



Community Transport in South Ayrshire

South Ayrshire Council has embarked on a process of joint-working and co-production of services with the community transport sector in the area. This has resulted in the establishment of South Ayrshire Community Transport (SACT) as a joint-venture between five community transport providers in South Ayrshire and has led to piloting and subsequently winning a transport contract from the Council.



Background

South Ayrshire Council (SAC) has been interested in the development of community transport since the 2000's. At that time there were a few small projects in the North of the area and the grant funded Travel Connections project operating in the South.

When the Travel Connections project came to an end, SAC commissioned a review of community transport in Carrick, which prompted SAC to look at community transport throughout the Local Authority in a more strategic way.

With the support of SAC and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) a number of local community transport operators from both Carrick and Kyle came together as a pan South Ayrshire Community Transport Steering Group.

In 2012 the Community Transport Steering Group commissioned a business plan for community transport in Carrick. As a result of this plan a Community Transport Co-ordinator was appointed to build capacity of local Community Transport Operators in Carrick. While in Kyle, Access to Employment through 'Reshaping Care - Change Fund' helped to kick start the development of community transport services in the area with two minibuses.

In 2013 a number of South Ayrshire community transport operators and members of third sector intermediary bodies came together with officers from SAC and SPT to jointly consider planning for services which met the transport needs of communities within South Ayrshire through the Partners for Change (PfC) process.

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

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

For the South Ayrshire 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 or user of transport services, third sector community transport providers, and Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT).
- Development of a Partnership Plan for community transport in South Ayrshire 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.

Scope and Focus

The PfC process was a starting point for SAC to accelerate the development of community transport and take it to the next level.

The Action Plan resulting from the PfC process “Developing Community Transport in South Ayrshire” included two main agreed actions:

- To strengthen co-ordination and co-operation of community transport throughout South Ayrshire.
- To use Council assets and procurement to deliver more efficient community transport solutions.

SAC commissioned an external consultancy to develop a Business Plan for a more co-ordinated approach to community transport.

The business planning resulted in the establishment of a new organisation, South Ayrshire Community Transport (SACT), which has been registered as a Scottish Charitable Incorporated Organisation (SCIO). A2E, who already ran Kyle Community Transport, has been identified as the lead organisation to run SACT.

The Council has commissioned two pilot schemes to the new community transport organisation:

- The transport of Team Ghana during the Commonwealth Games.
- The transport for a Day Care Centre for elderly people.

The transport of the athletes of team Ghana was a one-off, but the Day Care Centre transport was an existing contract, previously delivered by SAC.

Before awarding the pilot contact to SACT the Council implemented a market testing process involving more than 100 Expressions of Interest with four suppliers asked to submit a proposal.

The pilot has been successful and SAC has recommended awarding SACT a three year contract, worth £132k per year, to provide the service.

SACT has also been successful in attracting funding to employ a Community Transport Co-ordinator and has purchased and implemented the Trapeze booking system.

SACT is also a part of the Public Social Partnership (PSP) pilot with SPT. This pilot looks at developing training for community transport providers (MIDAS, D1), piloting Demand Responsive Transport and developing volunteering.

Currently SAC is in the process of developing an Active Travel Hub in Ayr, to link up transport and to promote walking and cycling. SACT is a key partner in the Active Travel Hub project and play a pivotal role in the development of joined-up transport solutions for South Ayrshire.

Key Challenges

There were a few challenges to overcome with the development of community transport in South Ayrshire.

- Initially there was a lack of intelligence of service commissioners and procurers about the existence of community transport and its capacity to deliver services. The PfC process has helped to increase knowledge and to bring community transport providers and public sector decision makers together.
- The development of community transport is influenced and accelerated by the need of SAC to make spending cuts. The challenge for SAC and SACT was to ensure the speed of development of community transport matched the speed of Council budget savings.
- SACT had limited experience with the Council’s tendering process and was therefore less prepared and equipped to win tenders. The pilot service has given SACT the valuable experience that will increase their chances of success in future tender processes.
- There was some initial resistance from the Day Care Centre that was subject to the pilot due to doubts whether SACT had the capacity and capability to deliver the contract. This hesitance, however, vanished soon after the start of the

contract when it turned out that SACT could deliver the service satisfactorily.

- Not all Council officers and departments recognised the strategic relevance of community transport.

Outcomes

A number of positive outcomes have emerged.

- There is a greater awareness of community transport in South Ayrshire, within the Council as well as in communities.
- SAC has made a small saving on the pilot service. This has proven that contracting with the community transport sector can help the Council in realising budget savings.
- The PfC process and the subsequent establishment of SACT and the successful delivery of the pilot service has started a cultural shift. The reputation of SACT has increased and community transport is now seen as a serious option in providing transport.
- The growth of SACT has increased the volunteering opportunities within the organisation, which in turn has provided training and work experience for unemployed people.
- SACT and the Council now share more resources. For example, SACT uses the Council's fuel pumps, which allows SACT to benefit from fuel at a discounted rate.
- From the business planning exercise SAC has got a better understanding of the specific transport needs within communities (e.g. disabled access vehicles) and a greater awareness of the varying transport needs across the area, including cycling and walking.
- Since community transport is working in a more joined-up way through SACT, there are a number of community-led initiatives that have integrated community transport into their development plans.

- The example of joint working and co-production in community transport is used as a model for other service areas within the Council.

Critical Success Factors

A number of factors that were essential to the success of SACT were identified, including:

- The support of SPT has been invaluable for the development of SACT. SPT provided knowledge of and experience with community transport, examples of good practice and contacts with other community transport providers, and practical support and funding.
- The high level buy-in from senior Council officers, such as the Head of Service responsible for community care services, has accelerated the development of SACT. This was ensured by involving senior officers from the start of the process.
- National policy changes, such as the Procurement Reform Bill and the Community Empowerment Bill have created a fertile environment for SACT to grow.
- The integration of health and care agenda has highlighted the need for community transport and the accompanying Reshaping Care funding has provided a great opportunity.
- The buy-in from the community transport sector in the joint-working process and the resulting establishment of SACT has created a vehicle for SAC to do business with.
- The development resources made available by SAC, financial as well as in-kind, were invaluable for the timely development of SACT.

Next Steps

SAC continues to be very supportive of community transport solutions to the existing and emerging transport needs in South Ayrshire.

SAC keeps supporting SACT to become an independent, fully sustainable community transport provider. The Council is also committed to create a

level playing field for community transport to enable SACT to bid successfully for upcoming tenders.

As SACT has developed from a concept into something tangible, communities are increasingly seeing the benefit of an enhanced community transport. With the integration of community transport in the development plans of other community organisations, it is seen as a key component in the area's future prosperity.

SAC is also keen to use community transport to realise more budget savings, whilst continuing and improving transport services.

SAC expects community transport to play a key role in implementing the prevention and early intervention agendas.

Finally, the Council thinks that community transport can help them address the problems arising from the existing rural isolation and changing demographics in the area (elderly population).

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