

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

REPORT TO EXECUTIVE MEMBER

Date of report: 29th May 2009
Report of: Director of Places
Executive: Councilor Jamie Macrae
Member:

TITLE: Department of Transport Consultation on the Administration of Concessionary Travel: proposal to respond

Is this a Key Decision? No

* One that affects finances over £1m or significantly affects two or more wards

1.0 What is the report about?

1.1 The Department for Transport (DfT) are consulting all local authorities and other stakeholders on the way that resources should be allocated to fund the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme.

2.0 What Decision is required by the Portfolio Holder?

2.1 To endorse or not, the attached response to the DfT consultation exercise which has been approved by the other members of the Cheshire Districts Concessionary Travel Scheme (Cheshire East, Cheshire West and Chester, Halton and Warrington).

2.2 The closing date for responses was 21 July. Hence the response has been submitted; the Portfolio Holder is asked to endorse this on behalf of East Cheshire.

3.0 How does the Decision contribute to the Council's Corporate Priorities?

3.1 By encouraging high levels of use of the bus network the concessionary travel scheme supports a healthy bus industry and supports priority 5.1.2: Facilitating appropriate transport for the public and service users.

3.2 Also because the target "market" for concessionary travel is people over 60 and disabled people it supports two key priorities in the adult health and well being area: 2.1.2 Increasing for older and disabled people their choices and their control over the resources made available to them; and 2.1.3 Helping older people to keep their independence as long as possible.

3.3 It is therefore important that the Council contributes to the national debate on concessionary travel issues.

4.0 Report Details

4.1 The consultation is concerned with three issues:

- Which tier of Government should be responsible for administering concessionary travel with particular reference to whether in two tier areas the burden should move from district to county level;
- Whether district councils should retain powers under the 1985 Transport Act to offer discretionary travel concessions; and

- Whether there are any other funding issues which need to be considered ahead of the consultation on the comprehensive spending review for 2011- 14.

4.2 As a unitary authority Cheshire East Council is not directly affected by the first two points. However it is important to make clear that economies of scale and efficient administration are being achieved by the Cheshire Scheme which operates on a sub-regional basis. Any changes imposed by central Government should not adversely affect these benefits.

4.3 It is also important to make the point that any funding arrangements take into account the growth in the target population and the uptake of the scheme. So far funding for the scheme has been adequate at the level of the new Council. This has not been the case in some other areas. Rather than abandon what is essentially a well financed scheme consideration should be given to establishing a contingency fund to compensate proven examples of underfunding. In this way if there are any dramatic developments in the local economy or demographic changes, it will be possible to bid into this fund.

4.4 The response is attached for consideration.

5.0 Officer's Recommendations

5.1 That the attached proposed response be endorsed.

6.0 Reasons for the Recommendation

6.1 To ensure that the interests of Cheshire East Council are represented in this consultation.

7.0 What will it cost?

7.1 There are no immediate costs to responding to the consultation. However if the Government does not take revenue allocation decisions which sustain the current level of funding, the Council could face a future shortfall.

8.0 What are the legal aspects?

8.1 The consultation is taking place within the legal framework of the Concessionary Travel Act 2007 and the Transport Acts of 1985 and 2000.

9.0 What risks are there and how can they be reduced?

9.1 The principal risk is on the revenue stream and the efficiencies achieved by running a sub-regional scheme. They can be reduced by accepting the proposal.

10.0 What is the impact of the decision on equality and diversity issues?

10.1 Any adverse impact on the revenue funding for the scheme could reduce the potential for discretionary travel concessions which would have a negative effect on benefits for people in rural areas (via taxi vouchers and community transport) and older and disabled workers (who currently benefit from the half price pre 9.30 concession).

11.0 Are there any other options?

11.1 These are outlined in 2.1.

For further information:

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Background Documents:

Department for Transport: Possible changes to the Administration of Concessionary Travel, consultation paper.

Documents are available for inspection at:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/consultations/open/concessionarytravel/consultationdocument080509.pdf>