

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**CHILDREN AND FAMILIES
CABINET MEMBER**

**HUMBER AND WOLDS RURAL COMMUNITY COUNCIL:
VOLUNTARY CAR SERVICE**

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To approve a grant of £15,000 for Humber and Wolds Rural Community Council (HWRCC).
- 1.2 This will ensure that a voluntary car service continues to run in North Lincolnshire for people who need to make essential journeys but have no transport of their own and who cannot use or have no access to buses or trains.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 HWRCC provides a voluntary car service (VCS) for elderly, lonely, isolated or disabled people who need to make essential journeys but can't use public transport and have no car of their own or anyone who can take them. The service arranges for volunteers to provide journeys using their own cars. The user pays the driver's expenses for the trip, usually a sum between the bus fare and a taxi fare.
- 2.2 The service is based in Barton upon Humber. It helps people living mainly in the rural parts of North Lincolnshire. The scheme is available to all residents in North Lincolnshire.
- 2.3 It provides journeys within the area and to outside destinations such as hospitals or taking carers to visit their relatives in residential care. It is highly valued by users as evidenced by passenger feedback.
- 2.4 The number of passenger journeys have gradually increased until they peaked in 2018-19 at 7,838. The numbers decreased in 2019-2020 to 6,116. This is due to stricter implementation of the criteria with particular emphasis on the need for 48 hours notice in order to secure the services of the volunteer driver. The numbers further decreased in 2020 – 2021

to 202 passengers due to covid restrictions. No passenger journeys occurred from April to August 2020 with a steady incline from September 2020 to March 2021.

- 2.5 Although passenger journeys have decreased, the number of people contacting the Voluntary Car Service has increased due to the demand from people who were not eligible for the Non-Emergency Patient Transport. HWRCC has fielded more calls and issued more passenger registration packs than previously, however this has not been converted into passenger registration or journeys as many patients believe that they should not have to pay for their journey to hospital appointments.
- 2.6 45 new passengers registered with the service. In order to manage this increase in registrations, passengers who had been registered for some time but not used the service were contacted and where they no longer needed the service were removed from the database to meet GDPR requirements. At the end of March 2021 there were 310 current passengers registered.
- 2.7 People access the voluntary car scheme for a number of reasons:
- Bookings to health, social care and community activities and appointments that are within and outside of North Lincolnshire
 - More complex passenger requirements either in the journeys required or their abilities and support requirements.
 - Bookings with a regular driver that are known to the individual particularly where there are memory issues.
- 2.8 There are currently 28 volunteer drivers with 6 new ones recruited this year.
- 2.9 Coronavirus has had the following impact:
- A large number of drivers fall into the 'vulnerable' category and therefore stepped back from volunteering or were advised to do so by HWRCC
 - All non-urgent medical appointments were suspended
 - For the safety of drivers and passengers, the service was suspended mid-March 2020
 - HWRCC refocused attention on supporting the registered passengers by contacting them by letter providing details of support available and, for those identified as most vulnerable providing weekly/fortnightly practical support and wellbeing calls
 - HWRCC maintained contact with volunteer drivers through telephone, newsletters and zoom.
 - HWRCC is now working with Carers Support Service and Lindsey Lodge to create a consistent approach to re-opening the service with Covid-19 assured policies, procedures and PPE requirements

- HWRCC re-opened the Voluntary Car Service in September as all support was in place and demand for medical, social care and community activity/appointments begin to increase again.
- 2.10 HWRCC invested in an electronic allocation system called Flexiroute in December 2016. This has enabled the scheme to grow at no additional cost to the Council and provides an interface between passengers and drivers.
- 2.11 The Council has grant-aided this service for 20 years. The payment of £15,000 has not risen for a number of years. The money does not go to the users or the volunteer drivers (with the exception of driver recruitment, training and development) but covers the cost of a paid staff member. She acts as a broker between the clients who ring up to request transport and the volunteers who provide it. The funding also covers telephone charges and a share of accommodation expenses.
- 2.12 All volunteers are cleared by the Disclosure and Barring service to work with vulnerable adults. The clearance is renewed every three years. HWRCC also checks driving licences, MOTs and insurance annually of voluntary drivers and their vehicles.
- 2.13 The council wishes to encourage volunteers to provide services for the community. The VCS has done this for many years and is an important element in the community transport mix in North Lincolnshire.
- 2.14 If the grant is approved, we shall prepare a simple agreement with HWRCC to set out the service they will provide in return.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

- 3.1 Option 1: Provide grant aid to continue the VCS.
- 3.2 Option 2: Provide no grant in 2021/22 and subsequent years.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

- 4.1 If we provide grant aid, the service will continue and is predicted to increase. It helps people who are otherwise unable to travel. It also supports thousands of hours of volunteer drivers' time. It fulfils part of the key council outcome of "Connected" by providing accessible transport.
- 4.2 If we withdraw grant aid, the service is likely to cease. Experience shows that it is not possible to run the service without paid staff at the core. The end of the service will bring hardship for users because they will find it much more difficult to access health and social care services and community activities.

5. **FINANCIAL AND OTHER RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (e.g. LEGAL, HR, PROPERTY, IT, COMMUNICATIONS etc.)**

5.1 **Financial** A grant will enable the service to continue and cover all of North Lincolnshire. There is funding allocated in the subsidised bus services budget to fund the VCS for a further year.

5.2 There are no other resource implications to highlight.

6. **OTHER RELEVANT IMPLICATIONS (e.g. CRIME AND DISORDER, EQUALITIES, COUNCIL PLAN, ENVIRONMENTAL, RISK etc.)**

6.1 There are no other relevant implications

7. **OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)**

7.1 The assessment highlights the service's benefits to older people and people with disabilities who live across North Lincolnshire and particularly in the rural communities. If it ends, they will be unable to make essential journeys.

8. **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED**

8.1 We have discussed the future of the VCS with HWRCC. They will be unable to provide the service without a grant from the Council.

9. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

9.1 To approve a grant of £15,000 in 2021/22 to HWRCC to support the Voluntary Car Service.

9.2 That regular monitoring of passenger numbers and scheme impact on the community, health and social care services and individuals continues to be carried out.

DEPUTY CHIEF EXECUTIVE AND
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR: COMMERCIAL

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**Background Papers used in the preparation of this report –
Humber & Wolds File**