



Chester-le-Street
District Council

Report to: Council Meeting
Date of Meeting: 30 March 2006
Report from: Chief Executive
Title of Report: Concessionary Travel Scheme
Agenda Item Number: 8

1. PURPOSE AND SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to inform Members of the latest position with regard to the Concessionary Travel Scheme. The report also advises Members of the urgent decision that has been taken, by the Chief Executive, in accordance with part 4D paragraph 4 of the Constitution in consultation with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board to ensure free travel is available throughout the County and on cross boundary journeys to qualifying residents of the District.

2. CONSULTATION

- 2.1 In order to achieve the outcome consultation has taken place with members of the Durham Districts Forum and the two main bus companies, Arriva and Go North East. Informal consultation has been undertaken with the Leader and members of the Executive and formally with the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board

3. CORPORATE PLAN AND PRIORITIES

- 3.1 The Concessionary Travel Scheme meets the aims of the Corporate Plan in developing inclusive communities and enhancing the opportunities for all people in the District.

4. IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Financial

There will be no additional cost to the Council above that already approved.

4.2 Legal

There are no legal implications.

4.3 Personnel

There are no personnel implications.

4.4 Other Services

There are no implications on other services.

4.5 Diversity

The extension of the Scheme will provide free bus travel for the over 60's and those disabled residents of the District that meet the criteria.

4.6 Risk

The perception of the public is that the Government intended free travel would be available to the over 60's. Failure to meet the expectation will result in dissatisfaction amongst residents.

4.7 Crime and Disorder

There are no crime and disorder issues.

4.8 Other Implications

There are no implications to other services.

5. BACKGROUND

5.1 The Council at the special meeting on 2 March 2006 agreed to a budget which included the sum of £749,720 to fund a hybrid scheme for concessionary travel that would provide free travel within the District and half fare travel elsewhere within the boundaries of the current scheme.

5.2 The Districts Forum agreed that the ideal position was to seek to achieve, for all Councils, free travel throughout the area covered by the existing scheme. District Councils promised to review the scheme after six months usage.

5.3 Following a further meeting of the Districts Forum on 2 March 2006 it was agreed that a letter (drafted by your Chief Executive) should be sent on behalf of the Districts to representatives of the bus companies to seek further negotiations. The aim of these negotiations was to establish a funding basis for a free scheme that was both affordable and transferred risk of additional cost to public funds to the bus companies.

- 5.4 A meeting was subsequently held on Monday 6 March between the Chief Executives of Chester-le-Street and Sedgefield and representatives of Go North East and Arriva, with technical support from an officer of Durham County Council. It was agreed after negotiation, that a free scheme be provided within the budget of £7.4M in year 1 and £7.3M in year 2 provided the bus companies would accept responsibility for the risks associated with any increased patronage and increased cost accrued. It was further agreed to be on a two year contract.
- 5.5 The Districts Forum meeting had previously agreed the principle of Councils pooling any additional resources available to them to fund a free travel scheme.
- 5.6 The consequential effect for Chester-le-Street is that there will be no additional cost above or beyond that provided for the hybrid scheme, the additional costs being met by the authorities that benefited to a greater extent by the settlement.
- 5.7 Because of the need to expedite the matter in order for the scheme to be introduced in April 2006, a decision was needed by 8 March 2006. It was necessary, therefore, to instigate the Council's procedure for urgent decisions on the basis that the decision to introduce a free scheme was in variance to the hybrid scheme agreed by Council. The procedure required that the Chief Executive discuss the matter with the Chairman of the relevant Overview and Scrutiny Panel.
- 5.8 The details of the proposals were discussed with Councillor Armstrong in his role as Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on the grounds that concessionary travel is not associated with any particular Overview and Scrutiny Panel. Councillor Armstrong agreed to the proposals on the morning of 7 March 2006 and that the details will be reported to the next appropriate Council meeting.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 6.1 The Council is asked to note the decision made, in accordance with part 4D paragraph 4 of the Council's Constitution, with respect to the concessionary travel scheme providing free travel throughout the County and on cross boundary journeys being introduced from 1 April 2006.
- 6.2 The Council is requested to endorse the action of the Leader and Chief Executive that led to the outcome.

AUTHOR NAME	Roy Templeman
DESIGNATION	Chief Executive
DATE OF REPORT	21 March 2006