

DIAL-A-RIDE WITHDRAWAL

1 SUMMARY

- 1.1 Members are invited to consider the implications of withdrawal from the Dial-A-Ride partnership and approve consultation with registered members of the service to determine their needs.

2 INTRODUCTION

- 2.1 The Council, having given notice of its intention to withdraw from the South East Essex Dial-A-Ride service (SEEDAR), will cease to be a member of the partnership in July 2002. At the present time the Council is continuing to fully participate and support the continuance of the service.

3 LIAISON

- 3.1 Member meetings are held on a regular basis and the partners continue to monitor and review the service.. The withdrawal of this Authority from SEEDAR may affect the proportion of funding currently provided by Essex County Council towards this District; it cannot be assumed monies would automatically be available on the same basis for an alternative service provision.

4 SUITABILITY OF TAXIS

- 4.1 The current intention is to replace SEEDAR in this District with a taxi voucher scheme and the Council has encouraged the introduction of wheelchair accessible taxis with eight now in service (146 taxis licensed). Although most are fitted with securing points for 2 wheelchairs, not all those vehicles which load from the side, and are designed to allow the wheelchairs to stand alongside each other, can achieve that objective. The difficulty arises because, once the first wheelchair has been loaded, the space available to position the second alongside is insufficient to allow the necessary movement through 90 degrees.
- 4.2 This difficulty does not occur with the SEEDAR vehicles which load in a straight line from the rear and are significantly larger.

5 THE NEED FOR CONSULTATION

- 5.1 The individual needs of the current clients of SEEDAR within this District vary. In order to assess the replacement service requirement it is advisable to consult with those persons who use the service.

6 TRAINING OF TAXI DRIVERS

- 6.1 The SEEDAR drivers are trained in the needs of the passengers they carry whereas taxi drivers are not generally "disability aware". It would be necessary to introduce training courses to ensure correct instruction had been given for dealing with the needs of passengers with mobility problems.

7 AVAILABILITY OF TAXIS

- 7.1 Taxis within this Council's area undertake contract work during the school term for Essex County Council and the two unitary Authorities. There is a high demand for wheelchair accessible taxis by the County Council. This reduces the availability of wheelchair accessible taxis on the ranks at certain times of the day.

8 FINANCIAL & RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

The necessity to ensure taxi drivers are disability aware would require provision for training by an approved body for which no funding is currently allocated. This training need was identified at the last taxi forum held on 13 October 1999, and reported to this Sub-Committee on 7 March 2000. The Transportation & Environmental Services Committee resolved that the provision of such training be investigated (Minute 98/00).

9 RECOMMENDATION

- 9.1 It is proposed that this Sub-Committee **RECOMMENDS**

That the Council consults with registered users of the SEEDAR service in this District concerning the withdrawal of Dial-A-Ride and its replacement with a taxi voucher scheme to determine the service delivery requirement.

S J Clarkson

Head of Revenue and Housing Management

Background Papers:

None.

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