



Agenda Item 9

Accessible Transport - Dial-a-Journey Service

Falkirk Council

Title: Accessible Transport - Dial-a-Journey Service
Meeting: Falkirk Council
Date: 7 December 2016
Submitted By: Director of Development Services

1. Purpose of Report

1.1 The purpose of this report is to propose the extension of the contract with the Order of Malta Dial-a-Journey Limited (OMDAJ) for a further two years.

2. Recommendation(s)

2.1 Council is asked to award a new contract for a door to door accessible transport service to the Order of Malta Dial-a-Journey Ltd for a further two years, until 31 March 2019 at a cost of £157,000 a year (comprising £24,000 to manage the Taxicard Booking Service and £133,000 for the door-to-door service).

3. Background

3.1 Falkirk Council agreed when setting its budget, on 17 February 2016, that officers were 'to consult further on the proposals in regard to the dial-a-journey contract'.

3.2 Further consultation was carried out with service users and analysis of daily run sheets was produced showing where individuals and groups travelled on a daily basis. The consultation and assessment revealed that, for a small number of service users, the proposed alternative services would not meet their needs or that the increased cost of the alternative service would be difficult.

3.3 A report was then considered by Falkirk Council on 22 June 2016 when it was agreed that a new contract be awarded to OMDAJ from 1 August 2016 to 31 March 2017 for a two vehicle, 5 days a week, 08:30 to 17:30 hours, Falkirk Council area only service, to allow officers to prepare a further report to Council on options for the future.

3.4 Although the available hours of operation have reduced by 59% (from 220.5 hours a week with three vehicles to 90 hours a week with 2 vehicles), the number of passengers per month has declined by only 28% (from 676 average per month to 490 average per month).

3.5 OMDAJ continues to transport people on a Friday night for the PHAB club when they are able to accommodate people and some weekend work where they are able to recover full cost. Although this remains outwith the current agreement with OMDAJ, some service users from the Falkirk area benefit from this arrangement.

3.6 The Council has received no complaints from service users about the changes in the service. However, OMDAJ has advised that the revised hours of operation have restricted a small number of people wishing to travel at weekends or in the evening or outwith the Falkirk Council area. OMDAJ has stepped in when they have resources available and where they can recover the full costs.

4. Considerations

4.1 OMDAJ have informed the Transport Planning Unit (TPU) that, to operate the service in 2017/18, they would maintain the costs at the current rate (2016/17) of £157,000. This comprises £24,000 for the management of the Taxicard booking system and £133,000 for the door-to-door service.

4.2 The Transport Planning Unit has costed bringing the door-to-door service in house. Since the service now operates 5 days a week and from 8:30am until 5:30pm, the potential cost of running the service is now more comparable with OMDAJ and it is estimated that it would cost at least £110,000 per annum. This would include the purchase or rental of 2 minibus vehicles, the full time employment of 2 drivers, training, personal protective equipment, the salary of casual drivers to cover annual leave, fuel, maintenance, depreciation and a member of staff to take the bookings and schedule the routes as well as a scheduling system.

4.3 However, the Council does not have a booking system or staff in place to deliver it in house from April 2017. There is also the possibility of social work transport and school children ASN escorts being taken on by the TPU. Although the date of transfer has not been agreed between services, the transfer would require time to organise and the simultaneous setting up of an in house accessible transport service is not recommended, if a seamless transition is to be ensured.

4.4 A further option would be to engage a commercial operator, possibly one or more of the larger taxi operators, to take the service on. In 2012 the Council agreed to tender the door-to-door service in order to test the market for the supply of these services. During the Pre-Qualification Questionnaire stage two taxi firms stated an interest in operating the door-to-door service. However, at the Invitation to Tender stage only OMDAJ submitted a tender. It is therefore anticipated that there would continue to be no further commercial interest in operating the door-to-door service.

4.5 The TPU has concluded that this would not be an effective option at present particularly since it would require the training of drivers in disability awareness, the use and purchase of appropriate vehicles and possibly the resolution of some licencing issues. Until the Council can set up its own booking system, the company would also have to operate the Taxicard booking scheme which would raise a conflict of interest.

4.6 The reduced level of service with two buses has been operating since 1 August 2016. The number of journeys undertaken has reduced but remains variable, particularly for individual service users. A stable level of demand has not yet been reached. This indicates that a further contract with the same level of service would have merit before any other changes are contemplated. In the current circumstances Best Value is being obtained and the costs have been

reduced. Once demand has stabilised, it will be possible to consider other options further.

- 4.7 Appropriate procurement requirements have been checked. With regard to European Rules the Accessible Door to Door Transport service would be regarded as a 'social care service' and subject to the Light Touch Regime under new procurement legislation introduced in April 2016. This means that there is no requirement to tender this service on the open market as per the Council's Standing Orders 8.9. Social and Other Specific Services.
- 4.8 Given the Council's previous testing of the market, it is appropriate to rely on these exemptions from tendering.

5. Consultation

- 5.1 Discussion has been held with OMDAJ on the proposal to extend their contract for a year or two. They have agreed to operate at the current rate of £157,838 for 2017/18 and (with inflation) for 2018/19.

6. Implications

Financial

- 6.1 The door-to-door service budget was reduced in 2016 from £184,000 to £69,190. The shortfall of £68,648 which was required to operate the revised DAJ service was made up from the Bus Services budget. This arrangement can be continued for the proposed contract.

Resources

- 6.2 There are no resource implications.

Legal

- 6.3 There are no legal implications.

Risk

- 6.4 There are no risk implications.

Equalities

- 6.5 An Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment was completed for the service changes which occurred from 1 August 2016. This found that, for a small number of services users, the alternative services which had been proposed in February 2016 would not meet all their needs. Therefore, the current level of service was provided from 1 August. There are no further changes anticipated from 1 April 2017.

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

- 6.6 There were no sustainability or environmental implications.

7. Conclusions

- 7.1 The majority of the journeys needed by the most severely disabled people are still being enabled but at a reduced cost. Based on the information provided and the options considered, it is proposed to award OMDAJ a two year contract to operate the door-to-door service and manage the Taxicard booking service. The Council could review the service in 2018/19 to assess whether the market should be tested again or if the service could be brought in-house from April 2019.

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Appendices

None.

List of Background Papers:

The following papers were relied on in the preparation of this report in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973:

- OMDAJ patronage data