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**EXTENSION OF THE RING-A-RIDE SERVICE LEVEL AGREEMENT**

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**Responsible Cabinet Member(s) - Councillor Nick Wallis,  
Highways and Transport Portfolio**

**Responsible Director(s) - John Buxton, Director of Development and Environment**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. To authorise the extension of the current Ring-a-Ride Service Level Agreement until 31 March 2007, whilst a review of Ring-a-Ride and associated transport functions is undertaken.

**Information and Analysis**

2. The Ring-a-Ride service has been operated by Darlington and District Youth and Community Association (DDYCA) since March 2002. It provides a transport service for people who are unable to access conventional public transport and complements wheelchair accessible taxis provided by the licensed taxi trade. For the users it has the added benefit of operating fixed fares for journeys.
3. The current Service Level Agreement, which specifies the operating conditions of the Ring-a-Ride service, comes to an end on 31 March 2006. The proposed SLA to extend provision by DDYCA to March 2007 is attached at **Appendix 1**.
4. Darlington Borough Council supports the Ring-a-Ride service with a £45,000 grant paid quarterly.
5. Analysis of the service undertaken by DDYCA has identified that the service is unable to meet demand, in particular on Wednesdays and Thursdays. To address this, an additional bus will be operated for a three month trial starting on 1 October 2005, within the grant value.
6. Feedback from DDYCA, Darlington Association on Disability and the consultation for the Second Local Transport Plan has highlighted the need to review the provision of wheelchair accessible vehicles throughout all Council provided or funded services. Therefore the review of Ring-a-Ride should not be considered in isolation but the scope broadened to other accessible community transport provision within the Authority in Children's Services, Youth Services, Adult Services and Leisure.
7. The review will also include an analysis of other transport provision across all departments to establish the level of usage of transport in all areas. A Steering Group comprising representatives from across the Council and Darlington Association on Disability will work with Transport Policy.

8. This has been done in other areas, such as Stockton, and will allow the exploration of opportunities of pooling vehicles and resources to enhance accessible community transport service provision, as well as possibly contributing to Gershon savings. (The review would exclude Home to School Transport but would take into account contract requirements, in particular for wheelchair accessible vehicles).
9. It is proposed that this review will achieve two key outcomes:
  - (a) To improve accessibility to services for people who require wheelchair accessible vehicles in order to travel.
  - (b) To achieve better value for money across transport provision.
10. The Framework Accessibility Strategy is an annex to the Provisional Local Transport Plan and identifies the importance of both transport and non-transport interventions in improving people's ability to access services, in particular health, education, fresh food and employment. The implications of the Accessibility Strategy need to be considered, in particular access to services for disabled people who rely on wheelchair accessible vehicles. This may extend the consultation to other external organisations in the voluntary sector and health service in particular.
11. However, it is important that the Ring-a-Ride service continues to operate during the review period and, therefore, it is intended to extend the SLA for a 12-month period. This time period will enable the appointment of consultants, extensive consultation with current and potential users of the service, a review of current and potential provision and a tendering process to contract the service.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

12. Discussions with Darlington Association on Disability, DDYCA and users of the Ring-a-Ride service have shown that there is a need for a coherent review of all the Council's accessible transport functions. If approved, the forthcoming review will give all relevant users, providers and other stakeholders the opportunity to shape the future of these services.
13. Adult Services are currently reviewing their in-house transport provision and are consulting users and other stakeholders on a 'care model', providing door to door transport.
14. Youth Services have also identified that transport is a major issue for young people and the provision of 'safe transport' is seen as important for young people to access activities.

### **Legal Implications**

15. This report has been considered by the Borough Solicitor for legal implications in accordance with the Council's approved procedures. There are no issues which the Borough Solicitor considers need to be brought to the specific attention of Members, other than those highlighted in the report.

## **Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998**

16. The contents of this report have been considered in the context of the requirements placed on the Council by Section 17 of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998, namely, the duty on the Council to exercise its functions with due regard to the likely effect of the exercise of those functions on, and the need to do all that it reasonably can to prevent, crime and disorder in its area. It is not considered that the contents of this report have any such effect.

## **Council Policy Framework**

17. The issues contained within this report do not represent change to Council policy or the Council's policy framework.

## **Decision Deadline**

18. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter.

## **Key Decision**

19. This is a key decision because it refers to a policy which covers all the Wards in the Borough.

## **Recommendation**

20. It is recommended that Members approve the extension of the Ring-a-Ride Service Level Agreement until 31 March 2007 to enable a review of accessible transport to be undertaken.

## **Reasons**

21. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons:
- (a) The recommendation is supported to enable the Ring-a-Ride service to continue to provide wheelchair accessible transport in the Borough.
  - (b) To explore the potential for delivering a better service to the public, whilst maximising the use of the Council's transport resources.

**John Buxton**  
**Director of Development and Environment**

## **Background Papers**

Ring-a-Ride Service Level Agreement.

Sue Dobson : Extension 2277



## Ring-a-Ride Service Level Agreement

The purpose of Ring-a-Ride is to provide wheelchair accessible transport for residents of Darlington. The service can be booked up to two weeks in advance and taxi vouchers can be redeemed on the service as full or part payment.

Darlington and District Youth and Community Association (DDYCA) will continue to operate the Ring-a-Ride Service until 31 March 2007. This will be funded by a grant from Darlington Borough Council.

The principal requirement of the service is to maintain the existing level of service for the Ring-a-Ride core business and to accommodate the contract work for Age Concern at full price.

Any other contract work must not impact on the delivery of the Ring-a-Ride Service and must not be subsidised by the grant provided by Darlington Borough Council.

DDYCA have the necessary powers to meet all legal requirements.

The Council will:

Pay a grant of £45,000 each financial year (for the period 1 April to 31 March). The payment terms of the grant are that it will be paid quarterly in advance on receipt of a VAT invoice.

DDYCA will continue to operate the service as follows:

1. Two fully wheelchair accessible vehicles are available, purchased using Local transport Plan capital funding. All servicing, maintenance and running costs, including a proportion of DDYCA Core Costs to be funded from the income of Ring-a-Ride including grants, fares and contract income.
2. One of the two vehicles will be used on a part-time basis to cover the Age Concern contract work and the second will be used to provide the Ring-a-Ride service during the hours specified below.
3. DDYCA will be responsible for the recruitment and employment of drivers and a part-time administrator. DDYCA will be responsible for scheduling and planning all routes for Ring-a-Ride and will be responsible for receiving all telephone calls or bookings for the service.
4. Users of the service must meet the agreed qualifying criteria.
5. DDYCA will provide the service on a no-profit basis and the accounts and books will be open to inspection by Borough Council officers.
6. A report will be made to Darlington Borough Council at the end of each calendar month, detailing the number of trips, the number of refusals, and the number of vouchers redeemed.
7. The minimum hours of operation for Ring-a-Ride to be 08:30 to 17:00 Monday to Friday and 08:30 to 12:30 on Saturdays.

8. The fares to be charged will be £3.00 single or £6.00 return in the urban area, and £4.50 single or £9.00 return in rural areas. Fares to be paid by cash or concessionary vouchers. Vouchers to be redeemed monthly and no later than the 15th of the month following receipt.
9. The service provider will be expected to expand the use of the Ring-a-Ride service within the cash limited grant provided by Darlington Borough Council.

John Buxton  
Director of Development and Environment

Date:

Ann Hardcastle  
Darlington and District Youth and Community Association

Date: