

MID SUSSEX DISTRICT COUNCIL

Equality Impact Assessment

Title of Policy/Service/Contract: Revisions to the Council's Concessionary Fares Scheme
Service: Leisure operations, Community Services & Culture
Lead Officer: Simon Hardy

Date Assessment completed: January 2014

Background

The provision of concessionary fares is intended to assist older and disabled people by reducing their travel costs. The following options are currently available:

Senior railcards – Due to bulk purchase discounting, the Council can offer the card for £25.50 instead of the standard £30. This provides qualifying residents with a third off rail tickets. These are available to all those of pensionable age. 2364 people in Mid Sussex currently have cards. To date the Council has overseen the issuing of these via the town and parish councils, whilst holding all records and receiving the income and paying for the cards. Four town and parish councils have added their own discount on top of this (Ardingly, Balcombe, East Grinstead & Worth) which requires a further recharging process to be administered.

Disabled railcards which are provided with a bulk purchase discount of £3 on the £20 cost. Only 58 people have these cards, with 82% of these being from Burgess Hill, as BH Town Council provides a further subsidy of half the cost all of which again need some form of reconciliation.

Taxi vouchers for disabled people. 162 people use these, which are worth £30 a year. Free bus passes for those of pensionable age. These are not administered by the District Council and do not form part of this review. However, as bus passes have become more popular, some of the options administered by the District Council have become less popular.

Why does the service need to change?

The Association of Train Operating Companies (ATOC) is changing the way that senior rail cards are issued and are likely to make similar changes to the disabled rail cards in due course.

There is a decline in the take-up of taxi vouchers which have become less popular with the introduction of the National bus pass and also the declining value of the discount which has been at £30 for the past ten years.

We therefore need to review how these concessions are administered to ensure the costs of administration are proportionate to the benefits of the schemes, whilst minimizing any negative impact on those who use these services.

Proposed changes

Senior Rail cards - In future people will be apply for these through their local parish/town council and receiving a unique number code. They will then quote this number to ATOC either by phone or online – make payment direct to ATOC and receive their rail card in the post.

ATOC have also offered a 20% discount (£6) if the Towns/Parishes remove their subsidies from the current process (although these can continue via a cashback offer which means that each parish/town council can provide a subsidy by paying the resident a sum instead of including the

subsidy in the application process). This decision is entirely down to each subsidising authority and not the district. So far Balcombe and East Grinstead are likely to withdraw their subsidies whilst Worth and Ardingly are still considering.

For the Council there is no change apart from the processing. This new system will remove the need for the Council to reconcile monies and keep records in the future as all records and payments will be received by ATOC. It will also mean all qualifying residents will be able to purchase their cards for £24 instead of the current £25.50.

The changes will affect older people on low incomes living in Balcombe, Ardingly East Grinstead and Worth should they decide to withdraw their subsidy although this is partly mitigated by the additional £1.50 bulk discount for each card that will be offered by the Council. However no other protected groups are affected by these proposals.

Disabled Rail cards

There are no immediate plans by ATOC to change the current system although it will inevitably change to a similar approach to the Senior rail cards process potentially starting in June 2014. Early discussions will be held with the subsidising Towns/Parishes regarding a similar approach – but potentially to look towards making the changes early in 2014/15.

Taxi Vouchers

It will be necessary undertake a review of the current users to establish the potential for change to the current system/offer. There are potentially three options:

- Maintain the system (Up to a maximum of 300 users) as it is, administered by Car Parking
- Limit the number of users to current ones only
- Withdraw the taxi voucher offer from 2015/16

A full consultation exercise will need to be undertaken, this would likely need to identify whether the current users would be severely restricted in the event that the vouchers were withdrawn.

Action Plan

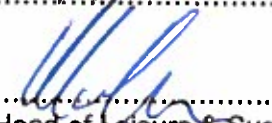
The Action Plan shown below is intended to demonstrate how the issues identified in this assessment are being addressed.

Action	Lead Officer	2014 Timescale
Finalise the position with the subsidising authorities for senior rail cards	EL	Mid February
Notify other towns/Parishes regarding the change in the process from the 1 st April 2014	SH	Early March
Set up process and instructions for all parishes / town councils on new senior rail card processing.	EL	Mid March
Undertake the taxi voucher renewals for 2014/15	EL	Late March

Train Car parks team on the new arrangements and what they will need to undertake in the first year	EL	Late May
Agree with ATOC on timescales for disabled railcard changes	EL	Early April
Establish position of authorities on disabled railcard subsidy	EL	Early April
Further work and consultation on options for taxi voucher scheme	SH	Early May

Signature: 
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Business Unit Leader

Date: 30/1/14
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Signature: 
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Head of Leisure & Sustainability

Date: 30/1/2014
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