

CORE OFFER BUDGET FOR CONCESSIONARY FARES

WHY DOES THE COUNCIL HAVE TO PROVIDE THIS SERVICE AND WHAT DOES IT NEED TO COVER?

The Government has introduced a national bus pass scheme to provide free off-peak local bus travel to eligible older and disabled people anywhere in England.

The Council must administer and fund the scheme which allows those people eligible for bus passes to travel in the off peak period free of charge.

The off peak period covers anytime on a Saturday, Sunday or bank holiday and from 9.30am to 11.00pm on any other day.

The current scheme in Darlington includes a companion pass which enables some disabled travellers to have a companion travel with them free of charge. This is a local discretion agreed by the Council and not part of the national scheme.

HOW DOES THE CORE OFFER BUDGET MEET THE COUNCIL'S OBLIGATIONS?

The annual core offer budget is set to reflect the anticipated costs of the service. The Council must pay the bus companies for the usage of bus passes associated with the national scheme.

DOES THIS DIFFER FROM THE CURRENT SERVICE?

The Council must continue to implement the scheme as prescribed by the Government. However, to manage down the potential increase in costs associated with the national scheme a number measures are being proposed. These include:

- Removing any local discretionary element of the scheme and operating the scheme to the national rules. This will mean the removal of the disabled person companion pass i.e. certain disabled users are issued a pass that allows a companion to travel with them. The companion would not travel free.
- The introduction of new systems to reduce fraudulent use.
- Reduced assumptions on inflation built in future years budgets

There are currently 635 disabled companion passes (July 2015) in Darlington.

As part of the Equality Impact Assessment and Cumulative Impact analysis the proposed removal of the companion bus pass does have a negative impact across a number of groupings within the disability protected characteristic. A number of options were put forward from users as part of the EQIA consultation process. To try and mitigate the impact it is recommended that further work be undertaken to investigate options to retain the Companion Bus Pass option on the principle of developing a sustainable scheme which is a combination of a more robust criterion and assessment for entitlement and an annual charge at a level to be determined.

These proposals do not guarantee savings but assist in managing demand and reducing usage to the national scheme requirements. These measures will reduce the numbers using the scheme to the statutory minimum and reducing any fraudulent use. The combined anticipated savings are expected to be £208,000 by 2019/20.

WHAT IS THE CORE BUDGET MADE UP OF?

2019/20 budget £3,662,718

| | Budget 2019/20 £ |
|---|-----------------------------|
| Supplies and Services | 77,377 |
| Transfer Payments (Concessionary Fares) | 3,473,334 |
| Overheads | 112,007 |
| Total | 3,662,718 |