

HAMPSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Decision Report

Decision Maker:	Executive Lead Member for Universal Services
Date:	27 November 2023
Title:	Publication of the Hampshire Concessionary Travel Scheme 2024/25
Report From:	Director of Universal Services

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Purpose of this Report

1. The purpose of this report is to seek approval to provide the range of concessions detailed for the Hampshire Concessionary Travel Scheme for 2024/2025, and to seeks approval for the basis upon which concessionary travel operator reimbursements will be calculated for local bus services from April 2024.

Recommendations

2. That approval be given to continue to provide the existing discretionary enhancements as detailed in this report for the next financial year, and that this forms the basis of the draft Hampshire Concessionary Travel Scheme 2024/2025, due to be published on 1 December 2023.
3. That approval be given, in line with Department for Transport guidance, for the Hampshire Concessionary Travel Scheme 2024/2025 to revert fully to the Scheme's standard reimbursement principles (that operators should be no better or worse off as a result of the Scheme) with operator reimbursements determined by the number of concessionary travel journeys made on Hampshire services.
4. That authority is delegated to the Director of Universal Services to make minor variations to the final 2024/25 Scheme as required, and any changes to the Scheme in response to updated Department for Transport issued guidance, in consultation with the Executive Lead Member for Universal Services.

Executive Summary

5. This paper seeks to set out the background to the scheme and proposes the scheme for 2024/2025.
6. This paper proposes the approval of the existing discretionary enhancements and that the Hampshire Concessionary Travel scheme reverts fully to operator

reimbursements based upon actual passenger numbers using the most up to date Department for Transport (DfT) Calculator and guidance.

Contextual information

7. This report concerns the administration of concessionary travel, for which the County Council acquired responsibility in April 2011.
8. The published scheme is updated annually, and the County Council is required to publish details of its draft Concessionary Travel Scheme for 2024/25 by 1 December 2023. The final details of the scheme have to be published by 3 March 2024, 28 days prior to implementation on 1 April 2024. This report seeks approval from the Executive Lead Member for Universal Services for the range of concessions and method by which operator reimbursement sums are calculated as detailed in this report.

Hampshire discretionary enhancements to the scheme

9. The statutory scheme provides for free off-peak travel on local bus services for eligible older and disabled persons. Off-peak is defined as between 09:30 and 23:00 on Mondays to Fridays and at all times at weekends and on Bank Holidays. The County Council has not been notified of any changes.
10. Since it commenced on 1 April 2011, the Hampshire scheme has incorporated a number of enhancements for those with disabilities. This followed a detailed Equalities Impact Assessment. These enhancements were approved by the Executive Member for Environment on 19 November 2010.
11. Since this initial approval, enhancements to the statutory scheme have reduced over time, with the most recent reductions made as part of the Passenger Transport SP23 Savings Proposals, which was given approval by Executive Lead Member for Transport and Environment Strategy in November 2022.
12. The enhancements to the statutory scheme are currently as follows:
 - free travel at all times for holders of Hampshire disabled persons bus passes on journeys commencing in Hampshire to destinations in England; and
 - companion travel – the scheme will allow certain Hampshire pass holders who have been issued with a ‘Companion pass’ to be accompanied by a companion who is eligible for the same free travel benefits as the pass holder. The companion may be anyone whom the pass holder considers appropriate to provide assistance.
13. The DfT is currently reviewing the eligibility for free bus travel for disabled people under the Scheme, which includes the statutory travel times for disabled pass holders. This review may result in Hampshire’s enhancement to the scheme for disabled pass holders becoming part of the statutory scheme in the near future. Therefore, it has not been proposed that any of the current enhancements be removed from the 2024/25 Scheme. The outcome of the DfT review will inform the development of the SP25 proposals in due course.

14. This paper proposes the continuation of the current discretionary 2023/24 enhancements as part of the 2024/2025 Hampshire Concessionary Travel Scheme.

Operator Reimbursement

15. Since April 2021, in order to support the recovery of the local bus network in Hampshire during and after Covid, operators have had the option to be reimbursed based on the percentage of pre-covid network mileage operated, rather than on passenger numbers travelling on their services.
16. This was previously possible due to ongoing extensions of the Statutory Instrument (until March 2024) to enable Local Authorities to legally reimburse operators above actual patronage levels for the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS). The latest message from the DfT is that it does not currently plan to extend this Statutory Instrument.
17. The DfT is undertaking a review of 'the current appeals process, reimbursement guidance and, by extension, the reimbursement calculator, following the impact of COVID-19 on travel patterns.' The updated calculator and guidance are expected to be available in the Autumn 2023 to come into effect from April 2024.
18. Without yet having received the revised guidance from the DfT for 2024/25, the current proposal is to revert to normalising operator reimbursement payments for concessionary travel in 2024/25. This will result in operators being reimbursed based on passenger numbers. This means payments will no longer recognise additional costs carried by operators who are maintaining the bus network despite patronage levels remaining lower than in the years before Covid-19.
19. Reimbursement rates are calculated by specialist consultants based on DfT guidance and using the DfT Calculator.
20. This paper proposes that the Hampshire Concessionary Travel Scheme reverts to calculating operator reimbursements based on actual passenger numbers, using the most up to date DfT Calculator.

Finance

21. The overall budget for 2024/25 is £12.288 million. This covers the cost of issuing concessions and reimbursement costs to operators for concessionary travel. Operator reimbursement payments account for the most significant part of the budget and are made by the County Council as advised by consultants who process these claims from operators in accordance with the scheme detail on behalf of the Council. This is a demand led budget with spend determined by the number of concessionary travel journeys made on Hampshire services. As passenger numbers have not fully recovered to pre-covid levels, it is unlikely that, even with the introduction of a new Calculator and the implementation of measures to encourage people back onto the bus network, the proposal will result in the costs to the Council exceeding the budgeted amount in the 2024/25 financial year.

Consultation and Equalities

22. Under the proposals in this report, Hampshire Concessionary Fare Scheme eligibility and the concessions offered for 2024/2025 remain unchanged from eligibility in the current year and therefore there will be no impact upon those groups with protected characteristics.
23. The proposal to revert to normalising and adopting any updated DfT Calculator in the calculation of operator reimbursement payments for concessionary travel in 2024/25 does not change the public's (including those with protected characteristics) access to services.

Climate Change Impact Assessments

24. Hampshire County Council utilises two decision-making tools to assess the carbon emissions and resilience of its projects and decisions. These tools provide a clear, robust, and transparent way of assessing how projects, policies and initiatives contribute towards the County Council's climate change targets of being carbon neutral and resilient to the impacts of a 2°C temperature rise by 2050. This process ensures that climate change considerations are built into everything the Authority does.
25. The tools to assess specific impacts on climate change adaption and mitigation were not considered applicable to the publication of the Concessionary Travel Scheme 2024/25 as it has no physical infrastructure component and is focused solely on the concessions that are to be provided to bus pass holders rather than delivery.
26. However, the Concessionary Travel Scheme administered by Hampshire County Council is a mechanism which incentivises eligible individuals to make journeys using local bus, which when undertaken as an alternative to using a private vehicle is considered an effective approach towards carbon reduction.
27. Concessionary travel operator reimbursements are a key component of revenue that supports the retention of the existing bus network, maintaining opportunities to travel by local bus for the wider public, which when undertaken as an alternative to using a private vehicle is considered an effective approach toward carbon reduction.

Conclusions

28. This paper seeks to continue the current discretionary enhancements to the Hampshire Concessionary Travel Scheme for 2024/2025 in recognition of the DfT review which may make this part of the statutory scheme.
29. It also seeks to normalise concessionary travel operator reimbursements. Although this will no longer recognise additional costs carried by operators as a result of patronage levels remaining lower than in the years before Covid-19, it is anticipated that the updated Department for Transport Calculator and guidance will, to a greater or lesser extent, reflect the new post covid landscape within which operators now function.

REQUIRED CORPORATE AND LEGAL INFORMATION:

Links to the Strategic Plan

Hampshire maintains strong and sustainable economic growth and prosperity:	yes
People in Hampshire live safe, healthy and independent lives:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy a rich and diverse environment:	yes
People in Hampshire enjoy being part of strong, inclusive communities:	yes

Other Significant Links

Links to previous Member decisions:	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>
Direct links to specific legislation or Government Directives	
<u>Title</u>	<u>Date</u>

Section 100 D - Local Government Act 1972 - background documents	
<p>The following documents discuss facts or matters on which this report, or an important part of it, is based and have been relied upon to a material extent in the preparation of this report. (NB: the list excludes published works and any documents which disclose exempt or confidential information as defined in the Act.)</p>	
<u>Document</u>	<u>Location</u>
None	

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT:

1 Equality Duty

The County Council has a duty under Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the Act') to have due regard in the exercise of its functions to the need to:

- Eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation and any other conduct prohibited by or under the Act with regard to the protected characteristics as set out in section 4 of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation);
- Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex and sexual orientation) and those who do not share it;
- Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic within section 149(7) of the Act (see above) and persons who do not share it.

Due regard in this context involves having due regard in particular to:

- The need to remove or minimise disadvantages suffered by persons sharing a relevant characteristic connected to that characteristic;
- Take steps to meet the needs of persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic different from the needs of persons who do not share it;
- Encourage persons sharing a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.

2 Equalities Impact Assessment:

Under the proposals in this report, Hampshire Concessionary Fare Scheme eligibility and the concessions offered for 2024/2025 remain unchanged from eligibility in the current year and therefore there will be no impact upon those groups with protected characteristics.

The proposal to revert to normalising and adopting any updated DfT Calculator in the calculation of operator reimbursement payments for concessionary travel in 2024/25 does not change the public's (including those with protected characteristics) access to services.