



Review of the Discretionary Concessionary Travel Scheme

Report of the Internal OSC Task and Finish Group

October 2011



Chair's Forward

Since June 2011, the TFG has reviewed all aspects of the Discretionary Concessionary Travel Scheme (DCTS) provided by Copeland Borough Council. This Council is the only local authority in Cumbria – and one of the only ones in the country - which has continued to provide a discretionary element as an alternative to the Statutory Bus Pass concession.

With savings of nearly £1.5m needed this year alone, the TFG has been aware of the financial pressures facing the Council from the outset and it has carefully considered whether the current scheme is the best way to allocate our limited resources.

The TFG is satisfied that it has considered a number of options and that its proposals for the future of the scheme in Copeland, including revised criteria, will ensure reduced resources are targeted and support those in most need. Throughout the review, the TFG has been clear that it wants to minimise any impact on the most vulnerable in Copeland.

I am pleased to present the report of the Discretionary Concessionary Travel Task and Finish Group (TFG).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'D. U. Moore', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Cllr David Moore
Chairman of the Discretionary Travel Task and Finish Group

Membership

Cllr David Moore (Chair); Cllr David Banks; Cllr Jackie Bowman; Cllr Stephen Haraldsen; Cllr Alistair Norwood and; Cllr Sam Pollen

Acknowledgements

The TFG would like to thank the following for their support during the review:

Anne Bradshaw – Chair of the Copeland Disability Forum
Julia Jackson – Copeland Borough Council GIS Officer
Alison Walton – Copeland Borough Council Equalities Officer
Stephen Fawcett – Customer Services Manager
Susan Stamper - Customer Services Team Leader
Leanne Barwise – Senior Accountancy Officer

RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Task and Finish Group makes the following recommends in respect of the Discretionary Concessionary Travel Scheme subject to agreement of the RPWG, Executive and wider Budget Consultation

1. That the scope of the review is noted
2. That the provision of the current scheme is noted
3. That the scheme and eligibility criteria is revised
4. That the provision of the Senior Railcard within the scheme is withdrawn
5. That a voucher-only scheme is retained which targets those who need it most
6. That the eligibility criteria for claiming under the voucher scheme is revised and the voucher scheme remains available to:
 - i) Copeland Residents over 60 or of pensionable age in receipt of Pension Credit
 - ii) Residents in receipt of War Pensions Mobility Supplement
 - iii) Disabled Copeland residents in receipt of Higher Disability Living Allowance (Mobility Component) or who are determined by a medical consultant or medical general practitioner to satisfy the eligibility criteria for the higher rate award of the mobility component of the disability living allowance.
7. That as a requirement of Copeland Borough Council's scheme, eligible claimants are not in receipt of the English National Travel Concession Scheme
8. That the initial EIA and the community impacts are noted
9. That the value of the voucher scheme is increased from the current £18 per claimant to £28 per claimant, making the scheme more financially beneficial to those who need it and offering the opportunity to cover costs of a Senior Railcard for eligible claimants who need it
10. That the revised scheme aims to deliver a service to those who need it most
11. That it is noted that the revised scheme offers estimated savings to the Council of £30,000.
12. That Budgetary control of the scheme is transferred to the administrators of the scheme.
13. A review is carried in Summer 2012

INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 As part of the 2010/11 Budget process, the Executive requested Overview and Scrutiny to review the Discretionary Concessionary Travel Scheme (DCTS) provided by the Council and to report their findings to coincide with the 2011/12 budget setting process.
- 1.2 The Internal OSC agreed to take this on to its 2011/12 Work Programme and on 6 June 2011, appointed a Task and Finish Group to undertake the review. The TFG membership was appointed following advice from the Council's previous Head of Legal and Democratic Services and the Council's Monitoring Officer. None of the TFG members are in receipt or eligible for any form of concessionary travel.
- 1.3 Members were joined by the Portfolio Holder for Resources and Transformation for the scoping of the review. While the DCTS had not been identified as a source of savings at the scoping stage, there was a consensus that it ought to be reviewed in light of legislative changes to the administration of the statutory bus scheme and the withdrawal of discretionary schemes by all other Cumbrian District Councils and many other local authorities around the country. It was also noted that the scheme is provided under the council's 'well-being' powers and it considered whether it was an effective use of resources in the long term and if the level of provision offered by the scheme met these objectives.
- 1.4 It was agreed that the following would be reviewed in detail:
 - National Concessionary Travel Legislative Framework (this provides a context but the Bus Pass was not reviewed in detail by the TFG)
 - The legislative framework around Discretionary Concessionary Travel
 - Copeland Borough Council's Discretionary Concessionary Travel Scheme
 - Provision
 - Eligibility Criteria and Evidence requested
 - Budget and Budgetary Control
 - Administration of the Scheme
 - Options on the future provision of a Discretionary Concessionary Travel Scheme in Copeland
 - Withdraw the scheme
 - Maintain the scheme
 - Revise the scheme
 - Community and Equality Impact Assessments

2. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK

- 2.1 There are different statutory requirements upon local authorities in respect of Concessionary Travel and alternative discretionary schemes.
- 2.2 The English National Concessionary Travel Scheme is a mandatory bus concession for older and disabled people. This has been in place since 2001 through the implementation of the Transport Act 2000. Since April 2008 and as a result of a gradual extension, the concessionary scheme has provided free off-peak local bus travel to eligible older and disabled people anywhere in England.
- 2.3 Until 31 March 2011, this mandatory scheme was administered by Travel Concession Authorities (TCAs). TCAs included Unitary Authorities, Passenger Transport Executives (PTEs); London Boroughs and Shire Districts. Therefore Copeland Borough Council was responsible for administering the scheme for eligible Copeland residents until this point.
- 2.4 However the Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007 (approved by Parliament in March 2010) moved responsibility for administering the scheme from lower tier authorities to upper tier authorities.
- 2.5 With effect from 1 April 2011, TCAs are County Councils; Unitary Authorities; PTEs and London Boroughs.

3. LEGISLATIVE FRAMEWORK FOR DISCRETIONARY CONCESSIONARY TRAVEL

- 3.1 There is legislation in place to allow TCAs powers to offer discretionary schemes. This includes the Transport Act 1985 and the Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007.

- 3.2 The Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007

“Enables local authorities to continue to be able to offer benefits above the statutory entitlement to their residents, such as travel before 9.30am and concessions on other modes like trams, as well as alternative forms of travel schemes, like tokens for use on taxis or community transport”

(Guidance for Travel Concession Authorities on the England National Concessionary Travel Scheme, Department for Transport, Dec 2010)

- 3.3 As Copeland Borough Council is no longer a TCA, it has continued to provide the DCTS under wellbeing powers within Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000. The

wellbeing powers are sufficient enough for districts to establish separate schemes offering discretions. However it is important to note that they do not have the same legal protection as those operated by TCAs.

4. COPELAND BOROUGH COUNCIL DCT PROVISION

- 4.1 Since 1 April 2011, Cumbria County Council has been the administrative TCA for the mandatory bus concession. As a result of this all Central Government funding for concessionary bus travel is directed to Cumbria County Council.
- 4.2 Copeland Borough Council has continued to meet the costs of a local DCTS through its own budget since 1 April 2011. It has continued to offer either;
- Senior Railcards (these are purchased by the Council and issued to eligible residents free. This then entitles the holder to one third of each rail fare)
 - Vouchers (these have a value of £18 and can be used on taxis and local coach companies participating in the scheme)

5. ELIGIBILITY AND EVIDENCE REQUIRED UNDER THE CURRENT DCTS

- 5.1 Residents are currently eligible for concessions under the DCTS if they fall within the following qualification categories:
- Age 60+ (Senior Railcard or Vouchers)
- 5.2 The following disabled groups are also eligible for **vouchers only**:
- Registered Blind and Partially Sighted
 - Those disabled with permanent and substantial impaired ability to walk
 - Profoundly or severely deaf
 - Those without speech
 - Those suffering from a mental disability
 - Persons without the use of both arms
 - Persons refused a driving licence on medical grounds
- 5.3 All claimants are required to provide proof of address. Those within the age 60+ qualification category are required to provide evidence of their date of birth. People eligible under the disability qualification category are required to provide the following: Registration certificate or Benefit Agency Awards for; War Pensioners Mobility Supplement; Disability Living Allowance (Higher Rate Mobility Component); Registered Blue Badge Holders; Copeland Borough Council Form completed by a health

professional stating which disability applies to the applicant or; a Letter from a Medical Profession supporting the application.

- 5.4 Eligibility and evidence required has been reviewed and revised by the TFG and this is highlighted at section 12 of the report.

6. BUDGET

- 6.1 The Council receives no Central Government grants or funding to support the provision of the DCTS. It is funded from the Council's own budgets.

- 6.2 The 2011/12 budget for the provision of discretionary travel is £60,000:

Discretionary Concession	Budget allocation
Vouchers	£35,900
Senior Railcards	£24,100

- 6.3 In addition there is an administrative cost estimated at approximately £19,000. A breakdown is attached at Appendix 1.

7. BUDGETARY CONTROL

- 7.1 The TFG heard evidence from Customer Services Officers and Finance Officers regarding financial control of the scheme.
- 7.2 This query had arisen as a result of a projected over-spend on Senior Railcards which the TFG were advised was due to the administrators not having budgetary control. In the event, demand has been high enough to ensure this spend was indeed necessary.
- 7.3 However to avoid this occurring again, the TFG recommends in the interest of effective budget management that the administrators of the scheme (customer services) are given full responsibility for controlling the budget.

8. ADMINISTRATION OF THE DCTS

- 8.1 The TFG has reviewed how the scheme is administrated, supported by the Customer Services Manager, the Customer Services Team Leader and the Senior Accountancy Officer. It noted the following:
- The Council's Finance Team managed the scheme up until 2009 when it was passed to Customer Services to administrate.
 - All but the budget management of the scheme was transferred. This was retained by the Council's Finance Team.

- The C-Travel IT system is used to administrate the scheme and hold claimant data
- Customer Services are able to determine from C-Travel if people are already in receipt of a statutory bus pass.
- Claimants of discretionary travel are written to annually through a 'bulk issue' process which is deemed good customer service.
- Advertising is widespread.
- The scheme is audited every 6 months.
- Based on a rough-cut costing exercise carried out in September 2010 it is estimated that the discretionary scheme costs approximately £19,000 to administrate with costs of administering the statutory bus pass scheme deducted.

8.2 The processes for purchase by the Council and administration of both components of the scheme were also noted:

8.2.1 Vouchers

- **Vouchers** are ordered in bulk according to demand indicated by claimant responses to the bulk issue. A surplus is set aside to meet requirements throughout the financial year.
- 2000 books of vouchers were produced for 2011/12. 1676 were issued at the start of the financial year as a result of the bulk issue. As of August, 256 of the 324 'surplus' books have been issued (In 2010/11 2330 books of vouchers were claimed).
- As of May 1760 vouchers worth £1 each have been exchanged by registered providers of the scheme.
- Vouchers expire and cannot be carried over apart from a short transition period between the end of one financial year and beginning of another
- There is no ceiling on the voucher scheme. Demand not accounted for would come from contingency funds.
- Vouchers of equal value are available for companions of severely disabled that require assistance to travel by public transport.

8.2.2 Senior Railcards

- The Council purchases **Senior Railcards** in bulk at a discounted rate of £22.75 each this year (face value £28.00)
- The Council estimates the number of railcards needed based on the previous year's uptake. 1680 were purchased for 2011/12. At the end of Quarter 2 1616 Senior Railcards had been issued by the Council.

9. THE FUTURE OF THE DCTS

- 9.1 The Council this year alone is required to find savings of nearly £1.5m and as a discretionary service, it is right that the current scheme is reviewed in light of this.
- 9.2 Copeland Borough Council is the only district council in Cumbria which has continued to provide a DCTS since 1 April 2011. Members have also considered a number of other comparator Local Authorities across England (Appendix 2). Many of the comparators do not provide a discretionary component. However of those which do which a number have advised that their schemes are under review for 2011/12 due to budgetary pressures.
- 9.3 The TFG have considered a number of options for the future of the scheme in Copeland, and the possible implications of each option.

10. OPTION 1 – WITHDRAWN THE SCHEME

- 10.1 Members have considered the option of withdrawing the scheme and encouraging claimants to take advantage of the statutory bus pass scheme. However they felt that this could have a detrimental effect on those who need financial support with transport but were unable to take advantage of regular bus services because of lack of services where they live. A GIS map of regular bus routes in Copeland is attached at Appendix 3i. 'Irregular' bus routes are also attached at Appendix 3ii. Both highlight the residential location of DCTS claimants.
- 10.1 Members felt that withdrawing the scheme completely was not an option at this stage.

11. OPTION 2 – MAINTAINING THE CURRENT SCHEME

- 11.1 Members have also considered in detail whether it is feasible to continue with the current scheme and during the course of the review, gathered data and evidence from a number of sources in an attempt to determine whether continuing with the current scheme was an effective use of the Council's resources. This included a comparison between Senior Railcard and voucher uptake.

Members queried a number of aspects in relation to the current scheme and who uses it.

11.2 Senior Railcards

- 11.2.1 The GIS Officer has provided Members with a comprehensive map highlighting the residential location of Senior Railcard claimants in Copeland. Members observed:

- Take up is spread across the Borough

- Take up is highly concentrated around towns/service centres where bus services and other services are more accessible. Therefore a bus pass would be an acceptable alternative to those claimants
- A number of claimants are located in rural areas away from a railway station/line which would suggest they have access to alternative forms of transport to access rail in the first instance

11.2.2 The Task and Finish Group also heard from the Customer Services Manager and Supervisor and were advised that there had been an increase in Senior Railcard uptake in 2011/12. This shift in preference by customers cannot be predicted from year to year but it could be due to the improved financial benefits of the Senior Railcard.

11.2.3 The TFG also heard that while it is difficult to gauge, and there was only anecdotal evidence, it has been suggested that a large proportion of the Senior Railcards issued are used for leisure purposes rather than as a 'necessity'. The location of claimants in receipt of Senior Railcards could support this to an extent.

11.2.4 Members queried the overall value of the Senior Railcard to the wellbeing of residents in receipt of it. However it was acknowledged that the railcard would serve a useful purpose for subsidising travel for residents in western parts of Mid Copeland with easy access to rail who need to access services in the towns of Whitehaven or Millom.

11.2.5 Data shows there is currently a higher uptake of senior railcards among women (749) than men (688). Uptake by gender is highlighted at Appendix 4.

11.3 Vouchers

11.3.1 Generally, there is a higher take up of vouchers than senior railcards. In terms of gender, there are more women (954) than men (806) claimants.

11.3.2 Member also considered GIS mapping on voucher uptake. Observations included:

- Take up is highly concentrated around towns/service centres where again bus passes would be an acceptable alternative.
- There are fewer claimants of vouchers in more rural areas of Copeland than there are for railcards which again, could be due to better financial benefits of the latter.

11.3.4 Furthermore it was acknowledged that some vouchers were used to supplement railcards and the Customer Service Supervisor confirmed that Northern Rail had advised that they were used for this.

11.4 Disabled Vouchers

11.4.1 At the end of August 2011, there were 103 disabled people in receipt of vouchers. These vouchers are of the same value (£18) and a discretionary set of companion vouchers also worth £18 are available to those in most need.

11.4.2 Members took written evidence from Anne Bradshaw, Chair of the Copeland Disability as part of the review. The written evidence included the following views:

- Disabled people in receipt of Higher DLA (mobility component) who use it for a mobility car should have no need to have discretionary concessionary travel
- This should be extended to disabled people who have access to car in the family
- Disabled people are also eligible for a bus pass under the statutory scheme and is there a need to provide more?
- If the scheme is stopped for all claimants then this should apply to disabled claimant too. This would achieve equality for all.

11.5 More generally, Members questioned the financial benefits and well-being that the vouchers presented for claimants, and whether, at their current value of £18, they could be really be being used as a necessity. It was suggested that in many cases, especially for people living in more rural areas, the vouchers would only be of sufficient value to cover a single taxi journey.

11.6 Another factor considered at this part of the review was car ownership is particularly high in the more rural wards of Copeland (Appendix 5i, ii and iii).

11.7 A key anomaly identified by TFG was the difference in value between the voucher component part of the scheme and the Senior Railcard component of the scheme. It was agreed that this ought to be addressed if the scheme is to continue.

12. OPTION 3 – A REVISED DCTS

12.1 Eligibility Criteria

12.1.1 As stated in section 5 of the report, the scheme is currently available to all Over 60s and eligible disabled people living in the Borough.

12.1.2 Throughout discussions, Option 2 led Members to question the provision of the Senior Railcard and they agreed that a decision should be taken to withdraw this option under the DCT scheme and allocate any future resources to vouchers.

12.1.3 Members considered a number of ways in which the financial resources allocated to the scheme could be reduced and more targeted to residents who need them. They identified that the only way they could do this was to revise what the scheme offered and the eligibility criteria.

12.1.4 At an earlier stage of the review, members referred to Northumberland County Council, one of the few remaining councils which has continued to provide Taxi Tokens for disabled residents only. They carefully considered the eligibility criteria applying to claimants in Northumberland (Appendix 6). This confirmed that claimants must fulfil ALL of the four following indicators;

- You live in Northumberland
- You are disabled and are unable to use public transport because of your disability
- You have no car or van at the household
- You are in receipt of certain means tested benefits

Members queried if the criteria was workable. Northumberland County Council was contacted and clarified the following:

- 84 Northumberland residents as of August had claimed the tokens
- There is no way to enforce the piece of criteria stating that there is no van or car at the household
- Acceptable evidence includes Proof of Higher Rate DLA (Mobility Component)

12.1.5 Members supported these criteria. However following advice from the Equalities Officer and Customer Services as administrators of the scheme, Members agreed that including no access to a car or van as a requirement was unworkable.

12.1.6 They also felt that given the geographical area and other groups in need of an alternative scheme to the bus pass in Copeland, the scheme should not be restricted to disabled people only.

12.1.7 Members referred back to Anne Bradshaw's advice and noted that she only advocated removing the discretionary provision for disabled claimants if it was removed for ALL other claimants over 60. Members therefore agreed that disabled residents in receipt of Higher DLA (Mobility component) or war pensioner's mobility supplement should continue to be eligible for DCT.

12.1.8 Members were very clear that they wanted discretionary provision to be available for severely disabled people in Copeland and one way of determining this was through the award of Higher DLA (Mobility component). Advice has been sought from the Council's Legal Services Manager who has advised and recommended that eligibility criteria in respect of disabled claimants be extended to include "who are determined by a medical consultant or medical general practitioner to satisfy the eligibility criteria for the higher rate award of the mobility component of the Disability Living Allowance". This would ensure that people who have a severe disability but who do not claim Higher DLA

(Mobility Component) continue to be covered by the scheme. This would meet Member's desire to see those in most need protected.

12.2 ACCESS TO BUS ROUTES

- 12.2.1 Another proposal put forward by the TFG was targeting a voucher scheme to residents who live in isolated rural areas with limited or no access to buses or regular bus routes. Again the GIS map at Appendix 3i and 3ii highlights regular and less regular bus routes.
- 12.2.2 This proposal was considered in detail, however it was noted that a rural/urban split based on bus routes would not necessarily target those in most need of the scheme. This is supported by Indices of Multiple Deprivation data at Appendix 7i and ii and 8.

12.3 MEANS TESTING

- 12.3.1 Members initially opposed means testing but felt that this was the only way that the scheme could be targeted to those on the lowest incomes who are unable to access bus services with a Bus Pass. Furthermore it will not be necessary for the Council to carry out its own means testing, as this will have already been carried out by the Department for Work and Pensions.
- 12.3.2 The TFG therefore recommends that the scheme is restricted to Copeland residents of pensionable age in receipt of Pension Credit who are not in receipt of a bus pass and Copeland residents who are in receipt of Higher Rate Disability Living Allowance (mobility component) who are not in receipt of a bus pass.

13. PROPOSED NEW VOUCHER SCHEME

- 13.1 With the recommended withdrawal of the Senior Railcard, Members felt that a revised voucher scheme had to make a more effective impact on the wellbeing of claimants for 2012/13. There was wide consensus that the £18 voucher value offered limited financial benefit to customers in receipt of the option.
- 13.2 The proposed revised criteria significantly reduces the number of eligible claimants and therefore offers scope to increase the value of the voucher scheme so that it offers greater benefits to those who require it.
- 13.3 Having carried out a forecast of future take up, Members would like to increase the voucher scheme to £28 per annum. This presents a number of benefits:
- It makes the scheme more streamlined and efficient to operate
 - It give the customer more financial benefit

- It enables the customer – including eligible disabled customers - to take advantage of a railcard by using the vouchers they receive to purchase a railcard themselves should this be their preferred option.
- Another proposal put forward by the TFG was targeting a voucher scheme to residents who live in isolated rural areas with limited or no access to buses or regular bus routes.
- This proposal was considered in detail, however it was noted that a rural/urban split based on bus routes would not necessarily target those in most need of the scheme. This is supported by the Indices of Multiple Deprivation data (Appendix 7 and 8).

14. ADMINISTRATIVE CONSIDERATIONS

- 14.1 Members are aware that there will be administrative implications when implementing the new scheme. It is therefore vital that the Customer Service Team who administrates the scheme is given adequate time to manage any agreed changes.
- 14.2 Members also recognise that it will mean a change in working practice with the withdrawal of a 'bulk issue' and customers requiring to apply again with proof of their eligibility. Members would like this process to be as easy as possible for customers and needs communicating effectively.
- 14.3 The Discretionary Scheme should only be available to residents who do not have a bus pass for access purposes. Therefore Members request that claimants sign a disclaimer stating they do not receive a statutory bus pass for access purposes.

15. COMMUNICATION

- 15.1 Similarly, our customers need to be aware of any agreed changes to the DCT scheme as soon as possible.

16. COMMUNITY/EQUALITY IMPACT ASSESSMENT

- 16.1 Before making recommendations on the proposed way forward, the TFG recognised the need to determine who in Copeland's communities would be affected by any changes to the scheme.
The TFG ensured this by assessing a number of areas including deprivation data.
- 16.2 Members are aware that the Council has duty to assess the impact of its policies and decisions on the community under the Equality Act 2010 Public Sector Duty.
- 16.3 During the review of the Discretionary Concessionary Travel Scheme, the TFG has considered the impact on the three protected characteristics protected by legislation and which are affected by the scheme. These are age, gender and disability. At the

request of Members, further factors have also been taken into consideration including IMD data and car ownership data (Appendix 7, 8 and 5).

- 16.4 An initial EIA is attached at the end of this report and before the appendices. It is recognised that these proposals will have an impact on specific groups in our community and subject to the agreement of RPWG, the proposed revised criteria will be included in the overall Budget Full EIA Consultation.

17. CONCLUSIONS

- 17.1 The TFG presents its findings and recommendations. Members have spent considerable time considering the options available and agree that this is the most feasible way forward for the Discretionary Concessionary Travel Scheme at this time.
- 17.2 Members estimate that this will deliver a £30,000 saving to the Council at a time when budgetary pressures are immense.
- 17.3 While all other Cumbria Districts and other local authorities across the country withdraw their schemes, Copeland Borough Council can demonstrate it has considered such implications carefully. Retaining this scheme in the way proposed targets important resources and will deliver benefits to those in our communities who need it most.
- 17.4 Subject to agreement and consultation and adoption by the Council, the revised scheme would be introduced from April 2012 and reviewed again at six months.

BACKGROUND PAPERS

Copeland Borough Council Concessionary Travel Registration Form
Northumberland County Council Guidance Notes for Concessionary Taxi Token Scheme
Citizen Advice Bureau Online Advice Guide – *Benefits for people who are sick or disabled*
Department of Transport *Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007*, June 2011
Department of Transport *Resource Guide for Local Authorities-Transport Solutions for Older People*, February 2010
Department of Transport *Guidance for Travel Concession Authorities on the England National Concessionary Travel Scheme*, December 2010
Department of Transport *Accessibility Statistics 2010*, June 2011
AgeUK Factsheet – *Public Transport and Concession*, November 2010
Directgov Online *Free Bus Travel in England for older and disabled people*
Cumbria County Council, *Moving Cumbria Forward-Cumbria Transport Plan 2011-2026*
Notes of the Discretionary Concessionary TFG Meetings July 2011-October 2011

