**Faversham Hopper Community Bus Service Business Plan (2024-2027)**

**Purpose**

The Faversham Hopper Community Bus Service (“The Hopper”) was launched in April 2024 to reinstate public transport for residents of Oare, Newnham, Lynsted, Teynham, and parts of Faversham. The service operates a wheelchair-accessible minibus, designed to cater to isolated and mobility-restricted individuals who have had limited transport options since early 2023.

**Key Success Factors**

To ensure long-term success, The Hopper requires:

* **Volunteer Support**: A committed, effective, and growing base of volunteer drivers.
* **Vehicle Availability**: Access to a reliable primary vehicle, supplemented by spares as needed.
* **Sustainable Funding**: Sufficient revenue and funding to maintain and expand the service in line with demand.
* **Effective Marketing**: Regular promotion to attract new users and maintain engagement with existing passengers.
* **Stakeholder Engagement**: Ongoing communication with stakeholders, passengers, and the wider public.

**Challenges**

1. **Low Population Density**: Some areas served by The Hopper, particularly FH2, have a high rate of car ownership and low population density, limiting ridership.
2. **Lack of Alternatives**: Kent Karrier dial-a-ride, the only alternative, operates a limited, costly service.
3. **Vehicle Dependence**: Reliance on a single leased vehicle, with spare coverage arranged through London Hire Ltd and neighbouring operators like Wealden Wheels and Sheppey Wheels in emergencies.

**Objectives**

**Short Term (2024-2025)**

1. **Service Optimization**: Review routes and schedules for efficiency and relevance.
2. **Funding**: Research and secure additional funding for operational continuity.
3. **Private Hire Viability**: Assess the potential for private hire, directing any proceeds to support the service.
4. **Volunteer Engagement**: Conduct recruitment and training campaigns to expand the volunteer base.
5. **Publicity**: Increase local awareness through participation in community events and seeking business sponsorship.
6. **Vehicle Replacement Planning**: Begin securing funding for a low-floor replacement vehicle.

**Medium Term (2026-2028)**

1. **Service Enhancements**: Continue refining services based on user feedback.
2. **Sustainable Fleet Transition**: Explore the transition to electric or non-fossil-fuel vehicles.
3. **Parking Optimization**: Investigate council-owned land options, such as Perry Court, for vehicle parking.

**Implementation Plan**

**Immediate Actions (by End of 2024)**

* **Timetable Adjustments**: Improve afternoon schedules and consult stakeholders before submission to KCC.
* **Funding Consultation**: Liaise with funding bodies regarding bids for operational and replacement vehicle support.
* **Volunteer Engagement**: Launch recruitment initiatives, enhance communication, and increase social media presence.
* **Community Promotion**: Attend local events, showcasing The Hopper and distributing promotional materials.
* **Sponsorship Agreement**: Finalize and implement sponsorship with Lotty’s Flowers.

**Financial Projections**

**Income Streams**

1. **KCC Concessionary Pass Reimbursement**: Anticipated annual income of approximately £2,000, accounting for projected growth.
2. **Fare-paying Passengers**: Expected revenue of £1,100 annually, assuming steady ridership.
3. **Sponsorship Agreements**: Current agreement with Lotty’s Flowers estimated to yield £2,000 per year.
4. **Bus Service Operators Grant (BSOG)**: Potential reimbursement of 60p per litre of diesel, subject to audit.
5. **Parish Council Contributions**: Ongoing support from Newnham, Doddington, Lynsted, and (potentially) Oare.
6. **KCC Community Bus Grant**: £30,490 remains available as of October 2024.
7. **Private Hire Revenue**: Developing plans for private hire, charging approximately £2.25 per mile, with coverage by volunteer drivers.

**Expenses**

1. **Community Bus Officer**: Part-time employment (8 hours/week).
2. **Vehicle Leasing**: Annual lease for a 12-seat, fully accessible minibus at £17,710.80.
3. **Insurance**: Annual insurance costs currently stand at £6,440.
4. **Fuel Costs**: Estimated annual cost of £5,200, based on weekly usage.
5. **Ticket Machine Software License**: £496 annually.
6. **Volunteer Training**: Estimated training costs of £700, covering turnover and compliance.
7. **Repairs and Maintenance**: Allocate £2,000 for minor repairs, including tail lift and bodywork.
8. **Marketing and Promotion**: Budget of £300 for banners, stands, and promotional materials.

**Financial Summary (2024-2027)**

| **Category** | **Annual Cost (£)** | **Annual Income (£)** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| KCC Concessionary Pass |  | 2,000 |
| Fare-paying Passengers |  | 1,100 |
| Sponsorship |  | 2,000 |
| BSOG |  | Variable |
| Parish Council Support |  | Variable |
| Private Hire Potential |  | TBD |
| **Total Projected Income** |  | **£5,100+** |
|  |  |  |
| Community Bus Officer | 8 hrs/week |  |
| Vehicle Leasing | 17,710.80 |  |
| Insurance | 6,440 |  |
| Fuel | 5,200 |  |
| Ticket Machine License | 496 |  |
| Volunteer Training | 700 |  |
| Repairs and Maintenance | 2,000 |  |
| Marketing & Promotion | 300 |  |
| **Total Projected Costs** |  | **£32,846.80** |

**Long-Term Sustainability**

Continued service improvements, funding diversification, and an increase in community engagement will be crucial. Strategic partnerships with local councils and community organizations can help expand our reach, while potential electric vehicle integration aligns with our long-term sustainability goals.

This business plan will be reviewed annually to ensure The Hopper’s objectives, operational practices, and community impact remain aligned with both evolving local needs and financial viability.