

Agenda Item 8

Executive Board

10 May 2006

DP



East Devon concessionary fares scheme

Summary

To provide delegated authority to the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council to extend the boundaries of the East Devon concessionary fares scheme should the opportunity arise.

Recommendation that the Chief Executive in consultation with the Leader of the Council be given delegated authority to extend the boundaries of the East Devon concessionary fares scheme on a phased basis should the budget be available.

a) Reasons for Recommendation

In order to gain a better understanding of the cost of providing free bus travel the initial East Devon scheme was set up on a restricted boundary. This provides less opportunity for free travel than is provided to residents of other Devon districts who make up the Devonwide partnership. It is proposed further destinations be added to widen the benefit of the scheme at the earliest opportunity in the event of an underspend on the concessionary fares budget being identified during the course of the financial year.

b) Alternative Options

To renegotiate the East Devon scheme with bus operators, with effect from April 2007, or rejoin the Devonwide partnership from that date.

c) Risk Considerations

d) Policy and Budgetary Considerations

1 Main Body of the Report

- 1.1 The Executive Board of 15 February recommended that the Council set up its own concessionary fares scheme, effective from 1 April 2006, to provide limit free travel to eligible residents within the boundaries of the district and to Exeter and Lyme Regis. When so doing Members indicated a willingness to review that restriction later in the year in the event of a forecast underspend on the concessionary fares budget.
- 1.2 The initial scheme has attracted much comment from residents, in particular in respect of the limitation on travel outside of the district, with many phone calls and letters being received together with a number of petitions.
- 1.3 Regular users of bus services, particularly those living on the periphery of the district and reliant upon public transport, have expressed the view that the quality of their life has

diminished due to the inability to travel for free outside of the scheme boundary. Examples cited are visits to:

- The doctor, dentist or a hospital
- The nearest bank or post office
- Shopping centres
- Park and ride facilities
- Relatives and friends
- The theatre, a day by the sea etc

1.4 The requirement to fund free bus travel placed an unquantified burden on district councils and although additional government grant has been paid the sum does not necessarily equate to the amount to be paid out. In East Devon's case the extra grant received in 2006-07 is £643k, a sum which would have fallen far short of the additional cost, of £1.033m, of remaining within the Devonwide partnership.

1.5 It is predicted that the introduction of the free travel concession will result in a surge in numbers using bus services in the initial period before settling down. It is also anticipated that the demand will be heaviest in urban areas with high density of elderly residents. Understandably it will therefore be a number of months before an accurate estimate can be made of the financial impact.

1.6 Should however the budget be available it is considered appropriate to extend the scheme boundaries on a phased basis to address the concerns of eligible pass holders. Here the proposal would be:

Phase 1 Routes to significant settlements outside of East Devon to which residents would travel to in order to visit the doctor, dentist, hospital, bank or post office which would also provide access to shops and other town centre facilities. Destinations could include Crediton, Tiverton, Cullompton, Wellington, Taunton and Chard.

Phase 2 Exeter park and ride facilities

Phase 3 Other destinations within Devon

Legal Implications

Provision has been made within the East Devon scheme to include other routes if the Council decides to do this. The Council will consult with participating operators, and notify them in writing following the revision. The scheme provides for the Council to give 28 days prior notice in writing of the change.

Financial Implications

Details are contained within the report.

Consultation on Reports to the Executive

Background Papers

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