

 Executive 14 th , April 2009		Agenda Item No.
Title	Proposed Changes to the Council's Discretionary Assisted Travel Scheme	
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Service Area	Revenues and Customer Services	
Wards of the District directly affected	All	
Is the report private and confidential and not for publication by virtue of a paragraph of schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, following the Local Government (Access to Information) (Variation) Order 2006	No	
Date and meeting when issue was last considered and relevant minute number	Executive 8 th , April 2008 – minute number 1052	
Background Papers		

Contrary to the policy framework:	Yes/No
Contrary to the budgetary framework:	Yes/No
Key Decision?	Yes/No
Included within the Forward Plan? (If yes include reference number)	Yes/No-Ref 160

Officer/Councillor Approval		
With regard to officer approval all reports <u>must</u> be approved by the report author's relevant director, Finance, Legal Services and the relevant Portfolio Holder(s).		
Officer Approval	Date	Name
Deputy Chief Executive		Andrew Jones
Chief Executive		Chris Elliott
CMT		Chris Elliott, Andrew Jones, Bill Hunt
Section 151 Officer		Mike Snow
Legal		Peter Oliver
Finance		Mike Snow
Portfolio Holder(s)		Cllr Les Caborn
Consultation Undertaken		
Please insert details of any consultation undertaken with regard to this report.		
Discussions with Racing Club Warwick		
Final Decision?		Yes/No
Suggested next steps (if not final decision please set out below)		

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The report requests approval of a revised discretionary assisted travel scheme entitling eligible residents to either £50.00 or £25.00 of travel tokens upon payment of a £5.00 administration charge. The value of entitlement will depend upon the quality of bus service serving the parish.

2. RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 The Executive to agree a new assisted travel scheme providing eligible residents with £50.00 or £25.00 travel tokens upon payment of a £5.00 administration charge.
- 2.2 The Executive to agree the eligibility criteria as set out in Appendices I & II.
- 2.3 The Executive to note that the three year partnership agreement with Racing Club Warwick ended on 31st, March 2009.
- 2.4 The Executive receives an update report in six months to review take-up of the scheme.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 3.1 The Executive of 8th, April 2008 requested that various Budget Working Groups be established to consider specific areas of work one of those being Assisted Travel.
- 3.2 The Assisted Travel Working Group (the Group) was to consider:
 - How the additional £50,000 allocated in the budget (2008/09) should be spent; and
 - How the current scheme should be modified in the light of the experience of Racing Club Warwick's Communitaxi Scheme.
- 3.3 Following a comprehensive examination of the Communitaxi scheme provided by Racing Club Warwick (RCW), the Group concluded that the scheme was not benefiting residents in the rural areas. This conclusion was not a criticism of the efforts of RCW but a belief that the scheme was not meeting the objectives described in the partnership agreement between RCW and the Council.
- 3.4 The Group recognised that the Communitaxi scheme was of benefit to some urban residents but given the significant annual investment made by the Council (c.£70,000 per annum), it did not consider that the scheme provided value for money to Warwick District as a whole. The Group was of the opinion that the council's resources would be better targeted towards those residents who had an irregular or only acceptable bus service and that the most efficient way of doing this was by the re-introduction of travel tokens.
- 3.5 Although many residents in rural areas were in receipt of a free national bus pass, the opportunity for those residents to use the pass was limited due to the quality of the bus service in operation. The Group therefore proposed that for the year 2009/10 the Council should allocate to eligible residents tokens to the value of either £50.00 or £25.00 (with a £5.00 administration charge) and then consider the take-up of the scheme to see whether it would be possible to increase the value of the token allocation in future years.

- 3.6 The £5.00 administration charge was considered appropriate as it was felt that the tokens were more likely to be used if there was a charge. It has been the experience of many authorities that without a charge local residents collect their entitlement but do not use the tokens thereby diverting resources from those most in need.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

4.1 Enhancement of the Communitaxi scheme

- 4.11 The Group examined whether it would be possible to enhance the RCW scheme through further investment. However, close examination of the scheme revealed that there are only 140-160 regular users and that only 3% of journeys are made either from or to rural locations. Given the comprehensive coverage of the bus service in the urban areas the Group did not consider that an expansion of this scheme would be an efficient use of the Council's resources.

- 4.12 However, it did become clear through the investigation that RCW would still be in a position to run a taxi scheme even if the Service Level Agreement with the Council was not renewed as it would pick-up travel token business.

4.2 Travel tokens for all residents with certain disabilities

- 4.21 Due to the difficulties that some disabled residents have with transport the Group was keen to explore whether it would be possible to award tokens to all residents with certain disabilities.

- 4.22 However, the Group wanted to ensure that the Council's limited resources were targeted at those in greatest need. The free national bus pass scheme entitles those with particularly limiting disabilities a free bus pass and so the group noted that those in the urban areas would have access to the bus services.

- 4.23 Notwithstanding 4.22, the Group also recognised that due to the nature of some disabilities it would not be practical or appropriate for all disabled residents to use the bus. However, the Group felt that the State already assists such disabled residents as it provides Attendance and Disability Allowances to compensate for a person's mobility difficulties. Appendix III provides details of the eligibility criteria for Disability Living Allowance (Mobility Components). The award for the lower rate is £17.75 per week and for the higher rate £46.75 per week.

5. BUDGETARY FRAMEWORK

- 5.1 The council's assisted travel (Communitaxi) budget for 2009/10 is £120,900. This amount consists of the original Communitaxi budget and the extra £50,000 agreed in the 2008/09 budget. It is estimated that the net cost of the travel tokens in 2009/10 will be £120,000.

- 5.2 The Executive needs to be aware that this initial estimate is very tentative as it is based on the 2001 Census and the take-up of tokens in 2006. Therefore any shortfall in the budget during 2009/10 will need to be met from the Council's contingency fund and the ongoing implications addressed in the budget setting process for 2010/2011.

6. POLICY FRAMEWORK

- 6.1 The report promotes the Council's corporate strategy priority of supporting, "the differing needs of our communities focusing support where it is most needed."
- 6.2 A High Level Action for 2008-2011 was to introduce a subsidised taxi service scheme for rural areas. Having examined the current Communitaxi scheme, the Group is of the opinion that this is best achieved via the re-introduction of a travel token scheme.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1 In 2006 the Council's assisted travel scheme was changed to replace travel tokens with a subsidised taxi scheme. The scheme was operated by RCW under a three year partnership service level agreement.
- 7.2 Warwick District Council and RCW agreed certain partnership objectives which would be used to help evaluate the success or otherwise of the project. Those objectives were:
- To provide transport options to rurally isolated people and rural people with mobility problems through a "communitaxi" service.
 - To establish and maintain a fleet of wheelchair accessible vehicles to provide the service.
 - To recruit and manage a team of staff to drive vehicles and administer the service.
 - To maintain good communication with users of the scheme.
- 7.3 The Budget Working Group tasked with investigating the Assisted Travel scheme undertook a comprehensive examination of how the scheme was operating and was able to draw a number of conclusions supported by quantifiable evidence. The conclusions can be summarised as follows:
- a. The scheme has approximately 150 regular users;
 - b. The vast majority of scheme users have a disability of some description;
 - c. The total number of journeys undertaken in any one month is about 1000;
 - d. The average distance traveled during any one journey is 3.22 miles;
 - e. The percentage of users undertaking journeys to or from the rural areas is approximately 3%.
- 7.4 The evidence suggested that although the Communitaxi scheme was proving of benefit to some residents, these were predominantly people in the urban areas with a disability and not those "rurally isolated" or "rural people with mobility problems".
- 7.5 The Group felt that the main issue for the rural areas was the lack of a regular bus service and that in order to provide rural residents with flexibility and choice, a re-introduction of travel tokens was the most appropriate way forward.
- 7.6 The Group was keen to see the Council taking the proposed assistance out into the rural communities as opposed to asking residents to collect their tokens in the towns. Therefore officers will be visiting village halls in the rural areas to distribute the tokens whilst at the same time promoting the Council's services and the other sources of financial assistance that residents may be entitled to.

APPENDIX I

Eligibility Criteria

To qualify for travel tokens of £50.00 a person must be a permanent resident in one of the following parishes and have attained the age of 60 or be disabled as defined by the Disability Criteria at Appendix II :

- Ashow
- Bushwood
- Beausale
- Eathorpe
- Haseley
- Honiley
- Hunningham
- Offchurch
- Old Milverton
- Rowington
- Wappenbury
- Wroxall

To qualify for travel tokens of £25.00 a person must be a permanent resident in one of the following parishes and have attained the age of 60 or be disabled as defined by the Disability Criteria at Appendix II:

- Bagington
- Baddesley Clinton
- Bishops Tachbrook
- Bubbenhall
- Budbrooke
- Hatton
- Lapworth
- Leek Wootton
- Norton Lindsey
- Sherbourne
- Shrewley
- Stonleigh
- Wasperton
- Weston under Wetherley

APPENDIX II

Disability Criteria

Disability in this context is defined as follows (the same as for the free national bus pass):

- blind or partially sighted
- profoundly or severely deaf
- without speech
- disability or injury which has a substantial and long-term adverse effect on ability to walk
- without arms or legs or have long-term loss of the use of both arms
- learning disability
- refused a driving licence on medical grounds.

A person applying for tokens on the basis of disability will need to provide appropriate evidence. The following are examples:

- Blind or partially sighted – certificate of registration with Social Services or Warwickshire Association for the Blind
- Learning disability – letter from special school, Mencap or Social Services
- Other forms of disability – Blue Badge or certificates confirming, for example, Higher Rate DLA or War Pension Mobility Supplement
- Refused a driving licence on medical grounds – DVLA refusal notice.

APPENDIX III

Mobility Component: who qualifies?

Lower rate

Payable if you need someone to provide guidance or supervision when you are outside on unfamiliar routes.

Higher rate

Payable if you have severe mobility problems. For example:

- If you cannot walk or are virtually unable to walk. OR
- If you have a double amputation, or were born without legs or feet. OR
- If you are deaf or blind. OR
- If you have a severe learning disability or severe behaviour problems and get the highest rate of the Care Component.

The Mobility Component takes account of how much help you may need to be mobile. It makes no difference whether or not you are actually getting that help. However, it is usually not paid if you cannot be moved, or could not appreciate going out. For example, if you were in a coma.