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VOLUNTARY CAR SCHEME

STARTER PACK

YOUR KEY QUESTIONS ANSWERED.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This guide will help you decide if setting up a Voluntary Car Scheme is right for your community, it provides the basic priorities and tools you need to **Get Started**, to avoid some of the pitfalls and to continue to run a successful Car Scheme.

The guide is available in hard copy and can also be downloaded from our website:

www.bucks-comm-action.org.uk look under the Transport Section. As well as the guide we can also offer you support through our Voluntary Car Schemes Project Officer Liz Baker, please contact her on 01296 421036.

2. FIRST STEPS

Here are some answers to commonly asked questions about VCS:

What is a Voluntary Car Scheme?

A good question, the simple answer is an organised form of car sharing, which uses a pool of volunteer drivers to take people eligible under the schemes constitution on pre-arranged journeys. These are usually co-ordinated by the central organisation. The drivers use their own cars and their expenses are reimbursed, normally on a mileage basis. Volunteer drivers can take people to a wide range of destinations and many schemes encourage their volunteers to stay with passengers throughout the trip, offering extra support and assistance beyond the scope of commercial transport operators. Because of these factors it is essential to ensure before trying to set up, that there is a real local need for such a scheme and that it will plug a gap in local services.

How do we start?

A car scheme is likely to be dealing with a wide range of transport needs. Get advice from your Local Authority public transport department, they will be able to tell you what is possible and what other provision exists in your area, you should also make use of your local rural transport advisor. It is also a good idea to involve representatives from a broad cross-section of groups and clubs (e.g.) the parish council, the playgroup, the club for the elderly, the youth club, the Church etc, in order to sound out local opinion and discuss different ideas. It is advisable to start the formation of a steering group at this stage.

Is a Public Meeting Necessary?

No, but it is a good idea to discuss your proposed scheme. Invite people from all the above mentioned sections as well as potential funders, voluntary & commercial transport providers and any others you wish to involve. At the meeting make sure you have an experienced chairperson and ensure that the steering committee is on hand to answer questions. Reassure the operators of local transport services (such as taxi drivers) that the scheme poses no threat to their livelihood and be prepared to modify your proposals in light of any sensible suggestions put forward.

As well as publicising your proposed service, the meeting gives you an opportunity to recruit committee members, volunteer drivers and potential clients.

What else do we need to do?

Following the Public Meeting or initial set up period the Steering Committee should establish what sort of scheme is required. You probably already have some idea about what gaps there are in your transport services, but it is worth looking at them in detail before you start a car scheme.

The Committee may decide to carry out a questionnaire survey to establish the potential market for a car scheme. The advantage of questionnaires is that they reach people who may otherwise be unable to voice their needs. Because you will be aiming to help a less mobile group of the population it is advisable for the questionnaires to be delivered and collected from households in your area. However, questionnaire results should be treated with caution because they can belittle the needs of small but important groups. Just because a car scheme may only be helping a small group doesn't mean that it is not providing a good and important service.

Once you have a reasonable idea that the service will be used you can begin to plan out your scheme.

3. LETS GET STARTED

Defining Our Limits

You will need to decide the following:

- **What sort of journeys will you make?**
- **What distance should you cover?**
- **Who will be eligible?**

- **What sort of journeys will you make?**

There are two main ways of organising car share journeys:

(i) Regular journeys - the voluntary driver would make a trip to a particular destination (e.g. the nearest shops) at a regular time, collecting passengers at pre-arranged pick-up points around the village. Timetables for these journeys would need to be made known to potential users.

(ii) Individual journeys - this system would need a volunteer to receive any requests for transport and to take bookings during a set period (e.g. 3 mornings) each week. Suitable drivers would then need to be contacted to deal with each request.

Alternatively, you could run a scheme with a combination of both these types of journeys.

Another idea is to co-ordinate requests for trips to the doctor's surgery so that a block booking could be made at the surgery for car scheme patients. This sort of arrangement would be dependent on the co-operation of the local doctor.

- **What distance should the journeys be?**

Generally car schemes cover short distances to the nearest shop or doctor's surgery but you could also consider the possibility of doing longer journeys to local towns and hospitals.

It may be an idea to link your car scheme with an appropriate bus service, so that you are not competing for passengers with the local bus operator. Longer journeys could then be limited for people who cannot travel by bus because of disability or frailty. If you are requested to do longer journeys you could charge a higher mileage rate, so that taking them on will not deplete your funds.

- **Who will be eligible?**

A car scheme is best equipped to cater for the day to day needs of people without their own transport or with a particular need and should not necessarily be limited to the elderly or disabled. Although you want to avoid losing disillusioned volunteers who feel that they are being "used", each case should be fairly judged. For example, the driver may see a car in the drive, or be aware that the passengers' relative usually gives them lifts. This may be an occasion when the relative is unable to help, or when the passenger wishes to seek confidential advice from a solicitor or doctor, without the knowledge of members of their family. The drivers should be prepared to take any passenger referred by the Co-ordinator, questioning afterwards, if necessary.

Beware also of limiting the scheme too much, some schemes have been set up to deal only with "emergencies" and have found that they are not called on very often. In a real emergency an ambulance can be called. Very often the people most in need of the transport don't consider themselves an emergency.

How do we recruit drivers?

The more volunteers you have, the easier the scheme becomes to run. You should begin recruiting volunteers early on in the planning of the scheme and continually seek them throughout the life of the scheme because there will be a continual turnover of volunteers. The public meeting is a good place to make the first approach to potential drivers. This could then be followed with appeals in the local newspapers, newsletters and with personal approaches by the Steering Committee and drivers already recruited. It is important that the volunteers who are recruited are suitable. Having offered a service, car schemes are responsible for providing safe and reliable transport for their clients. Drivers must have a Full Driving Licence and current insurance. They should be asked to sign a form to this effect. It is a good idea to repeat this annually in case any circumstances have changed and the driver has forgotten to mention it, indeed seeing the form may well jog a driver's memory about an insurance premium or a renewal of a Driving Licence. References should be asked for when a driver first registers and should be taken up. Though it is unlikely that any one volunteering for your scheme would receive an unfavourable reference, this has occurred. You owe it to your passengers to take care over this. The policy of the Committee should be made clear to drivers, so that they are in no doubt as to what kind of journeys they will be expected to undertake. Unless the drivers have stated particular wishes, they should be expected to take any passenger their Co-ordinator asks them to.

You will also wish to keep a record of the kind of car the driver has. How many doors it has, and whether they can get a wheelchair in the boot for example.

Who Pays/ How Much?

You need to decide:

- **How to Pay your Drivers**
- **Charging your Passengers**

- **How to Pay your drivers**

Running a car is expensive and volunteers should be re-imbursed for their expenses at a reasonable (NOT FOR PROFIT) rate. While it should not be necessary to pay mile for mile the full cost of running a car when the car is being kept on the road. You should be paying a contribution towards the upkeep plus the "marginal" costs of the journeys made, e.g. petrol, oil, servicing etc. Inland Revenue guidelines will be useful. At present the average paid in most schemes is between 25p and 30p per mile. You are recommended to select a simple rate, which does not vary with the size of car.

- **Charging your Passengers**

Passengers too, should be expected to pay for their transport. Most people pay for the journeys they make, the taxi, the bus fare, the contribution to a relative's petrol costs. There is no reason why they should not also be asked to pay for a car scheme journey. The important aspect of the service is provision of transport, not free transport! Payment for the journey also removes the feeling that a passenger is accepting charity by using the car scheme. Some of the journeys your scheme will be doing will be for the purposes that neither passenger or driver sees as being "worthy" and both would prefer to see payment being made. E.g. A trip to the hairdressers for example, or to a Music Exam. It is best to state clearly what the charge will be. If you feel that some people are genuinely unable to pay, you could keep a central fund to contribute towards their journeys. The money you collect will make a contribution to the costs of the scheme and will enable more journeys to be undertaken. You should try to set the charge for passengers at a rate broadly equivalent to the bus fare. Though fares vary a great deal. This will still leave you with the need to subsidise any journey where there is only one passenger, and you will also need to pay the full cost from the driver's home to the pick-up point.

A warning about donations. Experience has shown that they rarely meet a reasonable proportion of the cost of the journey. Non-car owners have very little idea about the cost of running a car, and the distance involved.

It is sometimes possible to arrange to redeem pensioners' tokens, which are issued by some District and Parish Councils. For more details, please contact the Rural and Community Transport Officer at Buckinghamshire Community Action.

What about Management structure?

Think about the following:

- **Your Committee structure**
- **The Scheme Co-ordinator**

- **Your Committee Structure**

The importance of a steering group during the early life of your scheme cannot be emphasised enough. This role should be handed over to a Management committee when the Car Scheme is launched. You are advised to develop a constitution, which sets out:

- The Organisation's name
- Your aims & objectives
- Rules
- Procedure for General Meetings
- Roles and Responsibilities of Committee Members
- Financial arrangements
- How to alter the constitution
- Procedures for dissolving the organisation

Buckinghamshire Community Action can provide draft Constitutions.

- **The Scheme Co-ordinator?**

The most important person in the organisation is the co-ordinator. The co-ordinator needs a telephone and should be able to be available at regular times on a regular basis. There is no necessity to be available constantly, so long as it is made clear when the co-ordinator can be contacted. The job involves keeping the scheme running on a day to day basis, ensuring that the drivers are available and dealing with queries and requests from passengers. How much this involves will depend on how the scheme is organised. One key role for the co-ordinator is to monitor the use of the scheme so that the drivers can report difficult cases to the co-ordinator, or a decision on eligibility. Most co-ordinators have a method of recording incoming requests and the arrangements made with drivers, either by a card index system, a "Day Book" or a form. Illustrations and samples can be provided.

(The role of Co-ordinator can be a paid role).

Are there any Legal Issues?

It is a good idea to make sure you understand the legal implications from the start, in this way you won't raise false expectations and you will be able to answer people queries. Here are the answers to some key questions.

- **Do we need a special license?**
- **What about Insurance?**
- **Are there any other legal requirements?**

- **Do we need a special licence?**

The answer here is no, voluntary car schemes are exempt from **ALL** the licensing and operating regulations. Providing your drivers do **NOT MAKE A PROFIT** on expenses paid the scheme and volunteer drivers need only comply with regulations applicable to private motorists.

- **What about insurance?**

Your drivers should notify their insurance company of their involvement in a car scheme, drivers should not have to pay any additional premiums. It should be made clear to the company that all **expenses will be claimed on a non-profit basis**. (See

First Steps. You should also consider such things as Public Liability Insurance, Employers Liability Insurance and Contingent Liability.

1. Public Liability Insurance – This insures against the legal liability of the organisation resulting from accidental injury of members of the public and the accidental loss or damage to their property arising from the organisations activities. **This is the most important cover to consider.**
2. Employers Liability Insurance – This is required by law for salaried staff (optional for volunteers), it covers injury sustained in the course of their work or volunteering. Providing this type of insurance is seen as good practice.
3. Contingent Liability – If a driver is involved in an accident whilst undertaking work for the scheme then the scheme itself can be held responsible as it arranged the journey. A contingent liability policy would protect the scheme from such claims from drivers, passengers and others.

Also consider Personal Accident Cover for those involved in the scheme, Loss of No Claims Bonus and Payment of Excess.

- **Are there any other legal requirements?**

Yes, but these are not onerous, it is a legal requirement that all participating drivers are volunteers and both salaried staff and volunteers working with vulnerable members of the community (mainly young children) must declare any previous convictions. You can get the booklet *Screening Volunteers* produced by the National Centre for Volunteering, which fully explains the situation. (Seek assistance from your VCS Advisor).

4. AND FINALLY

Can we get some funding to get started?

The answer here is probably yes. You will need to explore all sources of funding; you may have to submit funding bids. In all this you can get help from Buckinghamshire Community Action who can advise you where to look and how to apply.

Sources of funding include:

- Rural Transport Funds
- Local Councils
- National Lottery
- Health Authorities
- Fund Raising Events
- Donations

Support & advice is available from Buckinghamshire Community Action.

What about Publicity?

There is no doubt that publicity will help generate volunteers and potential users, it will also raise your profile in the locality and will be an aid to fund raising.

There are several ways of publicising your Car scheme:

- Word of Mouth
- Leaflets
- Posters
- The Press (including Newsletters)

- Television & Radio.

Why not ask your Voluntary Car Schemes Project Officer for help and advice.

What about the Administration?

You will need processes to administer your Car Scheme but these need not be complicated, Buckinghamshire Community Action can provide templates of surveys, record sheets etc to help you get started. These are available as hard copy or on CD-ROM.

For Further Information CONTACT:

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