Wiltshire Council

Children's Select Committee

10 March 2020

Final Report of the Youth Transport Task Group

Purpose of the report

1. To present the findings and recommendations of the task group (TG) for endorsement by the committee and referral to the Cabinet Member for response.

Background

2. After being identified by the Children's Select Committee as a priority of the then Wiltshire Assembly of Youth (now the Wiltshire Youth Union) the Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the committee requested a briefing document to outline the current public transport options available for youth across Wiltshire.

3. The briefing was received by the committee in January 2019. Following the item at this meeting the committee agreed to establish a TG (task group) to investigate the public transportation options available for young people in Wiltshire and to identify any potential areas for investigation and/or improvement and provide recommendations if necessary. It was agreed by the committee that the TG should also include a young person representative on their membership.

Terms of reference

4. The following terms of reference for the TG were endorsed by the Children's Select Committee on 16th July 2019:

    1. To investigate the current range of public transportation options available to young people in Wiltshire.[1]
    2. To identify any unmet needs, gaps in service provision, and potential areas of improvement.
    3. To produce recommendations with a focus on the improvement of Wiltshire's public transport services for young people.

    [1] The TG defines the term "young people" as aged up to 18 and up to 25 for care leavers and those living with SEND.

Membership

5.   The TG comprised the following membership:

Cllr Mary Champion
Cllr Tony Jackson (Chairman)
Cllr George Jeans
Cllr Jim Lynch
Master Alfie Lowe (Young Person Representative)

Methodology

6.   The TG met with the following witnesses:

Wiltshire Council:
Jason Salter, Head of Service Passenger Transport
Adrian Full, Transport Review Officer
Andrew Wickham, ICT, Innovation and Development Manager

External:
Harry Tipple, Head of Community and Business Development, Community First
Jaki Farrell, Charity Director, Seeds 4 Success
Sophie Martin, Community Rail Officer, TransWilts

7.   The TG received the following evidence:
Child & Young Person Bus Fares and Public Transport in Wiltshire – Briefing Report
Presentation: Introducing the public transport options available to young people in Wiltshire
Additional Information on Young Person Public Travel

8.   The TG met five times.

9.   The TG's preliminary findings were discussed at the task group's meeting on 14 February 2020. The recommendations were also shared with the Executive.

Evidence - current range of public transportation options available to young people in Wiltshire

Wiltshire Council Offer

10.   The TG noted that the free school transport was provided to meet the council's statutory obligations.

11.   The council provided free school transport passes which covered travel to and from school, Monday to Friday, limited to term time for eligible pupils.

Unmet needs

12. The TG heard that perceived unmet needs included:
    a. accessing before or after school activities,
    b. travelling at weekends,
    c. travelling during half-term and school holidays,
    d. prohibitive cost of travelling for care leavers, and
    e. accessing higher education and apprenticeship placements.

13. The provision of access to youth services, including leisure centres, was raised by the TG. It was explained that the bus passes do not cover more than two scheduled services to and from school. Thus, they cannot be used beyond these times to cover access to leisure centres or before and after-school clubs, even if a school has arranged to provide scheduled classes as part of the standard curriculum, but without prior agreement with the council to re-arrange transport.

14. The TG considered that before and after school clubs should be accessible for the most vulnerable. They considered that the restrictions on the free school bus passes constituted a cost barrier to accessing these services.

15. It was noted during discussion that to broaden free school transport political appetite would be required to make finance available. Officers estimated that the cost of this would be substantial (light touch estimates of millions of pounds).

16. It was also noted that where possible the Passenger Transport Unit would arrange for a school bus pass to be accepted on an ordinary bus service if one was available at no extra cost to the council. This would only be possible when the earlier or later bus was commercially run by the same bus operator contracted by the council to provide the school transport.

17. The TG also noted that the council operated a "spare seat" offer. Spare seats not used on a commissioned school transport could be purchased for students not entitled to free transport. Further details and fees can be accessed [here](#). This was currently operating on a "no fares" basis as vehicles used did not meet the Public Service vehicle Accessibility Regulations, therefore could not be a commercial service (i.e. less than 20% of passengers could be fee paying).

18. Post-16 education transport was described as a service still supported by Wiltshire Council which local authorities were not legally obliged to provide. This provided travel from home to school or college for Wiltshire residents. Transport was provided on any day when the school / college was open for normal lectures. The council reserved the right to select the most appropriate and / or economical mode of transport. The fee charged for the Post 16 travel scheme, for the school year 2019/20, was to be £781 or £231 if the gross household income was less than £20,819 for the year 2018/19. Further details and fees can be accessed [here.](#)

19. The TG was informed that the scheme was not able to cover those on apprenticeships. It was also confirmed that the scheme was available for SEND students up to the age of 25. However, it was noted that many students with SEND required more personal transport.

20. The TG were informed many of those eligible for the post-16 education transport scheme chose to pay for commercial passes or tickets instead.
    This was because some bus companies offered season tickets at comparable or cheaper rates.
    Staff at the Passenger Transport Unit would contact applicants if they considered that local bus companies may offer a better value ticket.

21. It was noted that there were currently around 600 students using the scheme which required a subsidy of £150,000 to run for the year. Out of the 600 students using the scheme 400 had purchased it on the lower rate of £231. All those aged 16 to 19 who lived at least three miles from one of their nearest study centres could apply for the scheme.

22. The Wiltshire Day Rover was a day travel pass co-ordinated by Wiltshire Council. There was no subsidy for the scheme and no revenue sharing. Bus companies participated on the basis that they would sell a similar number of tickets to those they accepted from other participants. The pass covered day travel across all providers in the area.

23. The cheapest day pass offered by a commercial bus operator was from First Bus (£3.50 on the bus or £3 via their app). It was noted that First Bus had expressed reservations over continuing future operations in Wiltshire.
    The next cheapest rate was from Faresaver (£4.50 for a day pass), but with limited network in the evenings and on Sundays.
    Following this, the next cheapest rate was £4.90 from Stagecoach West.

24. At its last meeting on 14 February 2020 the TG was informed of four tranches of central government transport funding, three of which Wiltshire Council would be eligible to apply for. Although not directly related to youth transport, one funding would be for providing "enhancement to bus services" (i.e. increasing the number of journeys, etc.).

Public Bus Providers in Wiltshire

25. Bus providers offered fares that varied from provider to provider across the county. All the bus providers offered youth and student fares. It was noted by the TG that there was no dominant bus provider within the county. It was explained that legally Wiltshire Council were prohibited from reducing fares to compete with commercial services.
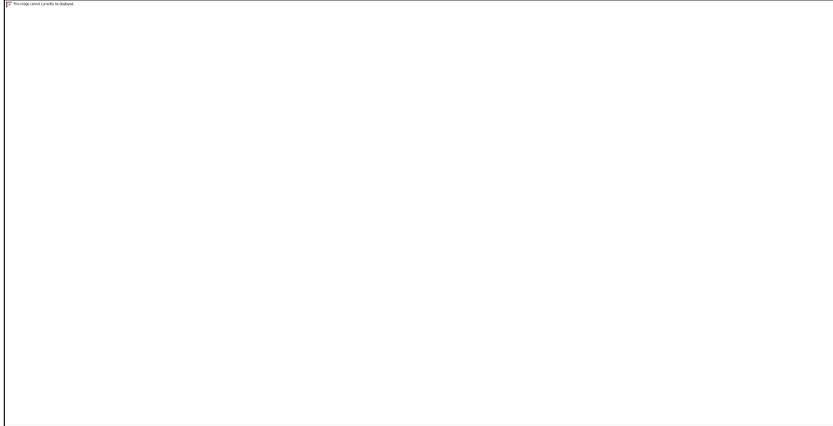
26. Of the bus miles provided in the county 50% were funded by Wiltshire Council with the other 50% provided by commercial services. Officers explained that drawing back on funding for public transport would create additional costs elsewhere.

27. The Traveline South West app, which was contributed to by Wiltshire Council offered a comprehensive travel planner with routes, times, and ticket costs. This app worked with all providers in Wiltshire. Online timetables were offered on all bus company websites, with physical timetables available from various locations including bus stations and libraries.

28. Many companies operating in Wiltshire offered phone-based apps to purchase tickets, along with many providers moving towards accommodating card-based payments on board.

29. The Bus Open Data scheme (Bus Services Act 2017), launching in 2020, legally obliged bus operators to feed into the scheme. The scheme would provide open information on bus travel hosted on a national Department for Transport platform, intending to help with travel planning, including relevant app development. (More information can be accessed here)

30. It was noted by the TG that all bus drivers operate under a policy of never leaving a young person behind unaccompanied at a bus stop.

Other Local Authorities

31. The TG considered different examples of offers for young person bus travel passes provided by other local authorities, including:

    a. The ability to use a free school bus pass to access youth services, including leisure centres, was provided by Kent County Council [*NB. This is no longer referenced on the Kent County Council's website*].

    b. Kent County Council Travel Saver: from September 2019 - the cost was to be £350/year (or £100/year for low income) and would offer a 50% discount for parents and pupils on all Kent buses for travel between 6am - 7pm, Monday to Friday across all months excluding

August. This replaces a previous scheme which was used by 25,000 people at a cost of £8.5m to the council.

c. "b_line" Pass (Derbyshire): This pass acted as a proof of age card to allow young people to access either: the under 16 discount; the 16-19 discount (25% off); or the apprentice discount (25% off). These were 24/7 discounts available on most bus and trains in the area.

d. MyTicket (Merseyside): Day travel passes are available for those aged 5-18 at a rate of £2.20. Statistics were provided which showed that young people's bus usage had increased by 168% since the introduction of this scheme in July 2015, however it was noted it was not yet commercially sustainable [NB. Halton Transport (the council's owned bus company in Widnes) collapsed in January 2020 and the costs of operating the MyTicket scheme was cited as one of the reasons for its demise in this news article].

Community First – Wheels 2 Work and LINK schemes

32. The TG were informed about the Community First-led Wheels 2 Work Moped Scheme aiming to provide transport to work or training for participants aged 17 or over and living in Swindon or Wiltshire. The scheme provided mopeds at a cheap rental cost with insurance paid for.

33. Take-up of the Wheels 2 Work scheme was incredibly low, with only 2 participants at the time of the TG's work and required significant investment to provide new scooters and promote the scheme. The TG heard from Community First that they were considering dissolving the scheme, which has subsequently happened.

34. The TG was informed that the money allocated for the Wheels 2 Work scheme had been reallocated to the LINK schemes.

35. TG members heard that there were 43 "LINK Schemes" operating and supported by Community First across Wiltshire. These schemes were grant funded by Wiltshire Council. However, the schemes were heard to be focused on supporting the most vulnerable in society, rather than youth transport. Out of the 53,000 journeys completed in 2018 a total of 33,000 were health related.

Seeds 4 Success

36. Seeds 4 Success (S4S) owned a single minibus and controlled a second minibus owned by a separate charity (Zeals Youth Trust). The charity used the minibuses to provide youth transport which enabled young people to undertake community activities at weekends and out of school hours. This work generated credits for the young people which could be used to access leisure activities with transport also provided by S4S.

37. S4S had a relationship with the local LINK Group but they noted that LINK currently had no capacity for providing out of school hours transport support. It

was also noted that S4S itself had no capacity to provide additional youth transport out of school hours.

Conclusions

Community First

38. Regarding the LINK schemes supported by Community First the TG felt that as these were targeted towards the most vulnerable in society, including providing health-related journeys (such as transport to hospital) there was no scope for expanding this to cover general youth transport. This view was especially supported after considering the safeguarding issues that would come with this expansion, such as DBS checks for volunteer drivers and workers. It was noted that there was already pressure in recruiting and retaining volunteers for the scheme, along with an increase in the journeys completed.

Seeds 4 Success (S4S)

39. The TG noted that S4S was an interesting example of a local community's response to providing worthwhile youth activities including the necessary transport support. This transport, however, was fully committed to specific youth activities and offered no capacity at the time to meet the needs identified by the TG. However, this remained a useful model which could be reconsidered should funding become available (*Recommendation 3*).

Public Bus Travel in Wiltshire

40. Given the low population density (and hence low profitability) of rural areas, it is a challenge for the market to supply practical and affordable transport solutions. Wiltshire being a large rural county with multiple bus operators, but no dominant operator, delivering services across the county made it more difficult to provide similar discounts as some of the bus passes on offer for young people in other areas.

41. It was noted that publicity of the Wiltshire Day Rover could be more proactive, both from the council and bus operators. The TG was informed that appointment to a post within the Passenger Transport Unit had been made, which had part of its duties on marketing on promotion. (*Recommendation 1*)

42. This also led the TG to consider information and publicity for all mode of travel available to young people (including safe walking and cycling route) and the current use of the council's Connecting Wiltshire (website) (*Recommendation 1*)

43. The TG also considered the issue of contactless payment which was a preferred option for many families but was not offered by all bus operators. However, the TG was informed at its last meeting (February 2020) that almost all bus operators in Wiltshire were now offering contactless payment. (*Recommendation 2*)

44. The TG explored the feasibility of "inter-acceptance" passes – where a single pass could be used with different bus and railway operators (akin to the Oyster card - electronic smartcards used to pay for public transport in London).

45. It was explained that bus ticket inter-acceptance was available in some partnership options available under Bus Services Act 2017, but it was unlikely that Wiltshire would meet the wider requirements of a formal partnership. It was understood however that the Department for Transport was disappointed by the take-up of the Partnership provisions available under the Act and were considering varying the requirements to make schemes possible in more areas. Any changes would be likely to be reported to the Environment Select Committee. (*Recommendations 4 and 7*)

Wiltshire Council Offer

46. Regarding the post-16 education transport offer from Wiltshire Council the TG considered that the low number of those signing up to the service could signify that there could be a better use for the £150,000 used to support the service in the form of a better offer that could be provided. (*Recommendation 3*)

47. Following discussions on funding bids during the TG meeting on 14 February 2020, officers agreed to include a "young person test" to their consideration of "enhancement to bus services". This would enable officers to see how many of their proposed schemes for "enhancement to bus services" would benefit young people in Wiltshire. (*Recommendations 4 and 7*)

48. The outcome of the funding bids would be known after this TG had completed its work and the TG believed that the outcomes should be reported to overview and scrutiny when available. (*Recommendations 4 and 7*)

49. The TG explored the feasibility of a "digital travel card" which would be issued by the council and on which parents and carers could "top up" the credit. It was explained that this would enable some bus companies to read the card digitally, replacing the current system where the driver read the card and pressed a button on the ticket machine, but would not offer more benefits.

50. The reason was that, for school transport passes, most students travel on "closed door" coaches on which all seats are block booked by the council. Where the council uses local service buses, the council effectively purchased season tickets from the bus company valid for 380 single journeys, on a school day and during school times. The council did not purchase travel to the value of 380 single fares, so the card couldn't be configured to operate on a monetary value credit scheme.

51. However, bearing in mind the council's digitalisation aspirations, this did raise consideration of a single "Wiltshire Youth Card" which could be a "membership / access card" for transport, library, leisure centre, etc. as well as proof of age. This raised issues for considerations around the cost of the card (and which service would cover it), date for renewal (as it may have to be linked to the

holder's birthday rather than start of the school year), availability of compatible "readers" in all the centres, libraries and buses, etc. (*Recommendation 5*)

52. In terms of expected technological advancements, the TG was informed that the Bus Open Data Scheme, which had been soft launched on 1 January 2020, should enable users to access digital tracking (i.e. know where the bus is in real time). It was the Department for Transport's hope that phone apps would be developed to enable easy access to the information that would be made available through the scheme.

53. Although the TG did not reach a position to make recommendations around technological developments, it wished to acknowledge the willingness and positivity of the council's IT department in considering potential technological developments to enhance and facilitate young people's access to public transport.

Gaps and unmet needs in Youth Transport Provision

54. Unfortunately, the TG concluded that the unmet needs for free school bus pass holders identified during the course of its work were unlikely to be addressed at this point in time due to the extensive costs anticipated and complex practicalities (mainly due to the number of bus operators covering the county) involved in extending the free school bus offer to enable pass holders to attend either before and / or after school provision.

55. Nonetheless, the TG still believed that this left potentially vulnerable school pupils unable to access additional support through school and therefore should not be forgotten when the Wiltshire Local Transport Plan 2011-2026 was reviewed or updated. The TG believed that the potential central government funding and the potential app development based on the Open Data Scheme could represent significant changes to the options on offer, and may require an update to the Wiltshire Local Transport Plan 2011-2026 (*Recommendation 3*)

56. The TG believed that these unmet gaps could potentially be filled if "demand responsive public transport" was to become a reality across the county (and country).

57. "*Demand-responsive transport is a user-oriented form of passenger transport characterised by flexible routes and smaller vehicles operating in shared-ride mode between pick-up and drop-off locations according to passenger needs*" – Community Transport Association (UK).

58. An example of Demand Responsive Transport in Wiltshire was the Wigglybus service. However, the TG noted that this service had been reduced over the years, as Government funding for experimental services was withdrawn.

59. The TG was informed that demand-responsive transport seemed to be seen by central government as the way transport would evolve in future but that this was an expensive system to run. (*Recommendations 4 and 7*)

Proposal

60. To thank Master Alfie Lowe for his time, work on and valuable contributions to the task group as their Youth Representative. To also thank Devizes School for enabling Master Alfie Lowe's attendance and providing a room for the task group meetings.

61. To thank officers from the Passenger Transport Unit for their engagement with the TG.

62. To share this report and the Executive Response to it with the Wiltshire Youth Union.

63. To endorse the report of the task group and refer it to the Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Waste, the Cabinet Member for IT, Digitalisation and Operational Assets and the Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Skills for response at the Committee's next meeting.

Recommendations

That the Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Waste:

1. **Ensures that some capacity is retained in the Passenger Transport Unit to deliver effective advertising and promoting of the services on offer and travel options available to young people in Wiltshire, including Connecting Wiltshire.** *This would ensure that young people are better aware of the options available to them for traveling in and around the county.*

2. **Ensures that all bus services contracted by the council have contactless pay facilities by April 2021.** *This would ensure that young people using contactless (which seems to be a preferred choice for parents and carers) can use buses across the county.*

3. **Considers, as part of the Wiltshire Local Transport Plan update, developing a "Bus Strategy" outlining the blue print for future bus provision across the county, which could include:**
   a. **specific reference to provision for young people (linking to the unmet needs identified);**
   b. **a consultation of all key stakeholders;**
   c. **any developments linked to the Open Data Scheme.**

   This could also offer an opportunity to:
   a. **review post-16 education transport to ensure it benefits as many young people as possible;**
   b. **explore developing (or supporting the development of) schemes like Seed 4 Success, should funding be available.**

This would ensure that the Wiltshire Local Transport Plan and "Bus Strategy" reflects that consideration is given to the needs of young people.

4. **Ensures that the following information is provided to the Environment Select Committee in a timely fashion:**
   a. **Developments to the partnership options available under the Bus Services Act 2017;**
   b. **The outcome of the "young person test" on the bids submitted for central government funding;**
   c. **The outcome of the bids submitted for central government funding;**
   d. **Update on demand-responsive transport initiatives nationally and potential application in Wiltshire.**

That the Cabinet Member for IT, Digitalisation and Operational Assets:

5. **Considers exploring the development of a single "Wiltshire Youth Card" (as described in paragraph 51).** *This could simplify access to services for young people.*

That the Cabinet Member for Children, Education & Skills:

6. **Notes this report and recommendations within it.**

That the Environment Select Committee Chair and Vice-Chair:

7. **Liaise with the Children's Select Committee Chair and Vice-Chair when the information listed in recommendation 4 above is provided.**

Cllr Tony Jackson, Chairman of the Youth Transport Task Group

Report author: Adam Brown, Senior Scrutiny Officer, 01225 718038, adam.brown@wiltshire.gov.uk
Marie Gondlach, Senior Scrutiny Officer, 01225 713 597, marie.gondlach@wiltshire.gov.uk

Appendices
None

Background documents
None