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

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

**Responsible Director - John Buxton, Director of Development and Environment**

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**Purpose of Report**

1. To authorise a further extension of the current Ring-A-Ride Service Level Agreement until 31 March 2008, so that additional work may be carried out to identify possible linkages with Adult Services' transport function.

**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 (SLA), which specifies the operating conditions of the Ring-A-Ride Service, comes to an end on 31 March 2007. The agreement has been extended once before for a period of one year (Cabinet report 29 November 2005). The current cost of the service to the Council is £45,000 per year.
4. In Darlington there is not a significant community transport sector. There are a lack of providers and vehicles operating within the Borough. Demand for vehicles is at a peak during early morning and mid afternoon, providing transport for trips to and from schools and day care providers. This leaves minimal provision for other residents who may be unable to access public transport. Other areas nationally have a buoyant community transport sector with a history of voluntary, charity and public provision of transport services that act independently or through a brokerage service.
5. Consultation undertaken for the Second Local Transport Plan (2LTP) and for other work has shown that addressing the accessibility issues of local people unable to use bus services is essential to realise the Community Strategy and the Corporate Plan. This is especially relevant to those living in rural areas in the Borough where there is more limited access to public transport (due to the reduced frequency of services) and where transport costs are higher (due to the distance from key facilities such as health care and shops).
6. Feedback from users has highlighted a need for wheelchair accessible vehicles throughout all the Council provided or funded transport services. A review of the Ring-A-Ride function was commissioned from consultants, Capita, in 2006 to deal with the issues raised by users. The review, which has yet to be formally reported, found that the issues raised by

users (relating to customer service, delivery arrangements and reliability) could be addressed through one of three options for future delivery.

7. Adult Services also commissioned a review in 2006, into the future for the delivery of their transport function. Currently, Adult Services operate 4 vehicles (plus 1 vehicle on lease until September and 2 vehicles that are about to be disposed of) dedicated to the carriage of people to and from Day Care Centres and other similar destinations as well as using taxis or private hire vehicles. The Adult Services' review has explored several potential methods of providing transport in the future, including making this the responsibility of the care provider, not Adult Services. This review is ongoing, and is now not due to report until late Spring this year. Officers from this Department are working with Adult Services to ensure that any potential linkages to the Ring-A-Ride Service are thoroughly evaluated.
8. It is still considered sensible to examine the potential benefits and other issues around delivering Adult Services and Ring-A-Ride transport together, before making a final decision. It is thus necessary to request that Members approve a further extension of one year to the Ring-A-Ride SLA with DDYCA. DDYCA are able to continue to deliver the Ring-A-Ride Service for another year.

### **Outcome of Consultation**

9. Consultation with users and others has shown that there is a need to review how Ring-A-Ride operates so that it best meets their accessibility requirements - for instance in terms of hours of operation, availability of vehicles, cost and ease of booking. A current example is the transport requirements of local people attending the "Prescription for Arts" scheme operated by Age Concern. At the moment, this scheme is using taxis since no other practical alternative exists. Adult Services have also identified similar issues as part of their work.

### **Legal Implications**

10. 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**

11. 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**

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

## **Decision Deadline**

13. For the purpose of the 'call-in' procedure this does not represent an urgent matter, so that the Ring-A-Ride Service may be continued beyond 31 March 2007 without a break in provision.

## **Key Decisions**

14. This is a key decision because it refers to the implementation of a service which covers all the wards in the Borough.

## **Recommendation**

15. It is recommended that Members approve the further extension of the Ring-A-Ride Service Level Agreement until 31 March 2008.

## **Reasons**

16. The recommendations are supported by the following reasons :-
  - (a) To continue to provide a wheelchair accessible transport service throughout the Borough.
  - (b) To ensure that the possible linkages with Adult Services transport have been fully explored before making a decision on the way that the Ring-A-Ride Service may be delivered in the future.

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

## **Background Papers**

Ring-A-Ride Service Level Agreement  
Review of Darlington Ring-A-Ride Service 2006. Capita Symonds Ltd.

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