



Partners for Change: Community Transport in North Lanarkshire

North Lanarkshire Council (NLC) is increasingly recognising the importance of community transport in helping to meet local transport needs in a financially efficient way. NLC wants to improve joint working with North Lanarkshire's emerging community transport sector. After participating in the Partners for Change process involving NLC, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) and the third sector community transport providers there is now a Partnership Plan in place that improves co-operation, implements a number of resource sharing opportunities and identified a range of community transport solutions.



Background

Community Transport is becoming increasingly recognised by North Lanarkshire Council (NLC) and other public authorities as an efficient, effective and inclusive way of meeting local transport needs.

North Lanarkshire is a medium sized local authority area located in central Scotland with a population of around 326,000. NLC spends around £4.2 million per year on public transport with external providers. The Council also operates a fleet of 145 vehicles to provide public transport.

In response to local demands and in collaboration with public sector partners; NHS and NLC; the third sector in North Lanarkshire has established a Community Transport Consortium and produced a North Lanarkshire Community Transport Action Plan 2012-14. This plan sets out the Consortium's vision on the development of community transport in North Lanarkshire and identifies a number of key objectives, including, to:

- develop services for older people
- develop partnerships with the public sector and the wider third sector

- explore sharing resources
- identify and address training needs
- develop volunteering opportunities
- build capacity of community transport operators
- secure contracts to deliver community transport

NLC's Regeneration Services has been supporting the Consortium and initiated Ready for Business to deliver a Partners for Change programme to increase understanding between the relevant Council departments and the Consortium and to unlock opportunities for local community transport services.

About the process

Partners for Change (PfC) is a tried and tested process of securing better local outcomes through improved collaboration with the third sector.

For the North Lanarkshire Community Transport PfC the process involved:

- Three intensive half-day workshop sessions, each bringing together Council staff with an interest in community transport, either as commissioner of transport services or user, third sector community transport

providers, and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT).

- Development of a Partnership Plan for Community Transport in North Lanarkshire focused on increasing co-operation between the Consortium and the Council, sharing resources and increasing opportunities for community transport organisations to win contracts and take on new services.
- Ongoing mentoring and advisory support to help deliver on agreed actions and take the next steps to partnership improvement.

The process has been delivered by Ready for Business as part of the national Developing Markets for the Third Sector Providers programme.

The timing of this process fits with the development of a new North Lanarkshire Social Enterprise Strategy and a Voluntary Sector Strategy and reflects the key themes and priorities to *'develop opportunities for the sector'*.

The starting point

At the start of the process the participants identified a number of strengths and opportunities for the community transport sector in North Lanarkshire, including:

- The existing partnership structures between the public and third sector, including a particularly well developed community planning structure and a reconfigured North Lanarkshire Social Economy Partnership.
- A genuine willingness from the Council to improve transport services to local communities, strengthened by political buy-in and executive leadership.
- An established Community Transport Consortium and earlier development of the North Lanarkshire Community Transport Action Plan 2012-14.
- Strong support of SPT for community transport organisations as part of the

West of Scotland Community Transport Network.

- A collective understanding of the transport needs of the community and the innovation and benefits that community transport can bring.
- The opportunity to share resources, drive down cost and deliver better local outcomes.
- A demand for community transport solutions among the population of North Lanarkshire, particularly among vulnerable and isolated groups.

However, there were also a number of weaknesses and challenges identified that would need to be overcome:

- A lack of resources heightened by the Council's financial constraints and the increasing cost of operating transport services (e.g. fuel).
- A lack of understanding and confidence in some parts of the Council regarding the capacity of the third sector to deliver on local transport needs.
- A lack of authority and mechanisms to co-ordinate the sharing of Council and third sector transport resources.
- The perceived complexity of public procurement processes and the lack of skills and knowledge in the third sector to bid successfully.
- Organisational cultures that at times can lead to aversion to risk and be resistant to change.

Local action

From the Partners for Change process a number of practical actions have been agreed to increase co-operation between the Council and the third sector which will develop community transport in North Lanarkshire, including:

- Accelerating the implementation of the North Lanarkshire Community Transport Action Plan 2012-14.
- Establishing a cross-departmental working group to ensure co-ordination of transport provision across the Council and prioritisation of community transport options.

- Increasing the capacity and quality of third sector community transport providers through training (MIDAS, PAT, Tender Writing) and implementation of the SPT Quality Framework.
- Setting up a 'hire desk' system for the Consortium members to access the Council fleet.
- Piloting low cost access for Consortium members to the Council's fuel delivery point and vehicle repair and maintenance service.
- Fitting a charging point for electrical vehicles at one of the Consortium members' premises.
- Exploring opportunities for Consortium members to procure vehicles through the Council's bulk purchasing arrangements.
- Reviewing current Council spending on transport in commissioning, procurement and grant funding and exploring opportunities to maximise community transport spending.
- Piloting community transport solutions to help meet Council overtime reduction targets and decrease the use of taxis.
- Exploring the establishment of a North Lanarkshire Community Transport Pilot to try and test community transport solutions to local public transport needs.

Overcoming obstacles

The Partners for Change process has helped participants to overcome obstacles to change. These included:

- **Cultural.** The process has brought together those in the Council that purchase transport with third sector providers. The structured process has increased mutual understanding of motivations, established and strengthened relationships, and broken down any resistance to change.
- **Intelligence.** The information shared in the process has helped to clarify the scale and scope of community transport opportunities (e.g. through offering a detailed breakdown of Council spending on overtime and taxis, a detailed overview of the downtime of the Council fleet, the amount the Council spends on transport and grants, and the scale resources/assets available to the third sector).
- **Financial.** Through the process it has become clear to third sector participants that the Council has to recover its overheads and cannot provide services for free. By using the Council's purchasing power, however, third sector providers can benefit from reduced cost for the use of vehicles (e.g. repair and maintenance, fuel and purchasing new vehicles).
- **Technical.** The process confirmed that identified 'technical' barriers to sharing resources (e.g. insurance, legal) are perceived rather than real. This has opened the way for Council officers to share resources where previously it was not believed to be possible.

Next steps

The participants of the Community Transport Partners for Change process agreed a number of next steps:

- The submission of the completed Community Transport Partnership Plan to NLC's Environmental Services Committee and North Lanarkshire Social Economy Partnership to get formal approval of and buy-in to the actions identified in the plan.
- The inclusion of NLC Finance and Procurement in the Council Short Term Working Group on Community Transport to ensure solutions will be implemented Council-wide.
- Follow up actions to engage with the NHS Lanarkshire in the Partnership Plan, in order to extend the reach and impact of the actions agreed.
- Identification of other areas in North Lanarkshire where the Partners for Change approach could be beneficial in reshaping public services.
- The exploration of opportunities to include a North Lanarkshire pilot project in a strategic SPT Community Transport PSP (Public Social Partnership).

Feedback and learning

Participants were generally very positive about the Partners for Change process. More than three-quarters of the participants found the process helpful or very helpful, while the remaining quarter found it partially helpful.

Increased knowledge about community transport, a better mutual understanding and improved partnership working between the Council and third sector partners were identified as the main benefits, by 85% of the participants.

The following table illustrates the value associated with the Partners for Change process:

Intended Outcomes	Participants Rating it as Positive*
Learn more about the perspective of people from other sector(s)	92%
Gain more trust and respect for colleagues from other sector(s)	92%
Establish common priorities with colleagues from other sector(s)	100%
Tackle the barriers and obstacles to partnership working	100%
Identify ways to develop the role of the third sector in public services	100%
Develop a meaningful action plan to improve commissioning practice	100%
Achieve better outcomes through partnership working	100%

* Participants that rated the process as helpful, either fully or partially.

Illustrative Comments

“The Pfc process employed good techniques to take the “debate” forward in a clear and logical manner. I’m now more open minded towards community transport ”

“I now feel comfortable that NLC wants to work with third sector community transport providers.”

“I have learnt lots about community transport and how important the service is to people and communities.”

“I have a better understanding of the third sector and the work going on with SPT and community transport in the Council.”

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