

TAXI VOUCHER SCHEME

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 Members to determine the amount of taxi vouchers to be granted to each qualifying applicant and whether additional vouchers ought to be awarded to wheelchair users.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Council is withdrawing from the South East Essex Dial-a-Ride Partnership from 1 April 2002 and replacing it with a Taxi Voucher Scheme for qualifying applicants.
- 2.2 £33,000 has been set aside in the 2002/003 Budget and Essex County Council are contributing around £20,000 to enhance the scheme.
- 2.3 In December 2001 registered Dial-a-Ride users were contacted regarding the change in service provision and invited to register their interest in the new scheme. At 22 February, 128 residents had registered their interest, although not all may qualify.
- 2.4 Application forms were despatched during the week commencing 25 February 2002 and the Head of Service will give a verbal update on the numbers returned at the meeting.
- 2.5 The overall scheme cost is cash limited to £53,000. As administrative costs are absorbed into the Public Transportation functions of the Council, the whole of this amount is therefore available for voucher distribution.

3 WHEELCHAIR PASSENGERS

- 3.1 Early indications show that around 18 – 20 of those displaying an interest in the scheme are wheelchair users. These applicants need to access specially adapted vehicles designed to carry one or more wheelchairs.
- 3.2 An anomalous situation has been drawn to the attention of the Head of Service in as much as taxi drivers are entitled to set the taximeter running as soon as vehicle availability has been drawn to the hirer's attention. Bearing in mind that it takes 3 – 4 minutes to safely secure a wheelchair passenger, travellers are finding that the taxi meter already has £2 - £3 displayed before the taxi starts its journey. At the other end of the journey the disembarking process again adds a cost. Consequently, a short two or three mile journey might amount to £11

rather than £5 (illustrative only). Such costs would quickly erode the value of vouchers and disadvantage wheelchair passengers.

- 3.3 One taxi firm has attempted to overcome the problem, partially, by only charging for the embarking exercise and stopping the taximeter upon arrival; thus avoiding a charge for the disembarking exercise. However, fairness needs to be considered as the taxi driver could have access to another fare paying passenger when helping the wheelchair passenger to disembark.
- 3.4 Members may wish to consider awarding additional vouchers to wheelchair passengers to reflect this issue.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Acceptance on to the Taxi Voucher Scheme will continue throughout 2002/03 and future years as additional residents become aware of availability or qualify because of their disability. It is therefore thought prudent to hold in reserve around 20% of the total voucher value available for 2002/03 to serve new applicants. This means that about £42,000 ought to be made available for immediate release.
- 4.2 It is proposed that a progress report be made to an appropriate committee after six months of operation and, if appropriate, a larger award of vouchers might be made in the last quarter of 2002/03.
- 4.3 It is apparent that not all of those who pre-registered for the scheme will eventually qualify. For instance, two or three have indicated that they have their own motor vehicle and one applicant is a resident of Barking and Dagenham LBC (he has a caravan on Wallasea Island); this would disqualify them from the Taxi Voucher Scheme.
- 4.4 The Head of Service estimates that based on current information, around 110 might be eligible, although this could rise. This figure coincides with the “active” membership of SEEDAR although around 200 residents were registered. On this basis, and assuming no enhancement for wheelchair passengers, the quarterly issue of taxi vouchers ought to be around £96 - £100.

5 RECOMMENDATION

- 5.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**
the amount of taxi vouchers to be issued. (HRHM)

S J Clarkson

Head of Revenue and Housing Management

Background Papers:

Minutes of Taxi Voucher Working Party

For further information please contact S J Clarkson on:-

Tel:- 3120

E-Mail:- steve.clarkson@rochford.gov.uk