

Agenda Item No:

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 28th November 2019

Report Title: Community Connection

Report Author & Job Title: Alison Oates
Community Safety and Wellbeing Manager

Portfolio Holder Cllr. J Gideon
Portfolio Holder for: Community Safety and Wellbeing



Summary:	This report is to update Cabinet on the success of the community buses (Community Connection) and provide options for future delivery and funding arrangements.
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Key Decision: NO

Significantly Affected Wards: All wards are able to request a scheme

Recommendations: **The Cabinet is recommended to:-**

- i. Approve the continuation of the scheme**
- ii. Support funding arrangements for the next two financial years**

Policy Overview: Community transport can offer many benefits to a local community. It can give individuals greater independence and improve their wellbeing and quality of life. It can be the ideal response to a local transport problem and can reduce the overall cost of travel for residents. Supporting local communities is central to the council's wellbeing aims and is in line with the current and developing corporate plan.

Financial Implications: An estimated revenue implication of £14,000, over the next two financial years, will provide four additional buses. The necessary funding has been identified from within existing budgets and included in the MTFP.

Legal Implications A legal agreement is produced and signed by Ashford Borough Council and the host when the vehicle is launched.

Equalities Impact Assessment See attached

Other Material Implications: None

**Exempt from
Publication:**

NO

**Background
Papers:**

None

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Report Title: Community Connection

Introduction and Background

1. The Community Connection scheme is a wellbeing initiative and aims to better connect those living in rural communities with services and enable them to benefit from opportunities that otherwise may be unavailable to them due to transport restrictions. It also recognises the withdrawal of previously existing rural transport.
2. The scheme involves forward funding a mini-bus for a parish council or other local community group (referred to as the host). The organisation makes charges for those who wish to use the mini-bus, which are then passed to the borough council to cover the vehicle hire and other costs. After these costs are covered, any surplus is held by the host organisation. The scheme aims for a vehicle to be entirely self-funding by its first anniversary, i.e. 100% of the lease costs are recouped in income from users.

Current Position

Schemes to date

3. There are currently two schemes in operation, the Rolvenden Rocket which started in July 2018 and the Woodchurch Wagon which started in August 2019.
4. In its first year, the Rolvenden Rocket completed over 8,000 miles, providing trips for many local groups such as the WI, youth group and residents of Money Penny sheltered housing scheme. As the first year came to an end, Rolvenden Parish Council requested that we continued to administer the project while they transfer to an extended lease rather than the current rental arrangement. They are, however, covering the full hire costs but will be moving to a new lease shortly.
5. Rolvenden Parish Council has been proving highly successful and innovative in its approach to the scheme. The parish council has sought regular contracts to support their project such as acting as a minibus for a private school (1 day a week), supporting the work undertaken by the Tenterden Social Hub and are in discussion with Ivy Court Surgery to act as the transport solution for patients who are participating in a social prescribing scheme.
6. The Woodchurch Wagon launch took place in August 2019 and received extensive attendance from the community, local school children (who named the bus) and community groups who are planning on using the bus. The Wagon's first trip was for the local football club. A photo of the launch is provided at Appendix A along with an example of the positive press coverage

following the launch. Also included are some of the positive messages that we have received about both the Rolvenden and Woodchurch schemes.

7. Wye Parish Council wishes to become the next parish to join the scheme, and they are currently utilising Woodchurch Wagon for a day a week to test public demand and refine their business plan before a commitment is made.

Funding arrangements

8. In the first year of operation the council subsidises each vehicle hire. The council also funds the vehicle livery, training for five drivers per vehicle plus Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) checks and vehicle insurance. The total scheme cost for one vehicle (for 12 months) is £3,500. This figure is dependent on the parish achieving the required level of use in order to meet a repayment schedule. If they do not, the cost to the council is more than this figure, however, the council can terminate the agreement if the repayments are not made.
9. In the first year of operation the council subsidises the hire costs by 50% in quarter one, 25% in quarter two and 10% in quarters 3 & 4.
10. The scheme aims for a vehicle to fully self-funding by its first anniversary i.e. 100% of the rental costs are recouped in income received by the parish council from users of the bus.
11. After 12 months, responsibility for the hire/lease of the vehicles transfers to the parish council or a decision is made to shut down the arrangement. If the scheme is proving successful, a parish council could at this point convert to a lease rather than hire arrangement which would reduce the vehicle costs.
12. The cost of the service expansion will be dependent on parish council/community group interest, however, funding has been allocated through the "Town Centre Project" to provide two buses in 2020/21 and two buses in 2021/22.
13. If further vehicles are required then additional funding would need to be identified.

Implications and Risk Assessment

The main risks and implication are as follows:

- Take up of the scheme is not as currently anticipated. This has no financial impact, however, on the budget.
- The vehicle(s) are not used as much as the host hoped and therefore the required income is not achieved. In this case the council's costs could increase as it is paying the hire/lease company (the contract can, however, be terminated in this situation).
- The funding model is based on ability to roll forward income to reinvest in individual schemes the following year.

- The town centre funding may be reduced or removed to cover a higher priority project so funding would need to be sourced from elsewhere.

Equalities Impact Assessment

14. Members are referred to the attached assessment. There are no negative impacts and the scheme contributes positively on several fronts.

Other Options Considered

15. It would be possible to purely provide a toolkit for parishes explaining how to start up a community bus. It is a risk, however, that they would not be able to cover the costs while the scheme gets started and therefore it is believed this would be a significant barrier to further roll out of the scheme.
16. In addition to a toolkit, a one-off grant could be paid to equal the £3,500 subsidy being provided by the council. This would reduce the officer time and financially de-risk the council. It is, however, felt that the parishes have benefited from the support provided by officers and that our involvement helps ensure sustainability of the overall scheme.

Reasons for Supporting Option Recommended

17. The option that we are seeking support for is to agree that the allocated town centre funding should be used to support the launch of the vehicles.
18. If there is a demand for further vehicles within the next two years then the host would need to secure separate funding for this, however we will assist with the implementation of the project.
19. Finally it is believed that the toolkit and grant option would be detrimental to the host as they would find it difficult to afford the insurance for their first year of operation, whereas the current arrangement allows the vehicle to be added to our insurance inventory at minimal cost.

Next Steps in Process

20. Following agreement then work would commence to identify and commence the work plans for the vehicles for 2020/21.

Conclusion

21. Cabinet are requested to support the recommendation of an additional four Community Connection vehicles over the next two years.

Portfolio Holder's Views

22. This scheme embodies what local transport is all about: connecting local people with their communities. I am so pleased to see the project going from strength to strength, providing people with a friendly and caring local

transport. Whether it is being used for trips to the shops, a trip for a social club, or visit to the hospital it is much appreciated by those using it and something for the parishes to be really proud of. I will take this opportunity to particularly thank those within the parish councils who work to make the scheme a success and to the volunteer drivers who are the real stars who make the service possible. I ask members to continue to champion this schemes and ensure that the necessary funding is made available to allow other parishes to benefit from this important service. I wish the current and future scheme all the very best.

Contact and Email

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Appendix A

Woodchurch Wagon Launch





The Woodchurch Wagon scheme will be similar to the Rolvenden Rocket, which launched in the village last year

Actor to appear in village as minibus arrives

Transport scheme launched in bid to prevent isolation

by Rachael Woods
rwoods@thekmgroupp.co.uk

Actor Jan Francis will officially launch a new minibus service.

The star of 1980s romantic comedy *Just Good Friends*, who has also appeared in *Emmerdale* and *Casualty*, will set the Woodchurch Wagon on the road.

A 16-seater, the minibus has been launched after Ashford Borough Council and Woodchurch Parish Council worked together to plug a gap in transport to and from the village, where a reduced Stagecoach 2a services now operates, and to help prevent social isolation.

The vehicle was named by Woodchurch Primary School pupils and is the second one to be made available under ABC's not-for-profit Community Connect scheme, which allows community groups use of a vehicle whenever they need it, saving on the costs of running one themselves.

Cllr Jo Gideon, ABC's portfolio holder for community safety and



TV actor Jan Francis will launch the service

wellbeing said: "This scheme is a wonderful way of connecting those in rural communities who may be at risk of social isolation.

"We know that such isolation and loneliness can have a massive impact on health. I'm thrilled to see this scheme expanding to other rural communities, knowing that it will provide so much more than just a means of transport."

Nick Jones, vice chairman of Woodchurch Parish Council, said the council was delighted to be part of the scheme which would be of benefit to groups and soci-

eties in the village and improve residents' wellbeing by helping them to get out and about.

He said: "Our school has been involved with the children coming up with the name Woodchurch Wagon and we have been very encouraged with the support for volunteer drivers already"

The Woodchurch community information centre is being re-launched as the Woodchurch Hub at the same time.

The volunteer-run hub will manage the day-to-day running of the Woodchurch Wagon, in addition to acting as a resource centre for people in the village and beyond.

Cllr Jones added: "We would also like to thank Jan Francis for agreeing to launch the wagon."

Jan will launch the minibus at 10.30am on Sunday from the village's memorial car park.

■ Voluntary, charity and community organisations interested in joining ABC's Community Connect scheme should call 01233 331111 or email parking@customercare@ashford.gov.uk

Comments from users of Woodchurch Wagon:

1. Great transport option for the village
2. Affordable for us to go as a group when we don't have transport ourselves
3. Good to travel on a day out with friends (rather than being in separate cars – much more sociable!)
4. Door to Door service was great

Comment from Rolvenden Parish Council (Host organisation of the Rolvenden Rocket):

The Rolvenden Rocket minibus project has improved the lives of residents of all ages, both in our village and neighbouring villages, by alleviating the social isolation that often comes with living in a rural area with poor public transport links. Not only have existing village organisations made good use of the opportunities that the bus can offer but new social groups have also been created in the community, enabled by the availability of transport on the bus.

Equality Impact Assessment

1. An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) is a document that summarises how the council has had due regard to the public sector equality duty (Equality Act 2010) in its decision-making. Although there is no legal duty to produce an EIA, the Council must have **due regard** to the equality duty and an EIA is recognised as the best method of fulfilling that duty. It can assist the Council in making a judgment as to whether a policy or other decision will have unintended negative consequences for certain people and help maximise the positive impacts of policy change. An EIA can lead to one of four consequences:

- (a) No major change – the policy or other decision is robust with no potential for discrimination or adverse impact. Opportunities to promote equality have been taken;
- (b) Adjust the policy or decision to remove barriers or better promote equality as identified in the EIA;
- (c) Continue the policy – if the EIA identifies potential for adverse impact, set out compelling justification for continuing;
- (d) Stop and remove the policy where actual or potential unlawful discrimination is identified.

Public sector equality duty

2. The Equality Act 2010 places a duty on the council, when exercising public functions, to have due regard to the need to:
- (a) Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation;
 - (b) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
 - (c) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it (ie tackling prejudice and promoting understanding between people from different groups).

3. These are known as the three aims of the general equality duty.

Protected characteristics

4. The Equality Act 2010 sets out nine protected characteristics for the purpose of the equality duty:

- Age
- Disability
- Gender reassignment
- Marriage and civil partnership*
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race
- Religion or belief
- Sex
- Sexual orientation

*For marriage and civil partnership, only the first aim of the duty applies in relation to employment.

Due regard

5. Having 'due regard' is about using good equality information and analysis at the right time as part of decision-making procedures.
6. To 'have due regard' means that in making decisions and in its other day-to-day activities the council must consciously consider the need to do the things set out in the general equality duty: eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations. This can involve:
- removing or minimising disadvantages suffered by people due to their protected characteristics.
 - taking steps to meet the needs of people with certain protected characteristics when these are different from the needs of other people.
 - encouraging people with certain protected characteristics to participate in public life or in other activities where it is disproportionately low.
7. How much regard is 'due' will depend on the circumstances. The greater the

potential impact, the higher the regard required by the duty. Examples of functions and decisions likely to engage the duty include: policy decisions, budget decisions, public appointments, service provision, statutory discretion, decisions on individuals, employing staff and procurement of goods and services.

8. In terms of timing:

- Having 'due regard' should be considered at the inception of any decision or proposed policy or service development or change.
- Due regard should be considered throughout development of a decision. Notes shall be taken and kept on file as to how due regard has been had to the equality duty in research, meetings, project teams, consultations etc.
- The completion of the EIA is a way of effectively summarising this and it should inform final decision-making.

Armed Forces Community

9. As part of the council's commitment to the Armed Forces Community made through the signing of the Armed Forces Covenant the council's Cabinet agreed in November 2017 that potential impacts on the Armed Forces Community should be considered as part of the Equality Impact Assessment process.

10. Accordingly, due regard should also be had throughout the decision making process to potential impacts on the groups covered by the Armed Forces Covenant:

- Current serving members of the Armed Forces (both Regular and Reserve)
- Former serving members of the Armed Forces (both Regular and Reserve)
- The families of current and former Armed Forces personnel.

Case law principles

11. A number of principles have been established by the courts in relation to the equality duty and due regard:

- Decision-makers in public authorities must be aware of their duty to have 'due regard' to the equality duty and so EIA's must be attached to any relevant committee reports.
- Due regard is fulfilled before and at the time a particular policy is under consideration as well as at the time a decision is taken. Due regard involves a conscious approach and state of mind.
- A public authority cannot satisfy the duty by justifying a decision after it has been taken.
- The duty must be exercised in substance, with rigour and with an open mind in such a way that it influences the final decision.
- The duty is a non-delegable one. The duty will always remain the responsibility of the public authority.
- The duty is a continuing one so that it needs to be considered not only when a policy, for example, is being developed and agreed but also when it is implemented.
- It is good practice for those exercising public functions to keep an accurate record showing that they have actually considered the general duty and pondered relevant questions. Proper record keeping encourages transparency and will discipline those carrying out the relevant function to undertake the duty conscientiously.
- A public authority will need to consider whether it has sufficient information to assess the effects of the policy, or the way a function is being carried out, on the aims set out in the general equality duty.
- A public authority cannot avoid complying with the duty by claiming that it does not have enough resources to do so.

The Equality and Human Rights Commission has produced helpful guidance on "Meeting the Equality Duty in Policy and Decision-Making" (October 2014). It is available on the following link and report authors should read and follow this when developing or reporting on proposals for policy or

service development or change and other decisions likely to engage the equality duty. [Equality Duty in decision-making](#)

Lead officer:	Alison Oates
Decision maker:	Cabinet
Decision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy, project, service, contract • Review, change, new, stop 	Cabinet are requested to support the recommendation of an additional four Community Connection vehicles over the next two years to provide a quality offer to the most isolated residents within the borough.
Date of decision: The date when the final decision is made. The EIA must be complete before this point and inform the final decision.	28 th November 2019
Summary of the proposed decision: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aims and objectives • Key actions • Expected outcomes • Who will be affected and how? • How many people will be affected? 	<p>The Community Connection scheme is a wellbeing initiative and aims to better connect those living in rural communities with services and enable them to benefit from opportunities that otherwise may be unavailable to them due to transport restrictions. It also recognises the withdrawal of previously existing rural transport.</p> <p>There are currently two schemes in operation, the Rolvenden Rocket which started in July 2018 and the Woodchurch Wagon which started in August 2019.</p> <p>The scheme involves forward funding a mini-bus for a parish council or other local community group (referred to as the host). The organisation makes charges for those who wish to use the mini-bus, which are then passed to the borough council to cover the vehicle hire and other costs. After these costs are covered, any surplus is held by the host organisation. The scheme aims for a vehicle to be entirely self-funding by its first anniversary, i.e. 100% of the lease costs are recouped in income from users.</p> <p>An estimated revenue implication of £14,000, over the next two financial years, will provide four additional buses. The necessary funding has been identified from within existing budgets and included in the MTFP.</p>
Information and research: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Outline the information and research that has informed the decision. • Include sources and key findings. 	<p>The two schemes provide regular data linked to usage, miles covered and financial information. In the first year Rolvenden Rocket covered over 8000 miles.</p> <p>Wye Parish Council wishes to become the next parish to join the scheme, and they are currently utilising Woodchurch Wagon for a day a week to test public demand and refine their business plan before a commitment is made.</p>
Consultation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What specific consultation has occurred on this decision? 	Consultation with host organisations prior to the launch of the scheme to ensure community support to ensure commitment to the project.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What were the results of the consultation? • Did the consultation analysis reveal any difference in views across the protected characteristics? • What conclusions can be drawn from the analysis on how the decision will affect people with different protected characteristics? 	<p>No public consultation</p> <p>Scheme developed in consultation with Host organisations.</p> <p>The vehicles are fitted with wheelchair lifts and ramps for disabled access.</p>
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Assess the relevance of the decision to people with different protected characteristics and assess the impact of the decision on people with different protected characteristics.

When assessing relevance and impact, make it clear who the assessment applies to within the protected characteristic category. For example, a decision may have high relevance for young people but low relevance for older people; it may have a positive impact on women but a neutral impact on men.

Protected characteristic	Relevance to Decision High/Medium/Low/None	Impact of Decision Positive (Major/Minor) Negative (Major/Minor) Neutral
<u>AGE</u> Elderly	Low	Positive - minor
Middle age	Low	Positive - minor
Young adult	Low	Positive - minor
Children	Low	Positive - minor
<u>DISABILITY</u> Physical	Low	Positive - minor
Mental	Low	Positive - minor
Sensory	Low	Positive - minor
<u>GENDER RE-ASSIGNMENT</u>	Low	Neutral

<u>MARRIAGE/CIVIL PARTNERSHIP</u>	Low	Neutral
<u>PREGNANCY/MATERNITY</u>	Low	Positive - minor
<u>RACE</u>	Low	Neutral
<u>RELIGION OR BELIEF</u>	Low	Neutral
<u>SEX</u>		
Men	Low	Neutral
Women	Low	Neutral
<u>SEXUAL ORIENTATION</u>	Low	Neutral
<u>ARMED FORCES COMMUNITY</u>		
Regular/Reserve personnel	Low	Neutral
Former service personnel	Low	Neutral
Service families	Low	Neutral

Mitigating negative impact: Where any negative impact has been identified, outline the measures taken to mitigate against it.	No negative impact
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Is the decision relevant to the aims of the equality duty?	
Guidance on the aims can be found in the EHRC's Essential Guide , alongside fuller PSED Technical Guidance .	
Aim	Yes / No / N/A
1) Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation	No
2) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it	No
3) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it	No

Conclusion: <ul style="list-style-type: none">Consider how due regard has been had to the	Equality considerations: Community Connection is being pursued on an equitable basis. It does not breach any human
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<p>equality duty, from start to finish.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There should be no unlawful discrimination arising from the decision (see guidance above). • Advise on whether the proposal meets the aims of the equality duty or whether adjustments have been made or need to be made or whether any residual impacts are justified. • How will monitoring of the policy, procedure or decision and its implementation be undertaken and reported? 	<p>rights but acknowledges that there is benefit to individual's wellbeing due to improved connectivity.</p> <p>Monitoring the success or otherwise will be monitored over the length of the via monthly reporting tools and quarterly project meetings.</p> <p>Equality Duty: The project does not have any adverse impact by disadvantaging any of the equality groups.</p>
<p>EIA completion date:</p>	<p>7th November 2019</p>