transport providers, future plans and project activities and recommendations for the Holistic Transport Review (HTR). The Director was the lead officer for the HTR which was focused on transport and that people used it to travel for a purpose. With regard to the role of community transport in the larger picture, he wanted a system whereby community transport was available alongside a viable bus service with everyone benefiting from an integrated service. The County Council's current policy was out of date and work to develop a holistic and community led policy would start shortly and would need to be in place by April 2015. The Council faced a number of challenges including the deregulation of buses, viability of bus routes outside of urban areas, the need to enable community partnerships to engage in contract letting, the need to assess current models for strengths and weaknesses, to carry out options appraisals, improve the fleet utilisation, to consider the position of young people and the fleet to be used to best effect. Once the review had been completed, recommendations for the future of the service would follow.

Peter Finney, Cabinet Member for Environment and the Economy

178.9 The Cabinet Member for Environment and the Economy stated that community transport had developed in a piecemeal fashion over a number of years. The interest shown by the Cabinet Member for Children's Safeguarding and Families had contributed to the HTR. He recognised that there was no one solution for community transport, but a number of options for communities to consider or introduce. The County Council subsidised buses in the sum of £2m but if this funding was shifted to community transport he questioned whether non-subsidised bus routes would be maintained. Dorset was largely a rural county, with some heavily populated areas which were well served by bus routes. The HTR would look at the current situation holistically.

178.10 With regard to implementation of recommendations from the HTR, the Director explained that the strategy and policy would need to be in place by March/April 2015 as there was a major re-procurement of contracts in 2016 and the framework needed to be in place for this. The Cabinet Member for Environment and the Economy added that systems needed to be in place by March for the new school year in September 2015.

178.11 In response to members' questions, the Director explained that the Council wanted to develop community transport by working and listening to communities. He hoped that community transport would be able to provide the means for residents to travel to commercial bus routes but he recognised that current schemes focused on the older population and there seemed little opportunities for younger people. It was noted that Community transport enabled day to day living and also contributed to health and wellbeing. With regard to voluntary car schemes, the Council had provided insurance more cheaply through a block policy, although there was a small training requirement, and there were other areas where the Council could help provide training.

178.12 With regard to better use of school transport vehicles as a hub for community transport, the Passenger Transport Service Manager explained that bus companies often booked other journeys around their school commitments. She added that software had recently been purchased which would show how bus routes overlapped and would help with transport modelling. She hoped to encourage parents to consider travel to school at the time applications for places were made, which would enable commissioning decisions to be taken earlier, reduce empty running and reduce the costs involved. She drew attention to the fact that vehicles used for Special Educational Needs transport and transport to day and learning disability centres were not used during the middle part of the day, that it was difficult to find voluntary drivers for the Council's vehicles and there might be a training requirement for them. The Council might also consider whether training could be offered to community transport schemes as a contribution to their costs. There was no information available about the number of volunteers. Previously schemes had been biased towards older people, but there was a need for community transport to support the wider community. She highlighted that the Department for Transport considered Devon's transport system to be a good model to follow. Officers were also to visit Oxfordshire as it had similarities to Dorset.

178.13 It was noted that data on current usage would inform the model being developed. The tender was due in 2016 and current routes could be extended to allow for any model to be developed.

178.14 The Director added that a common strategy was needed to support the procurement process in 2016. With regard to payment, he confirmed that few schemes were free for users as most had a mileage rate attached. He thought a common card payment scheme for buses and trains might be possible, but he doubted this would be feasible for the 60 community car schemes. He hoped that any recommendations would be in time for the budget cycle, and identify how resources could be used to best effect. He hoped that by changing the way community transport was supported and by subsidising it, more funding would not be necessary.

Sue War, POPP Manager

178.15 The POPP Manager explained that Partnership for Older People Programme (POPP) had been in existence since 2006. It supported and enabled older people to remain in the community by supporting communities to help prevent a decline in their health and maintain them at home rather than requiring intensive support. Originally POPP had been in receipt of Department of Health funding but was now jointly funded by the Council and the NHS. It provided a means for people to access information about services and practical help available to them to develop opportunities according to local need. The scheme had worked well with little intervention from the Council and the NHS.

178.15 The Neighbourhood Car Scheme (NCS), based on a model used in Hampshire, was a community led scheme of volunteer drivers and provided co-ordinated local transport to enable people to get to appointments and activities. There were 26 schemes across Dorset now. They were seed funded by POPP and operated on the principle of users making a donation for the cost of their journey to cover the cost of volunteers expenses, telephone, insurance and public liability. Each of the 26 schemes used POPP's criteria. Some schemes only dealt with medical appointments, whereas others did not do them at all.

178.16 With regard to geographical coverage, members noted that schemes covered much of Dorset, Bournemouth and Poole. Coverage in Lyme Regis, the Purbecks and Sherborne was not so good. Generally schemes were successful but needed to be sustainable and cover their operating costs. Some schemes had identified loneliness and isolation as big issues for their users and as a result had developed a befriending service.

178.17 The POPP Manager supported the idea of looking at better vehicle usage. POPP had developed a minibus directory so that people could use them and this list was held on Dorsetforyou.com. The local Primary Care Trust had also provided funding for a public helpline for those who did not have access to the internet so that they could access information about local community transport schemes but this funding had ended and the service was due to end. She considered this to be a valuable and well used service.

178.18 She also highlighted that POPP had negotiated with local acute hospitals to have parking permits for voluntary drivers which meant that they could stay with their users. 1394 permits had been provided so far. Not every driver had one but they were available for any scheme. This had been extended to cover Devon and Exeter, Salisbury, Southampton, and Yeovil Hospitals. She added that in her experience 80% of trips in North Dorset were to health services compared to 50% across the whole of Dorset.

178.19 As regards the future, the POPP Manager thought that POPPs would form part of a bigger picture, depending upon local communities and local people wanting to do something for local people. The majority of volunteer drivers were older people but there were opportunities for those, for example, with young children to volunteer. People did need to contribute to the cost of their journey and community transport services did need to be co-ordinated. She suggested that if subsidy was applied to community transport there needed to be equity of subsidy provision across Dorset or there could be the possibility of challenge.

178.20 With regard to the role that the County Council should play in future, the POPP Manager thought that the NCS was part of a much bigger picture and that this would work better if it was left to POPP and local communities. A toolkit had been developed to support local communities to develop schemes and this included information about insurance, DBS checks, groups of people transported and provided a role description for co-ordinator. New schemes were encouraged to use the appropriate sections as they felt appropriate or necessary to their own local need.

178.21 With regard to whether the community car scheme model could be adapted for young people to help them access part-time work, medical appointments or extracurricular activities, the POPP Manager explained that the County Council could not specify this activity. Currently some schemes were happy to transport young people, others not. She questioned who would pay for such journeys as they could not be subsidised and schemes could not absorb the costs. Some of the schemes had previously struggled to reclaim money so any new process would need to be simple to manage as if it became too arduous volunteers might not want to be involved. She also explained that all schemes were aware of safeguarding issues as this information was included in the toolkit. Some drivers had DBS

clearance, others did not need this. She was not aware of any safeguarding issues having arisen.

Mike Bateman, Beaminster Area Community Cars

178.22 Mr Bateman managed Beaminster Area Community Cars. The scheme had a total of nine drivers who transported people living in and around a seven mile radius of Beaminster. The people he transported ranged from 60 to 90 year olds and journeys were to attend hospital, optician, chiropractor and medical appointments as well as for getting to stations and buses. 75% of the journeys were for medical appointments and this year the scheme had carried out 1,200 journeys which was a 25% increase. He had difficulty in finding drivers because older people were working longer and now looked after other members of their family. He was conscious that drivers were volunteers and he tried not to take advantage of them. He wanted the service to be at no cost to them and for the benefit of the local community. The only reward drivers got was from the characters they met.

178.23 The majority of people he transported had physical or mental health issues, were physically unstable or were visually impaired and could not use the normal transport systems. There were no buses from the Beaminster and Bridport area which dropped passengers off at Dorset County Hospital. The nearest bus stop was quite a distance away and inclement weather made this more difficult for people. The timing of buses also did not fit in with appointments. The people he transported needed assistance in and out of cars, some needed to be accompanied for visits as they did not retain information well, and drivers remained with the person for as long as necessary, even for minor operations, before undertaking the journey home. Public transport was impractical if a medical procedure had been carried out, particularly if this involved a walk to a bus stop. Because services were no longer provided locally, this had increased journeys to hospitals at Poole, Blandford and Southampton. A Beaminster GP recommended patients go to Dorchester for eye appointments and this could be 4/5 trips over a six month period, a total of £350 if a taxi was used. A large number of patients could not afford this and there was a risk of them not getting the treatment they needed.

178.24 His service had identified specific needs for some of its passengers and been able to help them meet these. He was happy and proud to work with people and help them get what they were entitled to. This was a big difference between the service he offered and one a taxi would provide.

178.25 He was grateful for the support the Council provided for his scheme (£2,500), but if this did not continue his service would be under threat. Without groups like his, people would not be able to get to the services they needed and might end up as prisoners in their own homes, with reduced independence. People knew the service was reliable, and that drivers would stay with them for appointments and then take them home.

Sally Falkingham, Maiden Newton Area Community Cars

178.26 Mrs Falkingham had been a community car driver for 18 years and was the Maiden Newton Parish Transport representative. She had applied to the Council to set up a rural transport hub in Maiden Newton as buses and train services did not meet local needs. She drew attention to particular difficulties in trying to get to Bristol, Weymouth and Dorchester and return by train and bus. She highlighted the issues people had in trying to get to work on time and of particular issues for young people. Her scheme covered part of the Beaminster electoral division in a 7 mile radius of Maiden Newton. Her scheme had provided journeys for people from 3 months to 100 year olds. She had 13 volunteer drivers and they provided a similar service to that provided by Beaminster Area Community Car. The people she transported had physical, mental, sight and hearing difficulties and needed support. She was very concerned that she might lose the current support, especially as the Council currently paid for "dead miles" and had undertaken DBS checks. The support provided last

year totalled £600, plus dead miles. She hoped the Council would continue to provide some level of support to enable her scheme to carry on as was needed. Mrs Falkingham had contacted POPPs about a start-up grant for her first year, and was looking forward to demand increasing. In response to a question as to whether the conventional health provider knew of the service provided, Mrs Falkingham confirmed that the local GP knew of her scheme but there had never been any hospital/surgery scheme in her area.

178.27 With regard to whether requests for services were ever refused, it was noted that it was rare and only occurred when a late request was received and drivers were fully booked. Journeys were doubled up, where possible. It was also noted that some hospital clinics would ring drivers when patients were ready to go home which meant that they did not necessarily have to wait around. Nearly all the journeys undertaken were for medical appointments.

Jane Pike, Director of Service Delivery, Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group

178.28 The Director of Service Delivery explained that previously the volunteer hospital car service had been managed through South Western Ambulance Service NHS Trust. This had transferred to a new non-emergency patient transport service (NEPTS) commissioned by the Dorset Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) and was provided by Ezec from October 2013.

178.29 There were criteria as to who was eligible for the new NEPTS and these could be found on the CCG and provider websites. Some of the people being transported by the community car schemes would have been eligible for NEPTS but that decision was for GP and clinicians to take with patients.

178.30 The Director explained that health services needed to be clinically sustainable and this required a certain level of procedures or interventions to be undertaken to remain competent and this meant that services should be centralised. Patients were having to travel further for treatments like heart operations or radiotherapy, but travelling was minimised wherever possible and follow-up appointments were held closer to home.

178.31 With regard to challenges, the Big Ask exercise the previous year had identified that patients wanted to be treated closer to home but were prepared to travel for specialisms. The CCG was concerned about travel for visitors and their lack of access, but there were often opportunities to stay on site if patients were critically ill. Hospitals also provided reduced parking costs for patients with a critical illness and relatives visiting them. She was aware of rural GP practices and their links to NCS and voluntary drivers and stated that access and transport had become more challenging as Dorset's demography had changed.

178.32 The NEPTS scheme had adopted the national criteria but these did not make any exception for patients with mental health issues, Dorset's criteria did. If patients were not eligible for NEPTS, there was the potential for them to be reimbursed through hospital clinics.

178.33 One member drew attention to the need for information about the criteria to be more available to the public so that they knew where to find them and how to access transport. The Director explained that use of the NEPTS was analysed and, prior to the new service being introduced, roadshows had visited GP practices and leaflets had been provided for them all. The member suggested that one portal for all information would be helpful. The Director agreed to explore this possibility, and also agreed to provide information about the number of volunteer drivers used by Ezec but highlighted that the NEPTS was undertaken by paid drivers in the main. She clarified that the CCG spent £5m on the NETPS contract and £12m on the ambulance service.

178.34 With regard to the possibility of joint commissioning across lead agencies, the Director agreed to look at this but drew attention to the fact that NHS services were free at the point of delivery whereas local authority services were means tested. As far as the HTR was concerned, she suggested that the chairmen of the 13 locality groups be contacted.

Patrick Jeffery, Winterborne St Martin Parish

178.35 Mr Jeffery reported on the bus difficulties experienced by Winterborne St Martin Parish when they were given statutory notice that the route of their bus service was to be rerouted at the end of March 2014. The Parish was not informed of any change until the formal notice was issued and he thought that this could have been handled better. He also drew attention to the fact that information on the website was not easily accessible and that the Council's current policy did not address social transport. He then outlined the lessons the Parish had learned from this process. A meeting with First Bus had been held and the bus service had been increased but other ways of getting to Dorchester were needed and there were no buses at weekends, when Saturday bus services had been the busiest. The change to bus service had generated interest in a community car scheme and this would operate from the end of November 2014.

Hugh de Longh, Community Led Development Officer, North Dorset District Council

178.36 The Community Led Development Officer explained that North Dorset District Council had undertaken a review of community and public transport in 2012, in conjunction with the County Council with a view to establishing need, provision and gaps. This had resulted in an action plan. He then informed the Committee that the report had found that there were 12 community car schemes providing good coverage but there were gaps around Blandford. There was one County Car Scheme in Blandford but there were capacity issues. A number of threats were identified including the need for volunteers, increasing demand, funding and bureaucracy. With regard to young people, he had hoped that young families might help but this had not materialised.

178.37 With regard to what could be done to support schemes, he suggested that expert support be developed, start-up funding and general funding be provided and help with costs and insurance might help. Some schemes were self-supporting and some were run through GP surgeries. He highlighted that 80% of journeys were for medical reasons and yet the NHS provided little support for this. He thought that community transport could support conventional bus services between market towns to join up services and he considered the involvement of the Transport Action Groups to find local solutions and make connections helpful. With regard to funding, the Committee noted that County Cars were supported by the County Council, NCS by POPP and some schemes by GP surgeries. One scheme had been supported to the value of £1,500 and one was running out of cash. Problems experienced were similar to those already reported to the meeting.

178.38 There were two commercial minibus companies in the area, a bus-to-go service between school times, a loan-to-own moped scheme, car share schemes, and lift schemes. For transport information people were directed to Travel Dorset or a local timetable.

Karen Rose, Community Transport Officer, Devon County Council

178.39 The Community Transport Officer explained how the team at Devon County Council operated. She reported that the sector was stable, with Section 22 buses operating in the late 1970's still operated currently. A dial a ride service had been set up in the 1990s. Any requests for new services would be discussed with local transport providers to see whether existing resources could be used to meet the need. Devon's Procurement Team had agreed that leased vehicles could be offered to providers to deliver schemes.

178.40 There was an on-going grant system for 16 community transport associations and one off support had been provided to replace community buses. Section 106 money and Department for Transport community funds in 2011 and 2012 had helped to start two new schemes. The Council supported a network of voluntary car schemes by funding three car Forums who arranged training, DBS checks, etc. There were 60 schemes in total and any new schemes were encouraged to join a Forum. There was also a moped scheme comprising 15 bikes.

178.41 The Council hosted 3 community transport network meetings per year to discuss issues and share good practice. These were led by the Forums. She believed that grant funding for community transport gave the best value. Devon's community transport budget for 2014/15 was £347,000 and this would go to community transport groups and help lever in funds from elsewhere. Community Transport partners were able to tender for contract work.

178.42 In 2013/14 29,500 return journeys had been undertaken, and trips and outings for older people totalled 6,000. One vehicle was available for private hire. Groups were encouraged to participate in an annual spend survey which gathered information and established how much the local community benefitted. Groups were also expected to provide quarterly financial returns and there were in the same format so that comparisons could be made. This provided information about trends, performance and best practice was shared.

178.43 The Council was working with Job Centre Plus staff to enable people to undertake unsocial hours work by providing a late night service and consideration was being given to social enterprise models. She also referred to a recent press release from the Department of Transport about £25m being available to support community transport.

178.44 The Community Transport Officer felt that the Council had provided a lot of support and that as the transport situation was stable, they could provide advice and support when needed, leaving the groups to take the lead. The Car Forums would be given collective funding and decide where this should best be used. The Council did have a toolkit to help new schemes and it provided policies, practice and procedures.

Faye Ashton, Tiverton and District Community Transport Association

178.45 Ms Ashton explained that her Association was a registered charity, a limited company by guarantee, based in mid-Devon and covering 353 square miles. This covered three market towns, 60 parishes and included the Ring and Ride Scheme, voluntary car schemes, wheelchair accessible transport, shop mobility, community minibus hire, and also provide information and assistance. They were the Mid Devon Single Point of Contact and signposted people to where they could find the information they needed. They also undertook contract work for schools and day centres.

178.46 She had experienced big changes this year in that the NCS had gone into liquidation overnight and the Association had expanded rapidly to fill the gap so that passengers were not affected and did not see any difference.

178.47 Her Association produced a vast amount of statistics to monitor service usage. This helped with grant funding and helped to develop plans for the following year by identifying needs and opportunities. She considered community transport to be key to enabling older people to stay home and remain independent. Funding was vital and income generation needed to be considered for the future and the Council was helping with this. She tried to ensure that everyone in organisation was positive and that lessons were learned when things went wrong.

178.48 With regard to challenges, she highlighted the lack of funding opportunities, sustainability, the ageing population and the affect this would have on demand which needed to be planned for.

178.49 In response to questions, Ms Ashton confirmed that 82% of journeys were for medical reasons and that volunteers had provided 6,000 hours help. She also highlighted that the Car Forum had produced a report giving more detail about journeys. This helped to support funding applications and she agreed to provide the report for members.

Andrew Wickham, Managing Director, Go South Coast

178.50 The Managing Director did not view community transport as a threat to his organisation, but thought it could feed into mainstream services. Go South Coast provided services in Dorset except for Weymouth where services were run by First Bus. The Company focused on getting people to and from the conurbation and services were thriving with year on year growth. A third of the users were older people or disabled and had concessionary passes.

178.51 The Company had faced significant cuts in April 2014 due to a reduction in tendered Dorset County Council services. They also now operated service 40 from Bridport to Yeovil and numbers of passengers were improving. Community transport could provide the means of getting more people onto the main commercial routes and help Go South Coast maintain or improve viability of routes.

178.52 The Committee noted that Go South Coast operated community transport on the Isle of Wight but this was not a commercial route. They provided buses and equipment, the drivers were volunteers but finding volunteers was difficult and a five duties a day service could not be covered. Go South Coast then provided a paid driver for any gaps with the cost being covered by the council.

178.53 With regard to financial support, the Managing Director explained that support from the Department for Transport in the form of a bus service operator grant had been cut by 20% in 2012 and further cuts were possible. They did receive reimbursement from the local authority for the concessionary passes. If funding was stopped, a number of services would stop so it was necessary to improve viability by marketing and increased usage.

Committee Consideration

178.54 Having heard from invitees, the members considered the way forward. They thought community transport should be encouraged and supported, that a toolkit should be developed, consideration be given to whether a dedicated officer should be provided as a reference point and whether the NHS should be contributing financially or commissioning transport jointly with local authority. They also highlighted that young people's needs were not being met currently, there were issues for them accessing post-16 and further education and they asked whether voluntary car schemes could provide the solution. The possibility of officers exploring schemes in Devon, Oxfordshire and Hampshire was suggested. Members supported a single point of contact to access information about all transport. They recognised that the County Council could provide support for schemes in the form of helping with insurance, driver training and DBS checks. It was felt that the Council should support but not run these schemes and do what it could to limit bureaucracy. Members suggested that the possibility of social enterprise and local schemes holding contract work be considered. In view of the number of journeys relating to health appointments, members thought that the NHS should be engaged in the process through GPs, locality groups and the Health and Wellbeing Board. It was also suggested that easy to use payment schemes be investigated.

178.55 The Director for Environment and the Economy stated that community transport needed to be developed to address the continuing decline in the number of

subsidised bus services and consideration should be given to what community transport needed to achieve and how the Council could enable this. He recognised that the Council could make funding channels more accessible, but subsidised buses were likely to decline further and community transport was the only option to fill any gaps. He agreed that the NHS should be engaged in future discussions and suggested a possible preventable cost issue for the Health and Wellbeing Board.

178.56 With regard to the way forward, the Director explained that the information gathered would inform decision-making for the budget for 2015/16. He suggested that a progress report be provided for the Committee's January 2015 meeting. This should allow officers time to contact and visit Devon, Hampshire and Oxfordshire Councils to explore community transport in their areas and share best practice. He added that arrangements for the HTR were progressing and members would be kept updated through a regular newsletter.

178.57 With regard to access for young people, the Director suggested that the County Council explore the possibility of groups of parents providing this support. The Government's decision to make young people stay in education longer, without providing any financial support, meant that post-16 transport needed to be addressed and should be included in any transport policy. Some colleges had their own transport and officers needed to work with them on this issue.

178.58 In summary, public transport, the commercial network, school transport and community transport should dovetail in an integrated system which made best use of vehicles, filled gaps and gave better value. The Passenger Transport Service Manager added that a dial a bus service or other initiatives could be developed once it was clear what was required.

178.59 It was also suggested that town and parish councils might have a role to play in helping to identify volunteers for car schemes, and that the best means of contacting them was through the Dorset Association of Parish and Town Councils.

Resolved

179.1 That officers progress with the Holistic Transport Review and other activities identified.

179.2 That an update report be provided for consideration at the Committee's meeting on 22 January 2015.

Questions from Members of the Council

180. No questions were asked by members under Standing Order 20(2).

Meeting duration: 10.00am to 3.10pm