

TAXI VOUCHER SCHEME – APPEALS

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 Members to determine appeals against the non-issue of Taxi vouchers and whether the scheme criteria ought to be amended as a result of such appeals.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 On 1 April 2002 the Council withdrew its membership of the South East Essex Dial a Ride Partnership (SEEDAR) and began its own scheme to provide Community Transport through the issue of Taxi vouchers.
- 2.2 Rochford District Council recognised that there was a requirement to respond to the needs of special groups within the community who, for a variety of reasons, were unable to use conventional forms of public transport
- 2.3 The ability to travel serves a number of functions for these groups, including:-
- Social Interaction – travelling provides an opportunity to meet and greet friends and neighbours.
 - Independence – they do not want to rely on friends and family to take them to the shops, hospitals, post office, etc.
 - Participation – they are usually involved in a number of organisations such as luncheon clubs, community groups and church activities.
 - Entertainment – participants enjoy getting out of the house and often travel as a means of entertainment.
- 2.4 The Council aims to meet these needs by providing taxi vouchers for travel within the District to qualifying individuals. The general scheme objectives are:-
- Equality of service delivery to all users.
 - Reduction or elimination of abuse by individual users.
 - Retention of dignity when travelling.
 - An “on demand” flexible service.

- 2.5 The Council has made a substantial investment in improving the taxi service within the District both in terms of finance and resources and believes that with the availability of wheelchair accessible taxis all users might travel in dignity and comfort. Taxi firms have pledged to provide an 'on-demand' 24 hour service.
- 2.6 The Council believes that access to the scheme should not be means tested but do believe that applicants should be in receipt of a Government allowance or benefit which reflects their disability and not have a vehicle of their own.

Admission Criteria

- 1 Applicants will be 18 years of age or over and residents of the Rochford District.
- 2 Applicants must be in receipt of at least one of the following allowances or benefits:
 - Attendance Allowance (mobility components)
 - Disability Living Allowance (mobility component)
 - Mobility Allowance
 - or be blind or partially sighted.

3 APPEALS

- 3.1 The Council stated in its original adoption of the scheme that it believed that review procedures are important and that if an applicant believed that they were unfairly treated then they could appeal.
- 3.2 Grounds for appeal might be that the applicants would not be in receipt of one of the allowances set out in paragraph 2.6 above but are wholly reliant on the use of a wheelchair outside their home.
- 3.3 The first point of appeal is to the Head of Service who has delegated authority to determine cases which generally fit the criteria. The Head of Service has used this delegation on just one occasion where the applicant was excluded from the issue of vouchers because she owned a motor vehicle. The applicant is severely disabled and has deteriorating health. She cannot drive at all at the moment but has not disposed of the motor vehicle in case her health returns. She states that if she was to dispose of the car she could never afford to replace it. The Head of Service felt this to be an exceptional case.
- 3.4 Attached are 19 cases portrayed anonymously in summary form where appeals have been lodged.

4 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Taxi vouchers are issued on a quarterly basis. The first quarter has been set at the following rate:-

Ambulant travellers £120

Wheelchair travellers £180

- 4.2 Publicity of the scheme has taken place in December 2001, January 2002 and again in April 2002. At each tranche additional applicants are admitted and at the time of drafting this report there were 192 successful applicants. This is more than twice the envisaged client base and close to the level of registered users of Dial a Ride (212).

- 4.3 The budget for Taxi vouchers is a fixed amount: £53,000. The admission of new applicants means a reduced level of vouchers being available in later quarters to those already in the scheme. The financial model used to forecast expenditure shows that in future quarters voucher issue should be drastically reduced as follows:-

Ambulant Travellers - £40

Wheelchair Travellers - £60

- 4.4 Existing voucher holders have been advised to expect fluctuations in the level of issues per quarter but none could predict this sort of change.
- 4.5 It will be necessary for Members to review the level of vouchers issued for the second quarter in order to stay within Budget.

5 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 It is proposed that this Committee **RESOLVES**

- (1) Those successful appeal cases and any amendments to the criteria to be made as a result of those decisions.
- (2) The level of vouchers to be issued for the second quarter of 2002/3. (HRHM)

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