

TAXI VOUCHER SCHEME

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report provides an update on the operation of the Taxi Voucher Scheme.
- 1.2 The scheme is a Discretionary Service.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The scheme was introduced on 1st April 2002 as a replacement for the Dial a Ride service, to respond to the needs of special groups within the community who are unable to access conventional forms of public transport. It provides users with a number of vouchers, in £2.00 denominations, which can be surrendered as part or full payment for fares incurred whilst using Taxis licensed in the Rochford District.

- 2.2 The admission criteria for the scheme are:

Applicants must be 18 years of age or over.

Applicants must be resident in the Rochford District.

Applicants must be in receipt of at least one of the following:

- Attendance Allowance (higher level)
- Disability Living Allowance (mobility component)
- War Pension (mobility supplement)

or be blind or partially sighted.

Confirmation is required that the applicant is unable to use conventional forms of public transport and does not have a vehicle of their own.

- 2.3 Wheelchair users receive an additional voucher allocation of 50%.
- 2.4 Successful applicants pay a £5.00 annual registration fee.
- 2.5 The budget allocation for 2003/04 is £90,000, plus unused funds from 2002/2003 of £3660, totalling £93,660. This also includes a contribution from Essex County Council of £20,000.
- 2.6 The Essex County Council contribution is subject to a Service Level Agreement with a first year targeted take-up of 80 users and 4000 journeys per annum.

- 2.7 Members receive regular reports from the Head of Service to monitor expenditure and to determine the value of the quarterly voucher issues

3 SCHEME USAGE

- 3.1 The number of voucher recipients has continued to grow since the scheme's introduction, and the number of users as at 1 November 2003 was 308 ambulant users and 61 wheelchair users, totalling 369 users.
- 3.2 Vouchers are issued quarterly and are valid for three months. New applicants join the scheme on the first day of each month and receive an apportioned number of vouchers, which are valid until the next quarter date. Issues to 1 November 2003 are shown below:

Quarter Commencing	Value per Non-Wheelchair user	Value per wheelchair user	Total value
1 April 2003	£48	£72	£17,888.00
1 July 2003	£48	£72	£18,456.00
1 October 2003 (Oct & Nov)	£48	£72	£19,288.00
Total			£55,632.00

- 3.3 Voucher redemptions currently total £27,620.

4 CONSULTATION

- 4.1 Following the last six-monthly report Members instructed that the taxi trade be invited to comment on the scheme. The following comments have been received in response:
- 4.2 Operators are of the opinion that the scheme has been a resounding success in terms of its ability to meet the needs of its users and generally it is thought to be a significant improvement on the previous Dial a Ride system.
- 4.3 Operators expressed some concern about the administration required of them in operating the scheme. In particular they have concerns about the issue of the envelopes on which journey information is entered, the short amount of time allowed by the Council to produce and submit redemption claims and the appointment system operated for submitting redemption claims.
- 4.4 Drivers express concern that the giving of change for fares paid by vouchers reduces cash funds available to them for earnings and

running expenses, as vouchers are redeemed at a later date. Suggestions have been received that the value of vouchers is reduced to £1 and the requirement to give change is removed.

- 4.5 The requirement to supply journey information is based upon Essex County Council's request for statistical data to be supplied.
- 4.6 In order to address some of the other concerns, it would be possible to make changes to the administrative arrangements:
 - 4.6.1 The submission of redemption returns could be accommodated weekly, on a day and time to suit the Operator/Driver. However, in order to reduce the cost of producing increased numbers of cheques, it would be preferable if those Circuit/Drivers requiring this frequency of reimbursement opted for payment by Direct Credit via the BACS system.
 - 4.6.2 It is acknowledged that the giving of change in respect of taxi voucher transactions can be disadvantageous to drivers. It is not currently possible to reduce the denomination of the vouchers, as substantial stocks are currently held. However, if the requirement for a driver to give change were removed, the maximum amount of cash to be paid by a user for any fare would be £1.80.

5 CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1 The above usage statistics, together with comments from the Customer Survey (reported to this Committee on 7 November 2002), would indicate that the objectives of the scheme are being satisfied.

6 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Current usage, redemption levels, growth in the number of users and current and proposed funding levels indicate that there is scope to increase the quarterly number of vouchers issued to users.
 - 6.1.1 Projections indicate that the standard quarterly issue could be increased to 36 vouchers (£72) with wheelchair users receiving 54 vouchers (£108), for the five quarters from 1 January 2004 until 31 March 2005. It is estimated that by March 2005 there will be approximately 500 users of the scheme. On this basis it will be necessary to maintain the 2004/5 budget bid at £90,000.

7 RECOMMENDATION

7.1 It is proposed that the Committee **RESOLVES**

- (1) That reimbursement of used vouchers be offered to Operators and Drivers weekly, subject to the use of the Direct Credit system.
- (2) That the requirement for drivers to give change for fares paid using vouchers be removed from 1 January 2004, and that all users of the scheme be notified with the January 2004 issue of vouchers.
- (3) That the quarterly issue of vouchers be increased to 36 vouchers (£72) for ambulant users, and 54 vouchers (£108) for wheelchair users, effective from 1 January 2004.
- (4) That the budget allocation for the Taxi Voucher Scheme be maintained at £90,000.

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Background Papers:

Letter from A-C-C-O-R-D.

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