

CONCESSIONARY TRANSPORT REVIEW

1 Purpose

- 1.1 To inform Members that the company supplying taxi tokens will be stopping the scheme.
- 1.2 To consult with Members in regard to the allocation of the annual budget for concessionary transport.

2 Recommendations

- 2.1 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the contents of this report and to endorse the recommendations and make any other comments that they wish Cabinet to consider prior to making a decision.
- 2.2 To provide members with the following two options for consideration:
 - a) The provision of discretionary concessionary transport is not a statutory district council function and the current scheme is no longer operational in its current form or fit for purpose. For these reasons, the provision of the concessionary transport scheme should be ceased, and/or;
 - b) That consideration is given to retaining some of the current funding within the budget for a time limited period for the purpose of funding new or existing community transport schemes. This funding would be for pump priming only and not for revenue costs. The process and criteria have still to be decided dependant upon the outcome of discussions with other partners.

3 Background

- 3.1 In 2011 BCC replaced AVDC as the Travel Concession Authority (TCA) and as such took over responsibility for the administration of concessionary travel. The same year, AVDC and BCC entered into a delegation agreement which allowed AVDC to administer a discretionary concessionary travel token scheme on the County's behalf.

BCC, as the TCA operates the statutory bus pass concession for older and disabled residents (also referred to as the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS).)

In addition BCC funds Community Impact Bucks (CIB) to operate a Community Transport Hub, which provides information to vulnerable Buckinghamshire residents about community transport providers, from Dial-a-Ride to community car schemes, mini bus hire to wheelchair accessible taxis. CIB is also funded by BCC to provide up to 10 days free support to communities wishing to explore setting up a community transport scheme.

- 3.2 Around the county, there are a number of community transport schemes, which are volunteer based transport solutions run for the community by the community, designed to meet a local need and used by those who cannot access or use conventional public or private transport. The scope and range of service offered by each scheme is determined by the community. Some provide transport to GP surgeries and hospitals; some cover social and shopping trips; some use volunteer car drivers; some have access to a community bus. See Appendix 1.

- 3.3 Research shows that AVDC appears to be one of the few District Councils that operates a concessionary discretionary transport scheme.
- 3.4 Funding for community transport schemes is available via the Local Area Forums (LAFs). A LAF can influence decisions about how money is spent locally and has some funding available to spend on meeting local priorities. Transport is a priority for many LAF's and any prospective community transport schemes would most likely be eligible to receive LAF funding. Currently, there is a shortage of schemes coming forward to the LAFs due to a lack of volunteers willing to take on the commitment and training that accompanies this voluntary role.
- 3.5 The discretionary concessionary transport scheme, in the form of taxi tokens originally operated alongside Aylesbury Vale Dial-a-Ride service, which closed in March 2016. Residents could use this service for any journeys they wished. The discretionary concessionary taxi token scheme is an alternative option for people that qualify for a free bus pass, don't have access to their own private transport and meet the following eligibility criteria:
- are in receipt of the state pension and cannot use buses because of disability or frailty; or
 - have a disability as defined by the Disability Discrimination Act.
- 3.6 There are currently 116 people in the Vale registered onto the scheme for 2018. With 184 in receipt of tokens from 2017 and who did not apply in 2018 but are still able to use any remaining tokens whilst operators continue to accept them (up to the 30th September 2018). The scheme is fully funded by AVDC and the budget is £33,400 per annum. The current cost to us of providing the scheme is £7,200 per annum, this covers staffing and recharge costs. We then pay for postage and packing on top of this. The remainder of the budget is available to source the provision of tokens,
- 3.7 We purchase the tokens from an external specialist company, National Transport Tokens Ltd. Qualifying persons may apply for up to £90 of tokens per year, which they can spend with a participating local taxi firm on essential journeys. The tokens can be used to fully or partly fund a journey in a taxi up to the cost of £15. The taxi firm then has to exchange the tokens for payment through the specialist company from which we source the tokens.
- 3.8 There has been a steep decline in the number of participating taxi operators involved in the scheme, from 21 operators in 2011 to just 5 in 2017. The primary reason for this is that it is not financially viable for them to do so because the minimum value of tokens that they can exchange with the company is £100 and the number of journeys that they are being asked to provide is not high enough to make this worthwhile for them.
- 3.9 It should be noted that this is an optional service that taxi firms can choose to offer their customers and they are under no obligation to provide it. Current taxi operators are from Aylesbury, Wing and Winslow, and only two offer wheelchair accessible vehicles. There are no operators who support the scheme in Buckingham.
- 3.10 There has also been a significant decline in the number of users of the scheme, from 314 in 2012 to 116 who have received £45 worth of tokens each in 2018.

For the reasons stated above, as well as budgetary and resourcing pressures, it was agreed to conduct a review of the scheme.

4 Findings of the review

The review was conducted in a number of ways including:

- Mapping of current community transport in the Vale.
- A survey of current users.
- Consultation with the Transport Hub.
- National research on older people and transport needs.
- Conversations with community and statutory partners.
- Review of scheme as it currently stands.
- Research on what other options are available in other areas of the county.
- Commissioning of Community Impact Bucks to signpost existing users to alternative provision.

4.1 Mapping of provision in the Vale

A mapping exercise of current community transport options in the vale was carried out. See Appendix 1. This shows that there are more community and hospital transport schemes operating in the vale since the taxi token scheme was launched and therefore, many customers now have alternative options that previously didn't exist. Partners acknowledge that transport provision that meets the needs of an ageing population and those unable to access public transport, is still an ongoing issue.

Consideration could be given as to whether residents using the taxi token scheme may also be clients of the shop mobility scheme.

4.2 Survey of recipients

In April 2018 we conducted a survey of all 209 recipients from 2017 and the following information was obtained from the responses to questions (where this was answered). We had 121 responses (58%) .Of which:

- 45% (54) were aged 85 and over
- 32% (39) were aged 75-84
- 68% (82) lived within Aylesbury Town
- 49% (59) travelled predominantly within Aylesbury Town
- 18% (22) travelled to Stoke Mandeville Hospital
- 80% (97) used taxi's to make their journey
- 33% (40) relied on family members to help make their journey (residents in Buckingham are not currently served by a taxi operator hence the response to this question was mainly from users in Aylesbury)

The vast majority of residents live in Aylesbury and most journeys are made within the town centre and to Stoke Mandeville Hospital.

For the full breakdown of survey results see Appendix 2.

The total number of recipients from 2017, (who can still use their tokens) and recipients in 2018 equal 300. Those with Aylesbury Central postcodes of HP17, 18, 19, 20, 21 represent 162 out of 300 or 54%.

4.3 Consultation with the Transport Hub operated by Community Impact Bucks (CIB)

CIB has highlighted that other than the taxi token scheme, there are no concessionary transport or community car based schemes operating within Aylesbury Central, where the majority of recipients come from and use the service – see Map of Community Transport Schemes - Appendix 3.

From communication with a number of recipients, it is clear that essential journeys include those which keep them socially connected although the original purpose of the taxi token scheme was for essential journeys to attend medical and hospital appointments etc.

4.4 National Research on older people and transport needs

- The Social Care Institute for Excellence (SCIE) concludes from extensive research that “enabling older people to retain their independence for as long as possible, through preventative approaches, is central to maintaining their quality of life and also reducing pressures on local health and social care budgets.
- Age UK produced an in-depth policy report entitled '[Painful Journeys](#)' in December 2017, which highlighted the difficulties older people have in getting to medical and hospital appointments.

4.5 Conversations with community and statutory partners.

Various partners have been consulted about AVDC's current contribution to the concessionary transport picture. These include: the BCC commissioned Prevention Matters Service, Community Impact Bucks and Bucks Disability Service.

Partners agreed that the taxi token scheme is not fit for purpose but they also thought that because of the lack of regular public and community transport, there is still a need for provision. However, they have been unable to suggest a viable alternative.

4.6 Review of scheme as it currently stands.

The current taxi token scheme is administratively and financially burdensome for AVDC and the taxi operators. The Council must incur the cost of the tokens upfront and recipients are at liberty to use the tokens as and when they wish. Figures provided by the supplier indicate that over a 3 year period, 87% of tokens AVDC provided to residents were redeemed. AVDC are unable to recoup the value of any unspent tokens, which does not provide good value for money. For the reasons stated above, the taxi token scheme is not fit for purpose.

During the scheme review, we were notified that National Transport Tokens Ltd, the company who supply the tokens, would cease supply of new tokens at the end of April 2018. The reason given was that it was no longer a viable

business activity for them. Taxi token schemes that are provided in a similar format are few and far between and previous efforts to find other suppliers have not been successful.

Applications for taxi tokens beyond 30 June 2018 have not been accepted by AVDC. National Transport Tokens Ltd agreed to honour the redemption of tokens from participating taxi operators until the end of October 2018. Users of the scheme have been advised that they must redeem their tokens with a taxi operator by the 30th September 2018.

There are a number of new community transport schemes in the Vale, which are in the initial stages and are listed in Appendix 1. According to CIB, schemes which require volunteers, can take on average 14 months from start-up until they are able to provide an operational service.

4.7 Research on what other options are available in other areas of the county

In the south of the county, Gerrards Cross and Little Chalfont parish councils both operate a concessionary Taxi Fares Scheme. Initially the schemes were pump primed with LAF funding but now operate using precept funds. The schemes continue to utilise the services of local taxi operators but the recipient can claim a cash concession off the cost of their journey retrospectively on production of a taxi receipt. Administration is absorbed within the current staffing resource and could be scaled accordingly depending on the funding available and criteria applied.. This option may be appropriate for adoption by similar parishes or town councils in the vale.

Aylesbury Town Council and Buckingham Town Council have both been made aware of these schemes for their consideration. Currently Aylesbury Town Council, have requested details of the Taxi Fares Scheme and also information on how the existing AVDC taxi token scheme operates.

- 4.8 At the current time BCC are conducting a survey of Council -supported rural bus services and results of the survey and a public consultation will be published later in 2018.

4.9 Commissioning of Community Impact Bucks to signpost existing users to alternative provision.

Following withdrawal of the taxi token provision AVDC commissioned Community Impact Bucks to contact recipients of the taxi token scheme to signpost them to alternative provision or redirect them to BCC to reapply for a bus pass. 122 recipients took up the offer of this service.

The majority of people spoken to were unable to access a bus because of their health and mobility and also a lack of buses in their area in certain cases. Most calls were to people living in Aylesbury and the surrounding areas like Weedon or Bierton, where there is little to offer them as an alternative.

- All recipients were contacted either in writing or by telephone.
- 32% (39) were signposted to BCC to receive a bus pass, along with other alternative community schemes.
- The majority of signposts were to : British Red Cross Volunteer Transport Service, Ambulance Service non emergency transport and local car schemes.

5 Options

- 5.1 Members are asked to note the contents of this report and that the taxi token scheme will be closing. As such members are provided with the following options for consideration:
- 5.2 The provision of discretionary concessionary transport is not a statutory district council function and the current scheme is no longer operational in its current form or fit for purpose. For these reasons, the provision of the concessionary transport scheme should be ceased, and/or;
- 5.3 That consideration is given to retaining some of the current funding within the budget for a time limited period for concessionary transport for the purposes of funding new or existing community transport schemes.

6 Resource implications

- 6.1 Officer time spent reviewing the scheme and sourcing alternative options going forward.
- 6.2 Administration, delivery and monitoring costs should an alternative scheme be agreed and sourced.
- 6.3 A potential saving of £33,400 per annum if AVDC cease to offer a non-statutory concessionary transport scheme.

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