

STOCKTON-ON-TEES BOROUGH COUNCIL

CABINET RECOMMENDATIONS

PROFORMA

Cabinet Meeting13th March 2008

1. Title of Item/Report

Introduction of the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme

2. Record of the Decision

Members considered a report that provided an update on progress with the implementation of the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) for bus journeys by the over 60s and people with disabilities to be introduced on 1st April 2008.

It was explained that Stockton-on-Tees Borough Council agreed to the recommendation to participate in the Tees Valley Enhanced Concessionary Travel scheme in a report presented to Cabinet on 1 February 2007. The enhanced concessionary travel scheme enabled those who qualified for free concessionary travel under the Transport Act 2000 to travel anywhere within the area covered by Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees Borough Councils at any time of day and at no charge to the pass holder.

Agreement was reached with bus operators on operation of the scheme for one year on the basis of fixed payments to operators. The cost of the agreement for the year from 1 April 2007 to 31 March 2008 inclusive was over £2.5 million, not including administrative costs.

It was advised that on 22 March 2006 the Chancellor of the Exchequer announced that from 1 April 2008, the government intended to introduce a new national scheme to apply throughout England. This would bring concessionary travel in England into line with the national schemes currently operating in Scotland and Wales.

The Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007 received royal assent on 19 July 2007. Under the Act eligible pass holders would be entitled to free concessionary travel on any local bus service between 9.30am and 11.00pm on weekdays and at any time at weekends. It was noted that local enhancements to the scheme were to be agreed under Section 93 of the Transport Act 1985.

Members were informed that the present Tees Valley Enhanced

Concessionary Travel Scheme had local enhancements enabling cross boundary travel anywhere within the area covered by Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton councils and also removing all restrictions on the time of travel.

It was, therefore, necessary to agree a scheme including any local enhancements to operate from 1 April. Operators had indicated that they would be willing to agree on local enhancements to the ENCTS that would enable pass holders to travel at any time of day; removing the national restriction on free travel before 9.30am and after 11.00pm on weekdays. It was recommended that a one-year local enhancement on this basis be sought. It was advised that payments to operators should be based on fixed payments reflecting the number concessionary journeys made with each participating operator, the average fare of each operator and a reimbursement factor based on Department for Transport guidance. It was further recommended that negotiations be carried out on a Tees Valley wide basis in order to secure consistency between authorities.

It was advised that Stockton Council had been asked by Help the Aged to consider introducing an alternative token scheme where residents could choose to have tokens that could be used on taxis rather than a bus pass. It was not considered appropriate to consider such a scheme as concerns over the security of tokens were raised. A full assessment of the likely demand and financial implications for the Council would also be needed.

Members were advised that the Tees Valley authorities had also been asked to consider allowing companions of pass holders qualifying for free travel on grounds of disability. Various reasons were provided to Members as to why free travel for companions could not be considered until all the implications for the Council were clearer.

It was advised that payments to operators for the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme and any agreed local enhancements to it would need to reflect changes in operating costs. Fares charged by the bus industry were presently increasing at well above the general inflation rate, and fuel prices had risen particularly sharply since mid-2007. It was noted that operators were seeking further substantial increases in payments to reflect fare increases.

Operators would need to be reimbursed for cross boundary trips beyond the old Cleveland County area (for which payment was already being made under the Tees Valley Enhanced Concessionary Travel Scheme). Payments for journeys to Darlington, Newcastle, Sunderland and Durham would now have to be made, along with any other long distance trips

commencing in Stockton-on-Tees. From 1 April 2008 reimbursement would be based on any passenger boardings in the Council's area, regardless of the issuing authority for the pass.

Members were provided with an update on Smartcards, which the Secretary of State had determined should be issued to passengers for the ENCTS.

RESOLVED that:-

1. Approval be given in principle to seeking to negotiate local enhancements to the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS). The enhancements sought will enable residents of Hartlepool, Middlesbrough, Redcar & Cleveland and Stockton-on-Tees borough councils to travel before 9.30am and after 11.00pm on weekdays.

2. Subject to agreement, an enhanced scheme operates for a one-year period from 1st April 2008 to March 31st 2009 inclusive, with negotiations carried out on a Tees Valley wide basis.

3. Approval to determine the Stockton contribution to a joint Tees Valley offer for the year 2008/09 be delegated to the Corporate Director of Development and Neighbourhood Services in consultation with the Corporate Director for Resources and Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Transport.

4. A further report be provided to Cabinet, in November 2008, regarding any potential impact upon resources for the scheme in 2009/10 following bus passenger usage data collection and analysis.

3. Reasons for the Decision

The need to agree payments with bus operators for the new English National Concessionary Travel Scheme and any local enhancements to it from 1st April 2008 to March 31st 2009 inclusive.

4. Alternative Options Considered and Rejected

None

5. Declared (Cabinet Member) Conflicts of Interest

None

6. Details of any Dispensations

Not Applicable

7. Date and Time by which Call In must be executed

By no later than midnight on Tuesday 25th March 2008

Proper Officer
17 March 2008