

Cabinet Member Delegated Decision Form

Decision Title

Staffordshire Bus Network & English National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) Update February 2023

Decision Required

To agree the level of support from the approved concessionary travel budget which will be used to support local bus services in Staffordshire to avoid extensive bus network reductions during 2023.

Decision Date

10/02/22

Decision Summary

Bus passenger numbers have still not recovered post-pandemic to the levels seen before March 2020. To help mitigate the loss of fare income during and after the pandemic, the DfT had previously asked local transport authorities to pay operators for concessionary travel at 100% of pre-covid levels during the pandemic and continuing until summer 2022 with a transition to actual figures thereafter. The aim was to provide further support to the industry to maintain routes and allow time for operators to grow patronage on their commercial services.

Further guidance has been issued from the DfT with a preferred option to continue to pay concessionary travel reimbursement at 100% pre-covid levels until 31 March 2024. As an alternative to this, DfT have requested that if a different reimbursement rate is followed then any savings from the concessionary travel budget are retained to support the bus sector to avoid extensive bus service reductions.

After careful consideration it is agreed pay at 80% pre-covid concessionary passenger rates (adjusted by actual commercial mileage) or using actual passenger numbers if greater than 80%. Any savings from the concessionary bus budget, which are anticipated to be c£1.3m in 2023/24, will be used to support (direct and indirect) local Staffordshire bus services, where sensible and reasonable to do so.

The decision to support any bus services will be subject to due consideration of the subsidy per passenger trip and the connectivity offered by the bus service to daytime, Monday to Saturday, essential journeys.

This decision will apply for concessionary travel reimbursement payments made for the remaining months of 2022/23 and all payments for 2023/24. This will mean that reimbursement rates, which have been reducing from 100% pre-covid rates from 1 October 2022 will now have a lower cap of 80% pre-covid passenger numbers or actual passenger numbers whichever is the greater.

The decision previously made to use allocated DfT one-off grants to support the bus sector is not impacted.

It should be noted that bus operators will be expected to continue with their efforts to grow bus patronage using innovation and suitable marketing strategies and the Council will support them in their efforts where possible to do so.

Member Delegated Function

General Delegation to Cabinet Member - Section 6 of the Constitution

Public / Exempt

Public

Options Considered

Several options were considered prior to making this decision including do nothing and following DfT's preferred option of paying 100% pre-covid passenger reimbursement until 31 March 2024.

Both options above were considered unsatisfactory for Staffordshire and the option chosen was considered to offer the correct level of probity and clarity on the use of public money.

Consultation Process

This decision has been made following close partnership working with the Staffordshire bus operators.

Electoral Divisions Affected

All

Name of Cabinet Member Making Decision:

Cllr David Williams, Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport

Community Impact Assessment

There are identified benefits provided by applying the latest DfT guidance regarding concession payments and ensuring allocated monies are retained by the Staffordshire bus sector. The decision should ensure that key bus routes are protected although it is possible that some bus services will be impacted if they cannot be justified on value for money criteria.

Key Issues

Protected Characteristics – residents with protected characteristics as defined by Equality Act 2010 are much more likely to be reliant on the bus. In particular, disabled people, older age groups and women are more reliant on the bus to access employment, education, health services, shops and leisure.

Public Health – the bus network plays a vital role in maintaining residents' independence. Removal of travel opportunities isolates people, triggering a decline in mental and physical health which over time adds cost to social care.

Environmental – buses are a key part of DfT's Road to Zero Strategy in decarbonising transport and addressing the Climate Emergency declared by the Council. Contraction of the bus network could increase individual car trips leading to increased traffic with resultant negative impact on air quality and carbon emissions.

Economic – the bus network links people to jobs and businesses. A contraction in the bus network will negatively impact access to employment and reduce footfall/spend in town centres.

Resource and Value for Money Analysis

The proposal to use 80% pre-covid concessionary reimbursement rates, or actuals if greater, until 31 March 2024 can be contained within approved ENTCS budgets.

The proposal to use any savings from the concessionary budget, alongside previously awarded DfT grants, in 2023/24 will allow for some essential existing bus services to be retained.

Legal Analysis

The DfT issued an Alternative Covid-19 Recovery Strategy in March 2022 to take account of the impact of the Omicron variant. They also plan to lay a further Statutory Instrument (the Mandatory Travel Concession (England)) in early 2023 to extend the removal of the 'no better and no worse off' element from the concessionary travel reimbursement regulations until 31 March 2024.

The DfT grant monies have been issued to Council to support bus services at a local level.

Implementation

Once this Member Delegated Decision is formalised, bus operators will be informed of the decision to follow the DfT advised concessionary payment guidelines and detailed work will be undertaken to retain essential bus services at potential risk.

To be implemented by: Richard Rea

Implementation Status

Work to commence on: N/A
Work in progress: N/A
Work completed on date below: N/A

Report Author

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Submission on Mod.Gov

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