

The background of the slide features a large, faint, light blue watermark of the City of Vancouver coat of arms. The crest includes a crown at the top with four maple leaves, a shield divided into four quadrants (top-left: a saltire, top-right: a stag's head, bottom-left: a sailing ship, bottom-right: an eagle), and a banner at the bottom with the motto 'A NE FOR A'.

AGENDA ITEM

11

ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT

FALKIRK COUNCIL

Subject: ACCESSIBLE TRANSPORT
Meeting: FALKIRK COUNCIL
Date: 22 JUNE 2016
Author: DIRECTOR OF DEVELOPMENT SERVICES

1 BACKGROUND

- 1.1 When setting the budget at the Council meeting on 17 February 2016, Members reduced the accessible transport budget to £69,190 and requested officers to 'consult further on the proposals in regard to the Dial-a-Journey contract' i.e. the accessible door to door service operated by Order of Malta Dial-a-Journey (OMDAJ) and in particular to further assess the equalities impact on service users if the dial-a-journey (DAJ) contract was not renewed at its expiry on 31 March 2016. To allow for this consultation the contract was temporarily extended until 30 June 2016. Any costs exceeding the new budget were to be found from elsewhere in Development Services' budgets.
- 1.2 The issue is whether the cessation of the door to door DAJ service would breach the Council's equalities duty. Officers have consulted the DAJ service users and a number of organisations as well as examining the "daily run" (booking) sheets from OMDAJ, which the company was not previously able to supply. The results confirm that a relatively small number of people use the door to door service in relation to the number of vehicles which the Council pays the company to provide and that the service is not cost effective.
- 1.3 Taxis could supply most of the service but users do not currently have confidence in the availability or quality of taxi operations. In addition it is possible that a small proportion of users could not be adequately served by taxis. It is recommended that further options be prepared for the future of the service from April 2017 and that this include possible enhanced taxi operations and the bringing of the service in-house. To allow for this work to be undertaken it is recommended that a new contract, at a reduced specification, be awarded to OMDAJ from 1 August 2016 to 31 March 2017 (with the current contract extended to 31 July 2016 to allow time for the operator to adjust).

2 CONSULTATION AND ANALYSIS

- 2.1 Based on OMDAJ's own list of organisations for whom they operate transport, the following consultation was carried out:
- questionnaires were sent to all Dial-a-Journey members (OMDAJ had been consulted on the contents of the questionnaire and some of their suggestions were incorporated);
 - a questionnaire was also completed on behalf of residents of Carrondale Nursing Home and another for Grangemouth Community Care Service users;
 - discussions were held with various teams within Social Work Adult Services (Community Care) and other organisations, including OMDAJ.
- 2.2 The 'daily run sheets' were also received from OMDAJ for March, April and May of this year. These show the individual journeys undertaken each day, the origin and destination of the individual or group, time of day, if they require an escort and if they are carrying a mobility aid.

3 SUMMARY OF RESULTS OF CONSULTATION

3.1 **Questionnaire** - a total of 393 questionnaires were sent to DAJ users. 13 had moved away or died and 112 responses (29.5%) were received. In addition a composite response was sent on behalf of one nursing home of 60 residents which could not be subdivided for the usual statistical analysis but has been useful in its own right.

3.2 The main points arising from the 112 responses to the survey were as follows:

- 68 respondents have a physical disability;
- 61 respondents used a wheelchair (44 people have a manual and 13 use an electric; others did not specify which);
- 48 people said they relied solely on DAJ for transport, 47 answered that they did not rely solely on DAJ. Based on the analysis of the run sheets, of the 48 respondents relying solely on DAJ, 21 have used DAJ at least once in the last three months; usage by the other 25 appears to be infrequent.
- 60 people responded that if DAJ was no longer available they would not be able to attend their activities. Of these 60 respondents, 22 people solely listed day centres or lunch clubs as their reasons for travelling using DAJ. However, the Council would continue to provide transport to both these activities even if the OMDAJ contract were not renewed.

3.3 In summary, those people who use DAJ seem to value the service, particularly in terms of the assistance they receive from the drivers to get from their home to the vehicle. The majority of respondents felt that removing the DAJ service would impact on their quality of life. Most respondents felt that where there was another alternative, it would be difficult for them to use. With regard to using taxis as an alternative, the majority considered taxis too expensive. Many advised that wheelchair accessible taxis were not always available when they wished to travel particularly at peak times of the day between 0800 - 0900 and 1500 - 1600. Further examination of these views needs to be undertaken to properly assess the detailed impact on users.

3.4 Consultation with groups and other organisations

- Social Work Adult Services (Community Care)
- meeting with Activities Coordinator of Carrondale Nursing Home
- meeting with Falkirk Area Disability Access Panel
- presentation and discussion with Falkirk Over 50's Group
- discussion with Alzheimer Scotland (they organise lunch clubs in Bo'ness and Stenhousemuir)
- discussion with Manager of Castings Sheltered Housing
- discussion with Secretary of MS (Multiple Sclerosis) Society Falkirk
- discussion with organiser of PHAB (Physically Handicapped and Able Bodied) Club

- 3.5 The feedback from the groups that use the DAJ service suggests a high level of satisfaction regarding the assistance they receive from drivers to and from the vehicle. Group organisers advise that they would find it difficult to meet the needs of their service users if the DAJ service was withdrawn. However, it is not clear in all cases that the groups require the accessible transport provided by OMDAJ and in some cases these requirements could be met by another operator. Indeed some groups use other minibus operators in part for their transport requirements, although they advise that securing this transport can be more problematic due to the operator's other commercial commitments. Not all groups solely rely on DAJ for transport.
- 3.6 Some journeys are outwith the remit of the Council's agreement with OMDAJ such as group day trips outwith the Forth Valley area. These should be undertaken as a commercial venture and could be provided by a range of operators including OMDAJ.
- 3.7 Some groups operate regular social clubs in the evenings and use the DAJ service to access these. As the current contracted service with OMDAJ ceases at 1900 the return journeys are provided by them outwith the Council's agreement.
- 3.8 **Daily activity analysis**
OMDAJ have supplied the 'daily run sheets' from 1st March to 31st May. These provide details of each individual trip made, where the person is going, time of day, whether they are a wheelchair user or have to carry specialist equipment, whether they require an escort and the fare charged for the trip.
- 3.9 The journeys have been categorised into four main types as follows, of which (d) is the most important in terms of the Council's policy and contract with OMDAJ:
- (a) Day Centre – OMDAJ assisted the Council in transporting clients to Dundas Day Centre when there was a shortage of Council drivers. Transport Planning have now recruited more drivers and there is no longer a need for OMDAJ to assist.
 - (b) Carrondale Nursing Home – DAJ is booked three days a week by Carrondale Nursing Home. These bookings mainly comprise a trip to a garden centre or to a restaurant for lunch. Other nursing homes, including publicly funded homes, either have their own vehicle or share vehicles to take their residents out. OMDAJ charge the home between £10 and £15 per outing. While the vehicle is being used for the home it is generally not available for individual door-to-door bookings. As members of the DAJ service, the residents would still be eligible to use the door to door as individuals paying a fare for the trip thus avoiding the Council making a double subsidy. It is clearly inequitable to allow Carrondale to continue to get both a preferential service in terms of weekly advance booking and a discounted group rate, when this is not available to other facilities, including Council owned nursing homes. There could well be a state aid implication which needs to be explored.
 - (c) Lunch Club – Grangemouth Community Care – a vehicle is used on a Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday to take people to a lunch club organised by Grangemouth Community Care. The Council's Transport Planning Unit also operate a day centre vehicle to transport people to the lunch club on a Tuesday and Thursday. OMDAJ charges Grangemouth Community Care £40 per day.

- (d) Individual Door-to-Door bookings - during the period 1 March – 31 May 2016, 487 individual door to door journeys were undertaken which represents an average of 5.3 single journeys per day. During this period 48 individuals used the service at least once, of whom 25 were wheelchairs users. In May, there were 20 days when the number of vehicles used was 2 or fewer. On 11 days, 3 or more vehicles were used but, in each of these cases, one bus was used to provide transport for either a day centre (which will not be required in future) or Carrondale Nursing Home (which should be charged in line with the normal fare structure).

The following is a summary of a reasonably typical day from the daily run sheets. On Thursday 5 May, 2 vehicles were utilised and a total of 27 single journeys were undertaken. This represents 5 individual door to door journeys plus a group booking of 11 service users from their home addresses to Talbot House, Grangemouth (lunch club), and return.

Bus 1 - 0900 Grangemouth to Larbert
 10.10 Bo'ness to Bo'ness Town Centre
 10.20 Bo'ness to Denny

Bus 2 - 0945 Grangemouth area 11 addresses to Grangemouth Talbot St arriving at
 1045
 1215 Bo'ness Town Centre to Bo'ness
 1300 Grangemouth Talbot St to Grangemouth area 11 addresses completed
 by 1415
 1520 Larbert to Grangemouth

4 ASSESSMENT

- 4.1 If the DAJ service were to be withdrawn the potential impacts on some service users have been identified as reduced mobility and/or increased cost (for taxis or other transport). It appears from the survey results that the majority of service users (60 out 112 responses) would no longer be able to attend their activities. However, the information in paragraph 3.2 above indicates that this may not actually be the case for 22 of those users. Given this uncertainty and the low frequency of trips of some respondents, the implications of the survey need to be examined in more detail during an extended period of operation. This would allow the apparent anomalies to be addressed and impact properly assessed.
- 4.2 DAJ is rated highly for the assistance the drivers give the clients from the home to the vehicle and vice versa. However, it is not yet clear if this is necessary in every case or could not be provided by other means. Through the consultation there was some dissatisfaction with the booking system (people can book only after 10am but, once they get through, are sometimes told that OMDAJ cannot accommodate the journey). Some people were not aware that they would qualify for the service and others thought that because it was based in Stirling, that OMDAJ would not send a vehicle out for a very short journey within the Falkirk Council area.

- 4.3 From the consultation, it would appear that Taxicard currently does not meet all the needs of all disabled travellers. Some taxis may not be able to carry larger wheelchairs. There is also a case for more accessible taxis, disability awareness driver training and improved publicity for Taxicard. Many disabled people do depend on taxis to get around but it is generally felt that there are not enough wheelchair accessible taxis to have confidence that they will be able to get one when required. Further work needs to be undertaken to properly understand what the issues are and how they might be resolved.
- 4.4 As mentioned in para 3.9 (b) above, OMDAJ have offered heavily discounted group bookings which confers a double subsidy by the Council, while preventing other individual users from using the vehicles at that time. While the Council needs to consider the financial impact on users, it also needs to ensure that the service is operated in a cost effective way.

5 FUTURE REVENUE COSTS AND SERVICE

- 5.1 The current contract with OMDAJ (costing £204,000 on an annual basis) requires that three buses are normally available to serve Falkirk Council area members for the hours of Monday to Sunday 0800 to 1900. As there is evidence that there could be a negative impact on some disabled individuals (albeit, given the daily run sheets this is a small proportion of people), it is felt that currently the Taxicard scheme would not meet all of those needs. Officers therefore requested that OMDAJ supply costs for a 3 bus, 2 bus and one bus operation, on 7, 6 and 5 days operations from 08:30 to 17:30 hours.
- 5.2 These would be within the Falkirk Council area only (instead of across the Forth Valley area). This change was considered in 2012 but the company had offered to operate cross boundary services within Forth Valley at no extra cost. Now, however, it is considered that these longer journeys may be contributing to the difficulties which some users are having in booking journeys and should therefore be withdrawn.
- 5.3 The Transport Planning Unit (TPU) considered that the initial costs provided by OMDAJ did not represent best value, so the company was approached again. Their revised costs are summarised in the following table.

Proposed Level of Service	All Costs inclusive of Taxicard Booking Service (annual rate)
3 bus operation Mon – Sun	£220,865
3 bus operation Mon – Sat	£213,377
3 bus operation Mon – Fri	£205,889
2 bus operation Mon – Sun	£164,494
2 bus operation Mon – Sat	£161,166
2 bus operation Mon – Fri	£157,838
1 bus operation Mon – Sun	£134,331
1 bus operation Mon – Sat	£129,339
1 bus operation Mon – Fri	£122,267

- 5.4 It should be noted that Stirling Council state that they are currently paying £120,000 for a two bus 7 day a week service, including a late evening service on Fridays. This broadly compares to the £164,494 figure (see above) quoted to this Council, although this price would not include a Friday late evening service. Commenting on the £44,494 difference, OMDAJ say they are unable to offer a comparable cost to this Council since they are based in Stirling and encounter additional costs serving the Falkirk Council area. They have also suggested that collecting more people and going to one place costs more, although this conflicts with the considerable discount which they apply to a private nursing home.
- 5.5 Officers have highlighted to OMDAJ that the fare levels for the group work should be reviewed. In some instances rates charged for groups appear to be particularly low, possibly barely covering the marginal cost of operating such journeys. This in effect gives a greater benefit to those travelling within a group over people with individual transport requirements who end up paying proportionally more for their journey.
- 5.6 Given that TPU would be able to cover some journeys and that Carrondale Nursing Home should make alternative arrangements for the outings for the residents (or book them as individual DAJ passengers and pay individual fares), it is believed that for the true door-to-door service a 2 vehicle operation would meet the demand from the majority of users. Some journeys are undertaken on a Saturday for shopping and football in particular but very few on a Sunday. There is approximately one evening trip per month for three service users who attend the MS Society and the PHAB club meet every Friday evening for two to three service users. However, the current contract with OMDAJ does not cover evening journeys after 19:00 hours and some of these are private arrangements with OMDAJ. Leaving these evening and weekend arrangements aside, it is considered that a two bus Monday to Friday operation would accommodate the majority of service users' transport requirements. It is unlikely that an option for one bus would be able to meet the current transport needs of services users.
- 5.7 Any decision to award a further contract to DAJ would require some additional funding in the current year. Some of this could be met from existing budgets and it is recommended that the balance (£66,000) be taken from the bus contracts budget as detailed in para 7.3 below.

6 CONCLUSION

- 6.1 A relatively small number of people use the door to door service in relation to the number of vehicles which the Council pays OMDAJ to provide and the service is not cost effective. Although taxis could in principle supply most of the service, the users do not currently have confidence in the availability or reliability of taxi operations. In addition it is possible that a small proportion of users could not be adequately served by taxis.
- 6.2 It is recommended that further detailed analysis of the user data be undertaken and this will allow a view to be taken on the anomalies arising in some answers to the questionnaire, such as the actual numbers dependent on the service and the frequency of their trips. Further options can be prepared for the future of the service from April 2017 and this could include possible enhanced taxi operations and/or the bringing of the service in-house. To allow for this work to be undertaken it is recommended that a new contract, at a reduced specification, be awarded to OMDAJ from 1 August 2016 to 31 March 2017 (with the current contract extended to 31 July 2016).

- 6.3 There is a contrast between the low level of usage overall and the difficulties which some potential users experience in making bookings. It is considered that by reducing the number of vehicles used and restricting journeys to within the Council area only, the service can be better concentrated on its intended purposes as well as making it more cost effective. The new contract from August until March 2017 is recommended to be for a 2 vehicle, 5 day a week, 08:30 to 17:30 hours, Falkirk area only service at a cost of £105,225.

7 POLICY, PERSONNEL, LEGAL AND FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 **Legal implications** – The contract would have come to an end on 31 March 2016 but was temporarily extended until the end of June 2016. Procurement issues are covered in paragraph 7.4 onwards.
- 7.2 **Personnel Implications** – There are no personnel implications.
- 7.3 **Financial Implications** – The cost of the DAJ service was £204,000 per annum. For 2016/17 the Council set the relevant budget at £69,190 which was to cover the Taxicard booking service, any increased use of Taxicard and any replacement services such as the lunch club. The total cost in 2016/17 of the existing contract extended to 31 July 2016 would be £68,000. To award a new contract to OMDAJ from 1 August 2016 to 31 March 2017 would cost £105,225 of which £39,490 could be met from existing Transport Planning budgets. It is recommended that the balance of about £66,000 be met from the subsidised local bus contracts budget.
- 7.4 With regard to procurement processes it should be noted that the service was tendered in 2012 with assistance from the Council's Procurement Unit but, despite initial expressions of interest from a number of companies at PQQ stage, only one tender was received (from OMDAJ). In these circumstances, and as the tender exceeded the available budget, officers were authorised to negotiate a reduced level of service with OMDAJ. These negotiations were reported to the Policy & Resources Committee who authorised the three year contract which was due to expire in March 2016. The Procurement Unit has again been consulted in preparing this report.
- 7.5 There are a number of factors to consider:
- (a) The previous tender generated no competition and the work was considered to be specialised then. The work remains specialised in the current state of the market. On that basis there is little or no confidence that a further procurement exercise at this stage would generate competition, although there remains the possibility that active involvement with some transport operators could potentially generate competition in future.
 - (b) The work is essential and needs to be progressed. To set aside the work is not an option.
 - (c) The value is £105,225 and below European tender limits.
- 7.6 The Council's Contract Standing Orders (CSO) allow for procurement without competition (para 4.2) and CSO need not apply where there are special circumstances (3.6 and 5.8).

7.7 Although it is not considered that value for money is currently being achieved the proposed contract from August would improve the position and allow further options to be explored, including the possibility of bringing the service in-house. It would also allow the proper analysis of usage to be undertaken to allow any impacts to be accurately quantified.

7.8 **Equality & Poverty Impact Assessment (EPIA)** – An EPIA was carried out for the budget proposal considered by the Council in February. This concluded that there would be a medium impact if the DAJ service were to be withdrawn and this finding is confirmed by the further consultation and analysis. An EPIA has been prepared for the two bus proposal recommended in this report and this concludes that there would be a low impact, since most journeys for which the service was initiated could be accommodated. The proposed changes are also temporary for a short period until the review can be completed.

8 RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 It is recommended:

(a) that, in order to give notice of a reduced service, the existing contract with Order of Malta Dial-a-Journey (OMDAJ) be extended to 31 July 2016; and

(b) that the Council award a new contract to OMDAJ from 1 August 2016 until 31 March 2017, for a 2 vehicle, 5 day a week, 08:30 to 17:30 hours Falkirk Council area only service at a cost of £105,225 (an annual rate of £157,838) to allow officers to prepare a further report to the Council on options for the future; the additional costs being met from a combination of existing Transport Planning budgets and the balance (estimated at £66,000) from the bus contracts budget.

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Director of Development Services
Date: 13 June 2016

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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

1. Questionnaire and results from the questionnaire
2. Comments & brief overview from Groups consulted
3. 'Daily Run' sheets summary

Anyone wishing to inspect the background papers should contact Gary McGowan on 01324 504925.