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**IMPLEMENTATION OF LOCAL SUSTAINABLE  
TRANSPORT FUND – DEVELOPMENT OF SHOPMOBILITY SERVICE AND  
BETTER MEETING THE NEEDS OF DISABLED PEOPLE**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member - Councillor David Lyonette, Transport Portfolio**

**Responsible Director - Richard Alty, Director of Place**

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**SUMMARY REPORT**

**Purpose of the Report**

1. To seek permission from Council to waive Contract Procedure Rules under Rule 18 to allow officers financially to support Darlington Association on Disability as part of the implementation of the Local Sustainable Transport Fund project.

**Summary**

2. Darlington's Shopmobility service is currently provided by Darlington Association on Disability (DAD) from its premises in 22-24 Horsemarket. The service has been funded for a number of years by the Council but a recommendation to cease funding from 31 March 2012, forms part of the MTFP earlier on the agenda of this meeting.
3. It is proposed to provide alternative funding for a further 12 months to enable DAD to develop an alternative business model to enable the service to continue and potentially expand.
4. Varying the current contract and extending it for a further 12 months would exceed the £75k procurement threshold set by the Council's internal Contract Procedure Rules and therefore this report seeks permission to waive contract procedure rules in order to part fund the service.
5. The Local Sustainable Transport Fund bid that was submitted in April 2011 included a proposal to extend Shopmobility, as a means of improving accessible transport options for more local people. Discussions with funders since the draft MTFP was published has allowed this funding to be used for the current Shopmobility for the next year, in the hope that a new business model can provide a long term, financially sustainable future for the Shopmobility service and extend its use to more disabled people.
6. The new varied contract would also include a role for DAD to provide direct support to the Local Motion project to ensure that it best meets the needs of disabled people. This would be achieved through the involvement of its Citizen Experts and specialist staff. This was

also included in the original LSTF bid as a local contribution, but which now needs to be funded due to the reduction in staff as DAD contracts as public sector support is reduced.

### **Recommendation**

7. It is recommended that :-

- (a) Council agree to waive the Contract procedure Rules under Rule 18 to allow for the procurement from Darlington Association on Disability of a continued Shopmobility service, including development of a new business model not reliant on Council funding, and provision of practical advice and guidance on the travel needs of disabled people.
- (b) The Borough Solicitor be authorised to extend the current contract with Darlington Association on Disability for the period 1 April 2012 – 31 March 2013 with a further maximum expenditure of £32,000.

### **Reasons**

8. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-

- (a) To enable Darlington Association on Disability to develop a new business model for the delivery of a Shopmobility service, following the withdrawal of funding by Darlington Borough Council; and
- (b) To meet the outcomes set out in the Local Sustainable Transport Fund bid to better meet the needs of disabled people through greater involvement of disabled people in the Local Motion project.

**Richard Alty**  
**Director of Place**

### **Background Papers**

Cabinet 19 July 2011 - Local Sustainable Transport Fund  
Cabinet 22 February 2012 Medium Term Financial Plan

Sue Dobson : Extension 2277

S17 Crime and Disorder	There are no issues arising from this report.
Health and Well Being	The Shopmobility service enables disabled people to participate more fully in their local community, providing greater levels of independence and social inclusion, with associated benefits to their health and wellbeing. The Local Motion projects aims to do this further by involving disabled people in aspects of the project such as information provision and service development.
Carbon Impact	The LSTF project seeks to reduce carbon emissions through the greater use of more sustainable modes of transport and reducing unnecessary trips.
Diversity	The proposal aims to better meet the needs of disabled and older people.
Wards Affected	All
Groups Affected	Current and potential users of the Shopmobility service and disabled people in Darlington.
Budget and Policy Framework	This decision does not require a change to the budget or policy framework.
Key Decision	No applicable.
Urgent Decision	This is an urgent decision. The contract needs to be implemented from April 2012 in order to ensure continuity of service provision and to ensure that maximum funding can be claimed from the Department for Transport.
One Darlington: Perfectly Placed	The report is consistent with the Greener Darlington and Prosperous Darlington themes
Efficiency	The LSTF bid identified proposals to achieve efficiency savings where possible. This proposal seeks to support an efficiency saving identified by the Council (i.e. withdrawal of direct funding of Shopmobility) and improve the effectiveness of other elements of the LSTF programme.

## MAIN REPORT

### Information and Analysis

9. Darlington's Shopmobility service is currently provided by Darlington Association on Disability (DAD) from its premises in 22-24 Horsemarket. This comprises a town centre wheelchair and scooter loan service which provides accessible transport to the shops and businesses within the town centre. The service has been funded for a number of years by the Council under contract. A recommendation to cease funding from 31 March 2012, forms part of the MTFP earlier on the agenda of this meeting.
10. The Local Sustainable Transport Fund bid that was submitted in April 2011 included a proposal to extend Shopmobility, as a means of improving accessible transport options for more local people. Discussions with funders since the draft MTFP was published has allowed this funding to be used for the current Shopmobility for the next year. This could allow further time for a new business model to be developed that can provide a long term, financially sustainable future for the Shopmobility service and extend its use to more disabled people.
11. The current contract with DAD ends on 31 March 2012. The contract has cost £72k for the period 31 March 2010 to 31 March 2012 and therefore the Council will need to waive contract procedure rules as further funding will take the contract value over the £75k procurement limit. The LSTF Bid includes an allocation of funding to support the development of Shopmobility and therefore £16k is available to part fund a member of staff to manage the Shopmobility service through its transition to a new business model over a 12 month period.
12. The total expenditure under the contract would be a maximum of £104k. Because of the nature of the services (Part B – Public Contracts Regulations 2006) there is no requirement for services of this type to be advertised through OJEU.
13. The legal position is that procurement of this type of service should be open and transparent. While selecting a provider directly needs to be objectively justified, in this case since the provider has a unique ability to provide this service and for the reasons set out in this report. With the LSTF bid, the extension of the contract will provide value for money and the procurement risk is considered minimal.
14. The current contract is let under the Council's Standard Terms and Conditions and subject to the extension will be on the same terms, varied as provided below
15. The proposal is to vary (and extend) the current contract and provide some funding to keep the service operational during the transition phase.
16. In addition the LSTF project seeks to improve transport options for disabled people. Therefore during the first full year of the Local Motion project (2012/13) we wish to appoint DAD to provide practical advice and guidance on a number of key elements of the project implementation, including:
  - (a) Improving driver behaviour amongst public transport operators, in particular disability awareness training that results in drivers better meeting the needs of disabled people;

- (b) Reviewing the proposed design of Dinsdale Station;
- (c) Providing assistance with the content of the Transition Programme in primary schools and potentially the inclusion of some specific Independent Travel Training;
- (d) Identify ways in which to include more disabled people in walking and cycling activities;
- (e) Providing advice on the design and content of marketing materials and information;
- (f) Involvement in the feasibility study and pilot project for an accessible taxi service; and
- (g) Identify whether technology, in particular mobile technology, can assist disabled people in making travel choices.

17. Whilst DAD will provide a part time member of staff to fulfil this role, it is anticipated that they will also use other resources such as the ‘Citizen Experts’. Funding of £16k will be provided to fund this role.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

18. 20-25% of Darlington’s population consider themselves to be disabled or to have a long-term limiting illness. This is a significant proportion of the population and issues around accessibility to services and facilities, negative impacts on health and wellbeing, and potential economic benefits associated with a more inclusive society, have featured within the development of, and consultation for, the Third Local Transport Plan. For many the solution is to provide assistance in using the existing transport system – easier to understand travel information; dropped kerbs or link footpaths; more low-floor buses; independent travel training – for others it is about providing accessible transport.
19. An extensive consultation and engagement process was carried out as part of the development of the LSTF Bid with local stakeholders including DAD, eVOLution and Age UK. It was agreed that the bid should identify ways to better meet the travel needs of disabled people including independent travel training for children; an increase in low floor easy access buses; an accessible taxi pilot project and greater involvement of disabled people in the development and delivery of the Local Motion project in order to encourage and support more disabled people to walk, cycle and use public transport.
20. In November 2011 the Council began its consultation on the Medium Term Financial Plan and this included a proposal to cease funding the Shopmobility service. The consultation included:
- (a) Self administered impact assessment questionnaire sent to all registered Shopmobility users (1,050 people)
  - (b) Three “drop in” sessions in the Dolphin Centre for users and their carers
  - (c) Talking Together events, including one specifically targeted at disabled people
  - (d) Meetings with protected characteristic groups
  - (e) Feedback received by letter, email, comments box & telephone.
21. The Shopmobility service is highly valued by the users and forms an important role in providing accessibility to shops and services with the town centre, supporting the local economy, and providing independence to disabled people.