



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY VIEWS AND RECOMMENDATIONS TO

Cabinet – 25th November 2009

Report Title	RECOMMENDATIONS OF OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ONE (PARTNERSHIPS, REGENERATION, COMMUNITY SAFETY & ENGAGEMENT) – CONCESSIONARY FARES APPRECIATIVE INQUIRY
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Agenda Status: PUBLIC

1. Purpose

- 1.1 To present to Cabinet the report of Overview and Scrutiny Committee One on the findings of the Concessionary Fares Appreciative Inquiry.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 Overview and Scrutiny Committee One recommends:
 - 2.1.1 That Companion Travel for eligible disabled pass-holders, both within Northampton and for eligible disabled pass-holders from other Northamptonshire districts be introduced in Northampton from April 2010, in the Northamptonshire Concessionary Travel Scheme 2010-11.
 - 2.1.2 That, in view of the clear support for and priority given to the introduction of all-day weekday free bus travel in the public consultation undertaken, Cabinet be asked to consider the introduction of this discretionary element in the concessionary travel scheme for Northampton or selective elements of the proposal as set out in the report.
 - 2.1.3 That a charge for replacement bus passes be introduced as soon as practicable – the recommended charge to reflect administration and production costs being £10.

3. Background and Issues

- 3.1 The Appreciative Inquiry was tasked with the consideration, in conjunction with public consultation, of possible variations to the Concessionary Bus Travel Scheme currently operated by the Borough Council. The setting up of the Appreciative Inquiry followed representations on variations being made at Council in May 2008. Then, the matter was referred to Cabinet by full Council on 2nd June 2008 and on to Overview and Scrutiny Committee One on 25th June 2008.

3.2 The Appreciative Inquiry was focused on a number of possible variations to the current concessionary scheme. The purpose of the Appreciative Inquiry was to recommend, following consultation and investigation, variations to the Scheme, which should be the subject of further consideration by Cabinet and/or full Council.

3.3

The main possible variations to the Scheme, under considerations are:

- Late evening travel after 11pm – Mondays to Thursdays.
- Morning Travel before 9.30am – Mondays to Fridays
- The current statutory scheme in Northampton offers all-day free bus travel Saturday and Sunday. *Although the above possible variations have been identified separately with separate impacts and resource implications, the most practical means of introduction would be 24-hour free bus travel on weekdays by combining the two.*
- Free bus travel for companions to Disabled pass-holders
- Free companion travel for Disabled pass-holders from all Northamptonshire Districts (NBC bear the cost when the pass-holder boards the bus In Northampton). This would be reciprocated when Northampton pass-holders travel in other districts.

3.4

After all of the evidence was collated the following conclusions were drawn: -

- The Consultants Report on the impact of potential changes principally provides a forecast of resources required to implement the proposals. It has been modified in the light of changing circumstances and forecasts, particularly in respect of changes in policy in other districts in the County.
- The Consultation Survey of Bus Pass Users has indicated a strong preference for all the proposed changes to be introduced and this has been reinforced by further consultation with Forums.
- The limited consultation with other Concessionary Travel Authorities needs to be seen in the context of being a random cross-section of authorities without a detailed look at travel patterns and other factors within these areas. In this sense, although the cross section have largely introduced discretionary elements into their schemes, the need for comparison within Northamptonshire is seen as more important to the exercise.
- The Department for Transport consultation on possible administrative changes has provided an important context for planning the future of the service. Whilst it is still at the consultative stage, the most likely outcome is transfer of responsibility to the County Council and their desire to have a clear scheme conforming to one set of rules. This need for conformity would apply, possibly with greater emphasis, were responsibilities to be transferred to regional or national level. Any change in the Authorities responsible for Concessionary Bus Travel will be subject to further consultation with Local Authorities by the Department for Transport and depending on the outcome, Legislation being enacted by Central Government.'
- The need for a uniform scheme which is clear both to bus users and bus companies is emphasised by the introduction of an electronic recognition system on the buses, due to commence in Autumn 2009. The 'smartcard' technology is complex in its introduction and variations should be kept to a minimum
- The impact of introducing a charge for replacement passes has been set out, for members' consideration.
- A key preliminary study to this evidence is the Equality Impact Assessment, which has a fundamental influence on the forecasting of the impact of

proposals.

- In summary, the elements proposed can be assessed within the broad areas of the evidence presented – resource implications, results of consultation, the need for conformity within the County and the equality impact.

Introduction of Companion Travel for eligible disabled pass-holders within Northampton

Introduction of Companion Travel for eligible disabled pass-holders from other Northamptonshire districts

- The resource implication has been estimated at £40,000 if introduced in 2010-11
- A clear majority in the consultation survey (87%) were in favour of the proposal
- In terms of a uniform scheme within the County, 5 districts have this discretionary element in place and introduction in Northampton would reinforce this.
- The equality impact assessment has identified the non-inclusion of these elements of the scheme as a major barrier to achieving full equality within the scheme.

Introduction of All-Day Free Travel: Monday-Friday

- The resource implication has been forecasted as £386,000 if introduced in 2010-11. Lower estimates have emerged from consultation with other authorities outside the County but there is a strong likelihood that the above estimate will be reached and it needs to be quoted as a risk implication. In addition, the introduction of free all-day travel may attract claims for capital expenditure from bus operators, which could incur additional expenditure.
- A clear majority in the consultation survey (89%) were in favour of free travel before 9.30am.
- In terms of a uniform scheme within the County, 4 districts do not have this discretionary element in place and 2 further districts are reviewing a possible change away from the discretionary free all-day travel to the statutory position i.e. no free travel before 9.30am. The retention of the statutory scheme in Northampton would reinforce this majority of districts adhering to free travel only being offered after 9.30am.
- The equality impact assessment has identified the inclusion or non-inclusion of this element of the scheme as having no significant impact on achieving full equality within the scheme.
- The evidence from other concessionary travel authorities, which is a random cross-section, differs from the County situation and together with the strong lobby for the proposal from the bus user survey and other representations may prompt the need for further member consideration of the options.
- This further consideration could include the introduction within the scheme of selective 'all day travel' elements, as discussed later in the report (pages 9-11):
 - Free weekday late night travel 11pm-4pm
 - Free all-day travel for disabled pass-holders only

Possible Charging for Replacement Bus Passes

- The resource implication of introducing a £10 charge (which reflects real costs) is estimated as an income to the authority of £12,000 per annum.
- A clear majority in the consultation survey (59%) were in favour of introducing a charge.
- In terms of a uniform scheme within the County, all other districts have a charge in place and introduction in Northampton would reinforce this.
- It would also anticipate the possible administration of the scheme in future by the County Council.
- The proposal would not impact on equality within the scheme and would improve the service in helping to reduce any fraudulent use of passes

4. Options

- 4.1 Cabinet will need to consider the possible options as part of its response to the recommendations.

5.1 Policy

- 5.1.1 The report and its recommendations may have policy implications for Planning. Cabinet will need to consider these issues in detail.

5.2 Resources and Risk

- 5.2.1 Cabinet will need to consider the resourcing issues for the recommendations made, for example there will be resourcing implications that would arise from, in particular, recommendations 2.1.1 and 2.1.2.

5.3 Legal

- 5.3.1 Legal issues will need to be considered as part of full Council's response to the recommendations.

5.4 Equality

- 5.4.1 Equality issues will need to be considered. A full Equality Impact Assessment has been made and has been the subject of consultation with the Pensioners' Forum and the Disabled People's Forum.
- 5.4.2 The Consultation Monitoring Form, which was issued with the Bus Pass User Survey, recognised that pass-holders represent a cross-section of the Community with no significant concerns about exclusion from the scheme.
- 5.4.3 The assessment was closely related to the possible changes to the Concessionary Fares Scheme, which were the subject of this Appreciative Inquiry. The main implications, in terms of equal opportunities, to the possible changes proposed are: -
- 5.4.4 Free travel to companions of disabled pass-holders:
- Lack of free companion travel is a major discriminatory element in the scheme and represents an urgent priority for resolution.
 - In order that the proposed introduction, if approved, is fully effective, it is also recommended that free companion travel from pass-holders from other districts should be offered when they board a bus in

Northampton.

- High risk of non-implementation in equality terms

5.4.5 All bus pass-holders could be perceived, to be discriminated against, in comparison with residents of other districts where wider concessions apply, mainly, in respect of free bus travel before 9.30am.

- The differential with other Northamptonshire Authorities has changed since the setting up of the Appreciative Inquiry. This element is not in the Statutory Scheme prescribed by Central Government and many Local Authorities have retained this minimum free bus travel regime. Therefore, the Borough Council is no more or less discriminatory than legislation adopted by the Department for Transport and a large number of districts throughout England.
- The introduction of the proposal is seen as a low level risk. There are no major discriminatory elements but there is a prospect of improving the service for all users.

6. Consultees (Internal and External)

6.1 Comprehensive consultation work was carried out as part of the evidence gathering stage of the Appreciative Inquiry work. The Committee consulted and took evidence from a variety of sources: -

- Individuals making representations to the Appreciative Inquiry and Overview and Scrutiny Committee One
- Assistant Head of Customer Services, Northampton Borough Council
- Atkins – Consultants Report
- Members of the Pensioners' Forum
- Members of Disabled People's Forum
- Concessionary Travel Authorities responding to survey

7. Background Papers

- 7.1
- Minutes of full Council 2 June 2008
 - Minutes of the meeting of Overview and Scrutiny Committee One of 25 June 2008
 - Scope of the Appreciative Inquiry
 - Minutes of the meetings of the Appreciative Inquiry
 - Results of the Survey with Concessionary Travel Authorities
 - Equality Impact Assessment for this Review

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