

## **Parish Council Report: Community Car Scheme – Stoke St Michael**

### **Purpose of the Report**

To consider the potential establishment of a Community Car Scheme in Stoke St Michael, to improve access to transport for residents, and to agree next steps.

### **Brief from Anna Mearns**

At the Shepton Mallet LCN meeting in October, several parish councils expressed interest in establishing a Community Interest Company (CIC). An initial grant of £5,000 has been secured from Somerset Community Foundation to support this work. The next steps are to formally set up the CIC, recruit volunteer drivers, and appoint a coordinator to manage the service.

The Frome Community Drivers scheme provides a useful model. It originally operated as a charity under Active and In Touch but later transitioned to a CIC structure to improve long-term sustainability. Its funding model is largely self-generated through journey fees, typically including a £6 administration charge plus mileage, alongside some additional support from local organisations and trusts.

A key lesson from the Frome scheme is the importance of maintaining a sufficient volume of journeys—around 200 per month—to ensure financial viability.

### **Background**

Stoke St Michael is a rural village in Somerset with limited public transport connectivity, particularly for:

- Access to healthcare (e.g. Shepton Mallet, Frome, Bath)
- Shopping and essential services
- Social and community activities

A Community Car Scheme is a volunteer-led, not-for-profit transport service that could help address these gaps by providing pre-booked, door-to-door journeys for residents.

### **Local Context and Need**

Key considerations specific to Stoke St Michael include:

- Rural location: Limited and infrequent bus services, with restricted evening/weekend provision
- Ageing population: Likely demand from older residents no longer able to drive
- Access to services: Regular need to travel to nearby towns such as Shepton Mallet and Frome
- Affordability: Taxi use can be prohibitively expensive for regular journeys

Initial evidence suggests there may be unmet transport demand, but this would need to be confirmed through local engagement.

## **Proposed Scheme Model**

### **How the Scheme Would Operate**

- Residents register as members
- Journeys are pre-booked via a coordinator
- Volunteer drivers use their own vehicles
- Passengers pay a fare covering mileage and administration costs

### **Governance**

A small management group or committee would be required to:

- Oversee the scheme
- Manage finances
- Set policies and operating rules

This could initially be supported by the Parish Council or operate as a separate community group.

## **Resource Implications**

### **Financial**

- Estimated set-up cost: ~£250
- Ongoing costs relatively low and typically covered by fares

Potential funding sources:

- Parish Council grant or seed funding
- Somerset Council support
- External grants and community funding

### **Staffing (Voluntary)**

- Coordinator(s) to manage bookings
- A pool of volunteer drivers

The viability of the scheme will depend heavily on local volunteer availability.

## **Legal and Compliance Considerations**

- Scheme must operate on a not-for-profit basis
- Drivers:
  - Must hold valid licence and insurance
  - Should notify insurers
  - DBS checks recommended
- Data protection requirements must be met
- Insurance (including public liability) should be arranged

## **Key Decisions Required (If progressed)**

- Who is eligible to use the scheme
- Geographic coverage (village only or wider area)
- Types of journeys (medical, shopping, social)
- Operating hours
- Fare structure (e.g. mileage-based or fixed fares)

## **Benefits for Stoke St Michael**

- Improved access to healthcare and essential services
- Reduced social isolation, particularly for older residents
- Support for residents without access to a car
- Strengthening of community volunteering and cohesion

### **Risks and Constraints**

- Dependence on volunteer recruitment and retention
- Administrative burden on a small group
- Risk of low uptake if demand is overestimated
- Need to ensure compliance with legal and safeguarding requirements

### **Options for the Council**

#### **Option A – No Action**

Do not pursue a scheme currently.

#### **Option B – Further Investigation**

- Undertake a local needs assessment (survey / engagement)
- Identify potential volunteers
- Explore funding opportunities
- Report back to Council