

CONCESSIONARY FARES ON COMMUNITY TRANSPORT SERVICES

To: **Economy and Environment Committee**

Meeting Date: **24 May 2016**

From: **Executive Director, Economy, Transport and Environment**

Electoral division(s): **All**

Forward Plan ref: **2016/010** *Key decision:* **Yes**

Purpose: **To report on a consultation on proposals contained in the 2016/17 Business Plan decision to remove the discretionary elements of the County Council's concessionary fare scheme**

Recommendation: **Committee is asked to:**

- a) Note the results of a recent consultation on the Business Plan decision to remove the discretionary 50% concession on community transport Dial-a-Ride services;**
- b) Recommend the use of reserves to defer the removal of the discretionary concessions until the financial year 2017/18 to allow more time to work with Community Transport operators on the implications of the proposals and potential alternative means of funding and providing community transport services.**

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1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) enables cardholders to travel free on all qualifying local bus services after 09:30 until 23:00 Monday to Friday, and at all times at weekends and on Bank Holidays.
- 1.2 The associated legislation enables authorities to provide additional local concessions, but there is no duty to do so. In Cambridgeshire, additional concessions are provided that enable cardholders to travel for 50% of the fare on Dial-a-Ride services in the county, and for blind and partially sighted cardholders to travel free before 09:30, in addition to the national scheme requirements. Currently, in the cases of Fenland and Huntingdonshire districts, a further 50% concession is added, meaning that in Cambridge City, East Cambridgeshire and South Cambridgeshire, passengers currently pay 50% of the community transport fare and in Fenland and Huntingdonshire they pay nothing.
- 1.3 Prior to Full Council making the decision to include the removal of discretionary concessions in the 2016/17 Business Plan, a consultation was undertaken with users and a Community Impact Assessment was undertaken. Unfortunately, there were concerns about the methodology applied, so following the decision by Members to withdraw the above concessions at Full Council, with a budget reduction of £125k, a further consultation was carried out to assess the impact of this decision.
- 1.4 The proposal in itself would not require the removal of community transport services. Instead, it would mean that passengers would need to pay up to the full fare for those services rather than the reduced fare with the concession applied. Clearly if as a result of that, less passengers travelled and thus revenue to the community transport providers was reduced, there may then be a need for them to review service levels.

2. MAIN ISSUES

- 2.1 A consultation was carried out by sending letters and forms to all members of Cambridge Dial-a-Ride (CAMDAR), Ely and Soham Association for Community Transport (ESACT), Fenland Association for Community Transport (FACT), Huntingdonshire Association for Community Transport (HACT) and The Voluntary Network via the Community Transport providers.
- 2.2 A total of 2,600 envelopes were sent out and 1,753 valid responses were received, equating to a 67% response rate. An analysis of the responses is attached as appendix 1.
- 2.3 The key results are that 61% of respondents were either unwilling or very unwilling to pay the additional cost, although this ranged from 15% for members of The Voluntary Network to 77% of FACT members. In terms of respondents who were willing or very willing to pay, the average was 25%, ranging again from 55% for members of The Voluntary Network to 15% of FACT members.
- 2.4 Other findings from the consultation were that the main reason for using the services was for essential shopping (75%); 45% of respondents used the service three or more times per week and 64% felt that the additional charge would have a significant impact on them.

- 2.5 The Business Plan notes an expectation of a £125k budget reduction for the removal of discretionary elements of the concessionary fare scheme. This budget line constitutes £118k for the Dial-a-Ride element and £7k for the use before 09:30 for holders of blind and partially sighted passes.
- 2.6 Although this proposal has been approved by Full Council as part of the Business Plan for 2016/17, the results of the consultation do show that there is considerable concern amongst users, many of whom are vulnerable, live in rural areas and are at risk of social isolation. Some of the results and experience from some parts of the county do, however, also indicate that there may be other ways of providing the essential access that these services currently provide. It is therefore suggested that Members may wish to consider deferring the reduction in this budget until 2017/18 to enable further work to take place with operators to minimise any impact on users of the services. This could include, but not be limited to, expanding the Total Transport pilot if successful, reducing the service level provided but ensuring that a sufficient base level is retained or encouraging the enlargement of community car share schemes. A further approach may be to consider alternative funding sources from an outcome based budget approach.
- 2.7 If the implementation of this Business Plan proposal is deferred the required funding will need to be found from elsewhere within the service. There is an opportunity to use reserves (operational savings) for this (a paper considering proposals for this will be considered later in this agenda). Members should note, however, if this was the case, this use would need to be finally approved by General Purposes Committee.

3. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

3.1 Developing the local economy for the benefit of all

There are no significant implications for this priority.

3.2 Helping people live healthy and independent lives

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Older and disabled people may not be able to travel to essential services such as shopping and health appointments, thereby reducing independence without access to these services.
- Older and disabled people may become more housebound, leading to social isolation and increased demand on support services.

3.3 Supporting and protecting vulnerable people

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Community transport services are generally used by those people who have limited other options for travel and are often used to access essential services. Therefore without some form of available services, such people could be significantly disadvantaged.

4. SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS

4.1 Resource Implications

The report above sets out details of significant implications in sections 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7.

4.2 Statutory, Risk and Legal Implications

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.3 Equality and Diversity Implications

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- Community transport services are generally used by those people who have limited other options for travel and are often used to access essential services. Therefore without some form of available services, such people could be significantly disadvantaged.

4.4 Engagement and Consultation Implications

The report above sets out details of significant implications in appendix 1.

4.5 Localism and Local Member Involvement

There are no significant implications within this category.

4.6 Public Health Implications

The following bullet points set out details of implications identified by officers:

- There is a risk of impact on other services and/or external partners, such as Health and Social Care, where there could be a need to travel to residents rather than residents travelling to services, as well as the social care implications of increased isolation.

Source Documents	Location
County Council's Business Plan 2016/17	http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/info/20043/finance_and_budget/90/business_plan_2016_to_2017