

WILTSHIRE COUNCIL

**COUNCIL
9 NOVEMBER 2010**

COUNCILLORS' QUESTIONS

FROM COUNCILLOR TREVOR CARBIN HOLT AND STAVERTON DIVISION

TO COUNCILLOR LIONEL GRUNDY CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN'S SERVICES

Question

In February this year Wiltshire Assembly of Youth, together with WC officers and councillors, agreed that a county wide system of 'fairer fares' across the primary transport providers would benefit young people using the buses and the companies providing the service as cheaper fares would encourage a greater number of under 18s to use buses.

A 'statement of intent' affirmed: "Over the next six months we will work together towards a 'fairer transport deal' for young people in Wiltshire up to the age of 18." Signatories to the statement included Stagecoach South and Stagecoach Swindon, the Wiltshire and Dorset Bus Co., Wiltshire councillors Richard Gamble and Richard Clewer, David Whewell, WC head of youth work and Liam Tatton-Bennett on behalf of the voluntary sector.

What has been achieved to help young people since these commitments were made?

Response

1. The Council has allocated £5000 to each of the Area Boards for locally-devised schemes to improve transport for young people. Some examples of how this has been used are as follows;
 - In the Lavington area, the Youth Development Service worked with young people to plan and set up a pilot scheme for weekend evening transport into Devizes using a community bus. Unfortunately this was not successful due to lack of take up. However, it has been useful in establishing a model that can be used elsewhere to test potential demand. The lack of take up could have been the result of the timing of the pilot in May, at the height of the school exam season, when evenings were light and sunny and when no special attractions were on in the town. Also most trips took place on a Saturday although there is some evidence that Fridays would be more successful.
 - A second pilot along similar lines is planned for the Amesbury area at a different time of year.

- The Marlborough Area Board are offering free transport (to be provided by youth service minibuses/school minibuses/community minibuses) on a pilot basis for a series of 7 youth events over November and December. They are also commissioning Community First's community transport team to carry out a 'mapping and gapping' exercise, to consolidate previous work done to ascertain young people's transport needs in the Marlborough Community Area; to map the transport services that might be available to meet these; and to ascertain the willingness of young people and other local people to coordinate bookings for, or to drive and chaperone minibus transport.
2. It is suggested that all Area Boards are asked to report on what they have achieved with the money that was given to them, as this would be useful in tracking progress and identifying successful approaches that might be adopted more widely.
 3. Wilts & Dorset have introduced an enhanced young peoples' fares scheme with discounts up to and including age 18, valid at any time of day (their previous policy, which had attracted considerable criticism over the years, was that child fares were only available up to the 15th birthday, and were not available before 9.00am on weekdays). This has been funded by reducing the amount of discount offered compared with the previous child fare.
 4. Stagecoach West have advised that, as a result of pressure from young people in both Wiltshire and Gloucestershire, they will be offering a promotional 'Mega-weekend' ticket for young people up to and including 18, initially for a trial weekend later this month (19th – 21st November). This will give unlimited travel on Stagecoach West buses for the whole weekend for a price of £5. If this is successful they intend to repeat the trial for another weekend this winter. If the trials result in increased use without losing income, they will consider a longer term experiment to offer off-peak discount fares for young people up to age 18 (the current age limit for child fares is 16). The company have no plans to offer discounted travel for 16-18 year olds at peak times.
 5. There have been discussions with another major bus company (not one of the signatories to the 'statement of intent', and who currently offer child fares up to age 16) who say they can not at present afford to increase the age limit to 18, as they have less scope to offset the cost and can not risk reducing income at a time when they already face significant losses of revenue as a result of reductions in central government funding.
 6. The 20% reduction in Bus Service Operators Grant announced in the Spending Review, and the revised guidance on OAP concessionary fares reimbursement recently announced by the Department for Transport that will significantly reduce operators income, is causing great concern in the industry and is likely to result in across the board fares increases and withdrawals of service; in addition to any reduction in local authority

funding for bus services. Operators are understandably reluctant to risk losing income given these uncertainties.

7. The draft public transport strategy in the third Local Transport Plan (currently out for consultation) includes in the Implementation Plan an action to encourage voluntary standardisation of the qualifying age limits and the rates of discount on bus fares available to young people. This will be continue to be pursued with the bus operators, although the financial uncertainty facing the industry at the moment may hinder progress.
8. It is also intended to review fares on Council - funded bus services during the coming year, and this will consider adopting a similar approach to that taken by Wilts & Dorset. As stated at the meeting with young people in February, there are no plans to introduce a council - funded concessionary fares scheme for young people due to the cost implications.
9. It is also intended to review fares on Council - funded bus services during the coming year, and this will consider adopting a similar approach to that taken by Wilts & Dorset. As stated at the meeting with young people in February, there are no plans to introduce a council - funded concessionary fares scheme for young people due to the cost implications.