

## **TAXI VOUCHER SCHEME**

### **1 SUMMARY**

- 1.1 Members to consider the report of the Head of Revenue and Housing Management on the current admission criteria for Taxi Vouchers.

### **2 INTRODUCTION**

- 2.1 The Taxi Voucher Scheme was introduced in April 2002 as a replacement for the Dial-a-Ride service, to respond to the travel needs of special groups within the community who are unable to access conventional forms of public transport. Qualifying users are provided with vouchers, which can be surrendered as part or full payment for fares incurred whilst using taxis licensed by the Council.

- 2.2 The admission criteria have remained substantially unaltered since inception.

They are:-

- Applicants must be 18 years or over.
- Must be resident in the Rochford District.
- Must be in receipt of at least one of the following benefits:-
  - Attendance Allowance (Higher Level)
  - Disability Living Allowance (Mobility Component)
  - War Pension (Mobility Supplement)

Or be blind or partially sighted.

- 2.3 The scheme requires the applicant to confirm that they are unable to use conventional forms of public transport and do not have a vehicle of their own.
- 2.4 Wheelchair users receive an additional allocation representing a 50% uplift in vouchers, in recognition of time spent embarking, securing the wheelchair and disembarking the vehicle.
- 2.5 Essex County Council (ECC) make a financial contribution to the scheme, which varies year to year, but in 2004/5 was £21,000. This amount is assigned by the Council from a larger grant to cover all Community Transport functions, including development of new schemes. In 2004/5 this was £61,402.

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- 2.6 In December 2003 Members made some administrative changes to the scheme relating to reimbursements to taxi drivers and change giving. The quarterly voucher issue was reviewed and fixed at £72 for ambulant users and £108 for wheelchair users until 31 March 2005. The Budget allocation for 2004/5 was maintained at £90,000 (includes £21,000 grant from ECC).

### **3 MEMBERSHIP AND USAGE**

- 3.1 Scheme membership is climbing, but not alarmingly so. At 20 August there were

348 ambulant users  
61 wheelchair users.

- 3.2 This has increased by 10.8% since last year, but voucher demand is likely to be contained well within the budget allocation. The reason behind this is that not all vouchers are used within their validation period and naturally expire.
- 3.3 As part of the Concessionary Fares “FareDeal” computer package designed and issued by ECC, Rochford was able to negotiate some software that would allow analysis of the Taxi Voucher Scheme, both in terms of usage and journey purpose. This will allow the Head of Service to provide Members with more meaningful information (after survey) as to why qualifying Taxi Voucher Scheme members do not use all their allocation.

### **4 SCHEME REVIEW**

- 4.1 The original (and still existing) qualifying criteria was adopted after seeking advice from the Essex County Council Independent Living Service as to the benefit entitlements associated with ‘mobility’. To a certain degree this has served the test of time and the Service still maintains that this criteria is appropriate, but Revenue and Housing Management team members who administer the scheme have identified two anomalies with the criteria.
- 4.2 Lower Rate Attendance Allowance is provided to those who need care during the day (and there may be several thousand in the District). The Higher Rate is provided to those who need both day and night care and in some instances these applicants appear to be housebound, although no categorical proof has been established. This criteria may need to be reviewed in the future when further information is available, as it would seem inconsistent to provide vouchers to those who are unable to use taxis.
- 4.3 The second area of concern is that Disability Living Allowance (Mobility Component) is also payable to those under 18 years, yet the Taxi Voucher Scheme excludes them on an age based criteria. There are only a handful of under 18 DLA claimants in the District and Members may wish to consider amending the scheme, with immediate effect, to allow these few physically challenged young people independence and a better quality of life.

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**5 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 If Members were to relax the age criteria on DLA applicants it is estimated that in 2004/5 the financial effects would be around £1,300. This would not compromise the Budget allocation, for the reasons set out in paragraph 3.2 above.

**6 RECOMMENDATION**

- 6.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**
- (1) That statistical information be gathered and analysed for a period of at least six months with a report back to Committee early in 2005/6
  - (2) That, with immediate effect, applicants of any age in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (Mobility Component) be admitted to the Scheme.

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**Background Papers:-**

None

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