COMMUNITY TRANSPORT INQUIRY

DUMFRIES AND GALLOWAY OLDER PEOPLE’S CONSULTATIVE GROUP

WRITTEN SUBMISSION

(i) Information about the Group making this submission

The Dumfries and Galloway Older People’s Consultative Group (OPCG) is recognised by both Dumfries and Galloway Council and NHS Dumfries and Galloway as the key group for consultation on older people’s issues in the region. The Chair and Vice-Chair positions are held by a member of the Council’s Social Work Services Committee and a non-Executive member of the NHS Board and the positions alternate on an annual basis.

The group is made up of representatives from a broad range of groups having a direct involvement or interest in older people’s issues and is governed by a constitution. Representatives meet six times per year and bring forward the views of their wider membership on a range of issues.

The Group met yesterday to consider the issues around Community Transport in detail to inform the submission below. Their consideration included the showing of a film produced by the Accessible Transport Forum in Dumfries and Galloway a few years ago.

Groups currently in membership of OPCG are:

D&G Accessible Transport Forum           Age Scotland
Alzheimer Scotland                        Dalbeattie Day Centre
Dumfries Day Centre                      D&G Carers Centre
D&G Access Panel                         D&G Over 50’s Group
Langholm Day Centre                      Loreburn Retirement Group
The Food Train                           Unite Retired Members
Assoc University of the Third Age Involvement
WRVS

Most of these groups were represented at the meeting yesterday.

(ii) Response to the consultation
OPCG members wish to make the following comments:

- The availability of reliable, accessible and affordable transport for older people is a vital component of the success of the Reshaping Care for Older People Programme. In the draft Dumfries and Galloway Joint Strategic Plan for Older People, addressing the issue of isolation, particularly amongst the older age groups of 75+, is recognised as a key priority. Supporting older people to remain engaged in their communities and in touch with their friends and supports is vital. Many, more frail older people need the support of others to do this. The concessionary fares scheme to provide free public transport or a timetabled community transport service does not address this issue and meet the needs of the most vulnerable.

- There are a good range of community transport providers in Dumfries and Galloway, many of which have been in existence for some time. These were supported originally through the funding made available directly from the Scottish Government. The withdrawal of this centrally dedicated fund and the reliance on funding from the local authority, where funding is no longer ring-fenced, has had a detrimental impact on local service provision. In Dumfries and Galloway, funding for community transport is now through the Area Committee structure which results in a lack of a strategic approach to the funding of community transport both nationally and locally.

- One community transport service in the rural Machars area of Dumfries and Galloway has had to close through a lack of funding. Due to uncertainties in funding going forward and rising costs of fuel, local community transport groups have had to increase their charges to external groups. These funding pressures mean the cost of using these services by, for example, local day centres, is getting prohibitively expensive. They have to pass on the costs of providing a transport service to the older people using these services – older people who have a concessionary travel card but are unable to use it because either they cannot get to a bus stop, they cannot access their local bus or there is no bus service where they live. These older people, whose incomes are subject to increasing pressures from rising energy and food costs as well, are being doubly disadvantaged in having to meet additional transport costs which in their turn reflect increasing fuel costs.

- Issues for older people in accessing transport are often considered a problem for older people living in rural areas but there are many parts
of the larger towns in Dumfries and Galloway where older people are equally isolated due to a lack of access to suitable transport. The Change Fund in Dumfries and Galloway has funded the provision of the WRVS Good Neighbours Service in Dumfries and Stranraer – a service funded through LEADER funding in rural areas. These types of services which provide 1:1 transport by volunteers using their own cars evaluate extremely well and clearly support older people to live at home with a good quality of life for as long as possible. However in order for these services to remain sustainable in the longer term, older people are asked to pay a charge for this service – something the majority are willing to do because it is a service they value and see as vital – but again these are older people who have a concessionary card that they are never able to use. Another instance of help with travel costs not being targeted to the services that people actually need and use.

• Many community transport services support older people to attend for NHS appointments as well as visits to their GP, dentist or optician. Again there are good links between community transport provision and the NHS non-emergency transport service in Dumfries and Galloway with signposting for those who are not eligible. However, these ineligible older people have to pay for the community transport to get them to appointments which are ultimately keeping them well and out of hospital.

• Although taxis are not part of “community transport”, the lack of accessible taxis in a number of towns in the region means older people with disabilities who cannot access a regular car are even more reliant on community transport services which have accessible transport. Thus, though they are eligible for a taxi card – they cannot use this or the concessionary travel card. They, too, are being deprived of access to the benefits of concessionary travel.

• There are some good examples of community transport providers running timetabled services with regular stopping places e.g. Glenkens Community Transport where older people are able to use their concessionary card. Whilst these provide a valuable service for many older people in these areas, as highlighted above, these are not the services which meet the needs of the most vulnerable and who may face the greatest income pressures.

• There are concerns that the projected funding to be made available in future years for the concessionary fares scheme will fall short of what
will be required with the projected increases in the population of the over 65’s. As this funding is assigned at the beginning of the financial year, if this runs out part way through the year, local service operators have either to meet the funding gap with substantial fare increases to service users or terminate the service for the remainder of the year. In both cases this will have a severe impact on the general population including people with young families.

- The whole subject of community transport provision needs to be considered by partnerships as the move to the integration of health and social care progresses.

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