
Report to

Cabinet Member (Community Services)

8 August 2006

Report of

Director of Community Services

Title

The Future of Top Ups to Concessionary Fares Passes for People with Visual Impairments

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To seek approval for changes to the City Council's practice in relation to concessionary fare top ups in order bring it in line with the Council's Eligibility Criteria.
- 1.2 To note that any savings generated will be invested back into the Sensory Impairment Team.

2 Recommendations

The Cabinet Member is recommended to:

- 2.1 Approve the adjustment of criteria for the issuing of top ups to concessionary fares passes in line with the Council's eligibility criteria and statutory guidance relating to that criteria.
- 2.2 Note that any money saved in this manner (which could be up to £26,000) is to be reinvested in the Sensory Impairment Team in order to reduce the current waiting lists for specialist assessments from a visual impairment Rehabilitation Officer.

3 Information/Background

- 3.1 It seems that the City Council has been issuing concessionary fares passes to blind people since at least the early 1960s, under the Travel Concessions Acts 1955 and 1964 and the Transport Act 1968. The Transport Act 1985, subsequently amended by the Transport Act 2000, replaced this previous legislation, and the management of the concessionary fares passes scheme for people who are elderly or disabled currently lies with the West Midlands Passenger Transport Executive (known as Centro).
- 3.2 Recent changes to the scheme mean that from April this year the concessionary fares passes offered cover all public transport in the West Midlands area from 9.30am for the rest of the day.

- 3.3 89 people who are registered blind in Coventry currently receive a 'top up' to that pass to allow them to travel for free before 9.30am. These top ups cost £380 per person per year, with the total expenditure on these passes being in the region of £26,000.
- 3.4 Disability Living Allowance was introduced in 1991. Most blind people are entitled to the lower rate mobility component, currently £16.60 per week.
- 3.5 In 2002 the Department of Health issued *LAC(2002)13 Fair Access to Care Services; Guidance on Eligibility Criteria for Adult Social Care*. The intention of this Guidance was to ensure that access to services is based on need, so that within any Local Authority people with equivalent need receive equivalent support. The FACS guidance document attached to LAC(2002) 13 states, in summary that:
- Councils (should) make only one eligibility decision
 - assessments should not unfairly discriminate against individuals on the grounds of their age ... (or) disabilities
 - through identifying the risks that fall within the eligibility criteria (the council) should identify eligible need.
- 3.6 In 2004 the City Council determined that it would meet needs where there was a Critical or Substantial risk to a person's autonomy, health and safety, ability to manage daily routines, and involvement in wider family and community life.
- 3.7 It follows that if the City Council is to offer a top up to the concessionary fares currently provided , it should do so where it has first assessed that the individual is eligible for a service under Fair Access to Care Services Guidance.
- 3.8 In order to be eligible for any service, the Council must first determine that, for each individual, there is a critical or substantial risk to their autonomy, health and safety, ability to manage daily routines, and involvement in wider family and community life. It is based on need not on a definition or diagnosis of disability.
- 3.9 Recognising that the loss of the top up pass may have a significant impact on current recipients, a comprehensive process of consultation was organised. This involved a public meeting to which all recipients were invited followed by the circulation of a questionnaire to all current top up recipients.
- 3.10 In summary the responses to the questionnaires suggests that only 2 of the 40 respondents state that they make regular pre 9.30 journeys that do not primarily involve travelling to either work or medical appointments. It is not within the City Council's power to subsidise transport to medical appointments.
- 3.11 All the respondents were in receipt of Disability Living Allowance mobility component paid at at least the lower rate, so would be able to meet the cost of any pre 9.30 journeys from this benefit that is specifically targeted at meeting additional transport costs.
- 3.12 If anyone who is in work is struggling to meet transport costs they should be able to access support either via a Disabled Persons Tax credit or Access to Work.
- 3.13 A Frequently Asked Questions document has been prepared for members of the public. This is attached in appendix 1.

4 Proposal and Other Option(s) to be Considered

The Council has set its eligibility criteria and has no choice but to ensure its practice is compliant with statutory guidance and its own Eligibility Criteria.

4.1 **Main Proposal**

4.1.1 Community Services should offer a review to any individual who is currently receiving a top up pass, to see if they meet the City Council's eligibility criteria. Where an individual does not meet the eligibility criteria the top up pass should be withdrawn.

4.1.2 We will aim to complete all reviews within 4 months.

4.1.3 Where a service is to be withdrawn, service users should be given sufficient notice, and they should be informed of their ability to complain about the decision via the Complaints Procedure.

4.1.4 Since all the people involved have a sensory impairment, care should be taken to ensure that any communication sent is in the correct format for each individual.

4.1.5 If an individual does meet the eligibility criteria for support, an individual should only be offered a continuation of their top up pass where it can be shown that to withdraw the top up would place them at critical or substantial risk. It may be that for some people the risk can be managed in other ways, such as through the provision of a different service, via the individual's own resources (such as Disability Living Allowance Mobility Component) or via another statutory body (such as the Access to Work Scheme from the Department of Work and Pensions).

4.1.6 The potential saving may be as high as £26,000 in the financial year 2007/8, depending on the number of people still eligible for a pass after their review.

4.1.7 Since there are currently long waiting lists for a specialist assessment from the Sensory Impairment Team, it is recommended that any money saved as a result of this be reinvested in additional staff in this team to reduce waiting lists and to improve the service offered to people with a sensory impairment.

4.1.8 The Canley Project in 2002 showed that the early involvement of a Rehabilitation Officer with Older People with newly acquired sight loss improves outcomes for the older person and reduces the amount of support they need. There is therefore a potential saving to the Older People's community care budget to be made by reinvesting the £26, 000 in a new Rehabilitation Officer post.

4.1.9 A further consequence of the change to the scheme will be that it will be possible to expand the scheme so that for individuals with other needs from other services to be offered a top up pass, provided the individual falls within the criteria for concessionary passes and only where the provision of a top up pass is the most cost effective way of meeting a need for support that falls within the Council's eligibility criteria and it is not possible for this need to be met in any other way.

4.1.10 It may well also be possible for such a top up pass to be offered to the service user as the result of a carer's assessment, as a way of supporting a carer to continue to care for an individual.

5 Other specific implications

5.1

	Implications (See below)	No Implications
Neighbourhood Management		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Best Value		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Children and Young People		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Comparable Benchmark Data		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Corporate Parenting		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Coventry Community Plan		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Crime and Disorder		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Equal Opportunities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Finance	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Health and Safety		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Human Resources		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Human Rights Act		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Impact on Partner Organisations		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Information and Communications Technology		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Legal Implications	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
Property Implications		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Race Equality Scheme		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Risk Management		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Sustainable Development		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Trade Union Consultation		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Voluntary Sector – The Coventry Compact		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

5.2 Equal Opportunities: At present top ups are only provided to blind people. This is discriminatory. Acceptance of the recommendation will remove that discrimination.

5.3 Finance: Since very few people are likely to qualify for a top up pass when they are brought within the eligibility criteria, up to £26,000 will be released. It is proposed to reinvest this money in a new Rehabilitation Officer post. As stated above the Canley Project in 2002 showed, the early involvement of a Rehabilitation Officer with older people with newly acquired sight loss improves outcomes for the older person and reduces the amount of support they need. There is therefore a potential saving to the Older People's community care budget to be made by reinvesting the £26,000 in a new Rehabilitation Officer post.

5.4 Legal Implications: The provision of travel concessions themselves is outside of the scope of the Fair Access Guidance. However, the current process of "topping-up" the travel concession scheme is an addition to the concessionary travel scheme currently in place. Consequently it

should be treated in the same way as other adult social care services provided by the City Council. The proposed changes to the 'top-up' scheme will ensure that this eligibility for this service is determined in accordance with the City Council's eligibility Criteria.

6 Monitoring

6.1 Any individual will be able to ask for a review of their support should their circumstance change.

7 Timescale and expected outcomes

7.1 It will take Council officers several months to review the 89 people involved.

7.2 Based on the responses to the questionnaire sent to all 89 current recipients of the top up, it is unlikely that more than a handful of people will be eligible for the continued service at the end of the review process.

	Yes	No
Key Decision		√
Scrutiny Consideration (if yes, which Scrutiny meeting and date)		√
Council Consideration (if yes, date of Council meeting)		√

List of background papers

Dept of Health (2002) *LAC(2002)13 Fair Access to Care Services; Guidance on eligibility Criteria for Adult Social Care*

Proper officer: John Bolton, Director of Community Services

Author:

Andrew Reece, Service Manager, Community Services Telephone 7678 5216
(Any enquiries should be directed to the above)

Other contributors:

Angela Wills, Team Leader, Sensory Impairment Team X5274
Michelle Rose, Democratic Services X3111
Fran Collingham, Communications and Media Relations Manager X1088
Mary Young, Finance and ICT X3460
Carol Williams, Human Resources X3444
Janice White, Legal and Democratic Services X4264

Papers open to Public Inspection

Description of paper

None

Location

Appendix 1

Changes to the provision of Top Up Passes - Frequently Asked Questions

- Q Why is the Council taking away top up passes? Is it just to save money?**
- A** No. In order to comply with the law, we have to make this change, and only issue top up passes to people who meet our eligibility criteria
- Q How will I be able to get to work if you take this pass away?**
- A** If you are on a low wage you may be able to claim Disabled Person's Tax Credit. If you need support to access public transport you may be able to get support from the Access to Work scheme, administered by Job Centre plus. All other working people are responsible for paying for their own travel to work.
- Q I do voluntary work, and need to be there by 9am. What should I do?**
- A** Good practice guides on working with volunteers suggest that the organisation you work for should be willing to pay reasonable travel expenses as a way of valuing your contribution. For more advice see the following web site;
<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/managingvolunteers/goodpracticebank/expenses/>
- Q I don't think I would meet the new criteria, but my carer is worried about having to drive me everywhere if I lose the pass. What can we do?**
- A** Your carer could request a Carer's Assessment. If they provide you with regular and substantial care they may be able to get some support to help them continue caring. It may be that the top up pass would be the best way of providing this support.
- Q I won't be able to get to medical appointments if I no longer have the pass. What can I do?**
- A** You can try asking for later appointments. If this is not possible the Hospital or Health Professional can reimburse your travel expenses through the Hospital Costs Travel Scheme if you are on a low income and are in receipt of one of the qualifying benefits. Ask at the Hospital or GP Surgery for details of qualifying benefits. You will usually have to produce receipts.
- Q I won't be able to afford to pay for the extra journeys. Is any other help available?**
- A** If you haven't already done so you may be able to claim Disability Living Allowance, Mobility Component. This is extra money particularly for people who find getting around difficult. Call the Benefits Advice Line ((024) 7683 2000) for specific advice on eligibility and how to claim.
- Q I struggle to use public transport sometimes. Is any other help available?**
- A** It may be you would benefit from a Mobility Assessment from a Visual Impairment Rehabilitation Officer. They may be able to offer travel training which will help make travel easier. You could also consider using the Ring and Ride service. This is a free service if you have a Concessionary Pass. Call (024) 7660 2177 for full details or go to <http://www.wmsnt.org/>