

Draft Minutes of the Meeting of the Executive held on Thursday 31st August 2006 in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Monkton Park, Chippenham commencing at 7.00p.m.

Present: Councillor C. O’Gorman, Leader in the Chair

Councillors A. L. Davis, H. M. Dixon, S. K. Doubell, D. J. E. Evans,
R. J. Henning, D. M. Moore, G. Offord and O. J. Thomas.

Non-Executive Councillors Present: Councillors S. Meadowcroft, S. Meadows,
T. R. Sturgis and S. R. Walls

Officers Present: D. Burbidge (Chief Executive), D. Ashton (Interim Chief Accountant), L. Bell (Community & Environment Strategic Manager), H. Braid (Policy & Democratic Services Officer), A. Davies (Planning Services Strategic Manager), N. Fenwick (Customer Services Strategic Manager), M. Gilmour (Principal Community Partnerships Officer), P. Jeremiah (Legal Services Team Leader), W. Oulton (Policy & Democratic Services Officer), S. Pangbourne (Strategic Manager Corporate Services), S. Parker (Community Partnership Officer), C. Pescod (Development Control Team Leader) and Jo Stirling (Principal Housing Enabling Officer).

E46. Concessionary Travel

Consideration was given to Report No.16 (circulated with the agenda) which sought guidance on any changes desired for the Concessionary Travel Scheme to allow the scheme to be developed for the 2007/08 financial year.

Resolved that the Concessionary Travel Scheme be retained in its current form, that is a Bus Pass with no restrictions on time of travel, with cross-border travel allowed, and the option of £18 of tokens.

REPORT TO THE EXECUTIVE

Report No.16

Date of Meeting	31 st August 2006
Title of Report	Concessionary Travel
Portfolio	Equalities & Diversity
Link to Corporate Priorities	Under the Corporate Plan priority of Equalities and Diversity this report links to the following aim: 'To celebrate the diversity of the District and its residents and ensure everyone has access to our services and facilities'.
Key Decision	YES - The decision will result in the Council requiring expenditure or making savings which amount to £50,000
Executive Workplan Ref	B214
Public Report	YES

Summary of Report

To seek guidance from Members on any changes desired to the Concessionary Travel Scheme to allow the Scheme to be developed for the financial year 2007/08.

Officer Recommendations

The Scheme is retained in its current form, that is a Bus Pass with no restrictions on time of travel, with cross-border travel allowed, and the option of £18 of tokens. This would have no budgetary implications above the normal running costs, although Members should be aware that due to the change from half fare to free travel this year there are uncertainties about the final cost of the Scheme.

Other than those implications agreed with the relevant Officers and referred to below, there are no other implications associated with this report.

Financial Implications	Legal Implications	Community & Environmental Implications	Human Resources Implications	Equality & Diversity Implications
YES	YES	YES	NONE	YES

Contact Officer	Mike Hasted Senior Regeneration Officer 01249 706489 mhasted@northwilts.gov.uk
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1. Introduction

1.1 To seek guidance from Members on any changes desired to the Concessionary Travel Scheme to allow the Scheme to be developed for the financial year 2007/08.

2. Options and Options Appraisal

2.1 In order for the Scheme to be developed and for an estimate of the budget required for 2007/08 to be made, then it is necessary to determine the nature of the Scheme now. This will give the consultants time to liaise with bus operators and the other authorities involved and develop the scheme for publication by the deadline of 31 December 2006 deadline, which is a legal requirement under the Scheme legislation.

2.1 Option 1: The Scheme is retained in its current form, that is a Bus Pass with no restrictions on time of travel, with cross-border travel allowed, and the option of £18 of tokens. This would have no budgetary implications above the normal running costs, although Members should be aware that due to the change from half fare to free travel this year there are uncertainties about the final cost of the Scheme.

2.2 Option 2: A restriction is placed on the time of travel with all other aspects of the Scheme remaining the same. There would be insignificant changes to the budget but it would represent a significant reduction in the level of service and would complicate the administration of the Scheme.

2.3 Option 3: The Bus Pass remains the same but the tokens are withdrawn. This would appear to offer a saving of approximately £204,000 per annum (based on the cost for 2005/06) but of course people who previously had token would most likely apply for a pass which carries a higher cost per person (£35 compared to £19) than tokens. This option would also leave those that are not able to use standard public transport at a disadvantage.

2.4 Option 4: The Bus Pass remains the same but the amount of tokens offered is increased to £30. This would require an increase in budget of approximately £126,000 (based on figures for 2005/06) but this could be off-set to a certain extent by offering the tokens to only those who are in need of them.

2.5 The recent change to free travel has left many unanswered questions both in terms of the operation of the Scheme (number of users of the different concessions, increase in take up etc.) and the effect on the budget. It would seem prudent, therefore, to have a period of stability to allow these effects to be fully realised (at some point in the next financial year) before any more changes are implemented. Therefore, Option 1 would be the best option to pursue at this time.

3. Background Information

3.1 The provision of the Concessionary Travel Scheme is a mandatory obligation under the following Acts of Parliament:

- Transport Act 1985
- Transport Act 2000
- Travel Concessions (Eligibility) Act 2002

3.2 **The legislation states that a scheme must offer a bus pass that allows free travel at off-peak times and within the authority area to people aged 60 and over, and people of any age with a disability. Local authorities may also offer better than this as well as other alternatives. In North Wiltshire there are two concessions available, the free bus pass, or £18 worth of travel tokens. The bus pass offers travel without time restrictions and between local authority areas within Wiltshire. North Wiltshire is the only local authority in Wiltshire offering the token option, most of the other councils just offer the bus pass, whilst West Wiltshire offer a voucher system as well.**

3.3 **The Bus Pass Scheme is part of a county-wide scheme offering free travel on public transport for those eligible. The District Councils and Swindon Borough Council are known as the Issuing Authorities (i.e. issue the Passes) within the scheme. Wiltshire County Council act as the Co-ordinating Authority, with mcl Transport Consultants managing the scheme (advising on policy, liaison with transport providers, provision of paperwork and software, and producing written reports). Both the Customer Services and Community and Environment Business Areas are involved in delivering the bus passes.**

3.4 **As well as a free bus pass, eligible residents are also offered the choice of £18 worth of travel tokens as an alternative. This part of the scheme is administered by the Customer Services Business Area and an administration cost of £1 is charged for this option. Tokens tend to appeal to a different person than the bus pass due to the more flexible travel options available i.e. can be used on taxis and some rail services as well as buses.**

3.5 The following tables and chart give a snapshot of the bus pass scheme for the current financial year compared to 2005/06. Whilst these figures do not represent the whole of the current financial year it is still valid to use them as an illustration as a good proportion of passes and tokens are already issued by this time.

Table 1: North Wiltshire Statistics for 2005/06.

Concession	Older People	Disabled People	Total
Passes	3816	262	4078
Tokens	6575	351	10653

Table 2: North Wiltshire Statistics for 2006/07 to date.

Concession	Older People	Disabled People	Total
Passes	6717	348	7065
Tokens	Data not available	Data not available	7126

- 3.6 The statistics show that there is a significant rise in the number of passes issued and a sharp drop in the number of tokens issued. It is not possible to be absolutely certain whether people are switching from the tokens to Passes, or whether new people are being enticed into the Scheme for the first time because of the free travel. It is likely that both of these mechanisms are at work but the more significant of the two is people switching from tokens to a Pass, which offers much greater value.
- 3.7 However, there is clearly some disparity within the figures. The total for both concessions for this year is still some 500 short of last years total, at a time when it was envisaged the move to free travel would increase the numbers applying significantly. Although it is estimated that some 5 to 10 applications are being received per day, which means the potential of another 900 applications yet to come, although this will still leave the figure short of the expected level.

Figure 1: Comparison between 2005/06 and 2006/07. The zero line represents 2005/06 levels.

4. Current Information



5. Financial Implications

5.1 There are many variables, particularly with the bus passes, such as the cost of journeys, the take-up of passes, and the number of times each pass is used, that make it difficult to determine a definite figure for the cost of the scheme in any given financial year. It is not until the final year-end figures are produced that the true cost becomes known.

5.2 Option 1 given in will ensure the best financial security for budget planning purposes

6. Legal implications

6.1 The only legal aspect to this report is that pertaining to the statutory nature of the Scheme and the requirement that this Council should provide a Scheme.

7. Community and Environmental Implications

7.1 By encouraging the use of busses the Scheme can go some way to reducing car dependence with an associated reduction in pollution

8. Equality and Diversity Implications

8.1 The Concessionary Travel scheme helps to reduce the cost of travel for citizens over the age of 60, and people with a disability, consequently making travel more affordable, and going some way to reducing social exclusion

9. Risk Analysis

9.1 Medium Risk due to potential cost increases as a result of high take of scheme.

Appendices:	None
Background Documents Used in the Preparation of this Report:	None

Previous Decisions Connected with this Report

Report	Committee & Date	Minute Reference
None		