

Study Brief – Options for a York community transport replacement service

Proposal

City of York Council (“CYC”) wishes to commission a study to identify possible community transport models to provide replacement options for its former Dial & Ride (“D&R”) service, which has not operated since December 2023.

The study should include an assessment of existing comparable schemes within the Yorkshire area and across the UK where appropriate with a summary of the operating model used, area covered, passengers carried and approximate annual costs involved.

Any recommendations for other potential operating models that could be practical and affordable for York would also be welcome.

Background

From the late 1990s until the end of 2023, CYC commissioned a D&R community transport service, providing journeys for older and disabled residents between their homes and city centre/retail destinations.

Since the mid 2000s, the D&R service was operated by local community transport charity York Wheels (“YW”), under a service level agreement with CYC. YW operated the service under a section 19 permit, with pickup areas and destinations to CYC’s specification.

For much of this time, the vehicles and depot facilities were directly provided by CYC. However following a review of licensing arrangements, CYC was advised to adopt a more distinct client/service provider model to reduce operating risks and liabilities across the two organisations.

In late 2022, CYC and YW signed a new grant funding agreement, whereby YW would fully own and operate the vehicles, with depot and maintenance facilities purchased from CYC on a commercial basis. Capital grant funding of approximately £200k was also provided to YW for them to procure two brand new vehicles. The 5-year revenue grant funding agreement provided YW with a fixed sum of approximately £100k per annum to manage the entire operation.

The new vehicles were purchased and delivered in early 2023, however these proved to be very unreliable. Support from the manufacturer was poor and they spent many months off the road awaiting parts, causing a severe impact on service provision.

By late 2023 the vehicle manufacturer went into administration and their assets were sold off to a foreign buyer, with no liability for previously delivered vehicles. YW decided that the financial risk to their organisation was too high, and notified CYC that they would be ceasing operation of the D&R service as of the end of December 2023.

CYC repossessed the two new vehicles and later disposed of them at auction for around half their original purchase price. The York D&R service has now been defunct for almost 2 years.

The council's scrutiny committee has published a report requesting officers to present options for a potential restart or alternative to the D&R service.

Options to be explored

- A full York community transport service, tendered by CYC and contracted to a commercial provider under an appropriate licencing model.
- A full York community transport service, funded by CYC and operated by a community provider under S19 permit.
- A CYC-funded extension of an existing community transport scheme in the North Yorkshire area, to include journey origins and destinations within the CYC area.
- A CYC-funded grant to a local community transport operator, allowing for the purchase of wheelchair-accessible vehicles to compliment an existing volunteer-operated scheme (eg. the one currently operated by York Wheels).

Each option must be accompanied by a fully costed business plan across a five-year operating timeframe based upon evidence that the consultant should acquire from vehicle manufacturers/suppliers and other Dial & Ride or community transport providers. The study should expand on the suggested options above, including a reasonable estimate of the likely capital costs, operating costs, service levels and passenger capacities of each.

Each option should contain sub options based on a 1-4 vehicle operation and identify potential routes that would maximise both accessibility across the York Boundary and likely patronage.

A passenger demand profile and assessment should be undertaken to help inform likely revenue generation.

Once a preferred approach and funding amount have been agreed a draft specification will be required in order to form the basis of a procurement exercise.

Budget and timescales

The budget for this study is £20,000.

The study should be completed and delivered for sign-off by XX/XX/2026, in order to inform a report to the council's scrutiny committee and the Executive Member for Transport.

The client lead will be the Council's public transport planner.