Meeting: Health and Social Care Scrutiny Sub-Committee
Date: 22nd March 2005
Subject: Concessionary Travel
Responsible Officer: Interim Head of Environment and Transport
Portfolio Holder: Social Care and Health/Environment and Transport
Key Decision: No
Status: Part One

Section 1: Summary

Decision Required

Members are invited to note the information provided and the continuing service pressures.

Reason for report

To provide an update on concessionary travel issues in the Borough.

Benefits

To ensure Members are aware of work by officers, including arrangements to undertake mobility assessments for Taxicard members.

Cost of Proposals

The Taxicard assessment contract is estimated to cost approximately £70,000 in addition to Harrow Council administrative support.

Risks

Whilst there are no risks directly attached to this report, measures need to be taken to ensure that concessionary travel is directed to those who need it most and that expenditure is contained and gives best value.
Implications if recommendations rejected

None directly

Section 2: Report

2.1 Brief History
Members have previously considered information reports on concessionary travel in Harrow, and Cabinet has considered a range of policy options on Taxicard, elderly Freedom Pass, disabled Freedom Pass and the Blue Badge Parking Scheme. Cabinet decided that the priority was to develop mobility assessments, initially for Taxicard, which could then be extended to cover the Blue Badge Scheme, with disabled Freedom Pass eligibility criteria examined at a later date.

Responsibility for the management of concessionary travel transferred to Urban Living from People First in summer 2004.

2.2 Background
The cost to Harrow of transport provision in 2004/05 is significant and can be summarised as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Cost</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Taxicard</td>
<td>£916,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concessionary Travel for people over 60</td>
<td>£5,600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Concessionary Travel for people with a disability</td>
<td>£600,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pupil Transport</td>
<td>£2,500,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Day Care transport</td>
<td>£1,300,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>£10,916,000</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Each of these services is under considerable budgetary pressure, with increased levels of membership and usage, and costs growing in excess of the level of inflation. Estimates show the cost to Harrow of concessionary fares and Taxicard is likely to increase by 7% per annum over the next three years as a result of inflationary pressures and demographic growth. The cost of the Taxicard service in 2004/05 is £127,000 over the combined available Harrow/TfL budget and continues to grow. In addition, the Freedom Pass scheme will see an increase from £6,200,000 to £6,848,079 for 2005/06 as a result of TfL fare increases.

Cabinet considered a report on Special Educational Needs transport on 13th January 2005 and agreed to:

- drafting and consulting on a new SEN transport policy, based on an assessment of individual need and regular review, to be implemented from September 2005
- the creation of a Travel Solutions Co-ordinator to co-ordinate transport across People First services

2.3 Taxicard
Taxicard is a London-wide door-to-door service for those with serious mobility problems who have difficulty in using public transport. The scheme
is financed by the London Boroughs with support from the Mayor, and is administered by the Association of London Government. The taxi contract is operated by Comcab.

There are currently 5,016 Taxicard members in Harrow, the second highest membership of all London Boroughs. Membership has grown by 872 in Harrow in 2004/05, the highest growth of all Boroughs. The comparative levels of membership are shown in Appendix A. 864 (17%) members are automatically eligible with the remainder through a GP endorsement of their application.

Harrow’s Taxicard budget for 2004/05 is £641,320. The Mayor provides support to Harrow up to a further £147,652, against a level of expenditure currently predicted to be around £916,000 for 2004/05. 69% of all Taxicard members in Harrow make 10 or less trips over a full year and usage has the potential therefore to expand dramatically if current members were to take up their full entitlement of 108 trips per annum.

All Boroughs are seeing high levels of increase in usage, up 21% on last year on average, and as part of TfL’s 5-year Business Plan, the Mayor has recently agreed to increase financial support over the next few years to cover the projected net overspend across London. It is however recognized that unless action is taken to control costs this additional funding is likely to be absorbed within a few years by further increases in levels of usage.

About 15% of Taxicard trips are to hospitals. It is believed that some of these trips could be undertaken by patient transport services but previous negotiations with health trusts have not reached a conclusion. The Association of London Government is undertaking a small study on the use of Taxicard services to hospitals and the criteria that Health Trusts apply when determining eligibility for hospital transport, so as to provide a sound evidence base for future negotiations. Harrow will be able to benefit from lessons learnt from this study.

Work is progressing in London to trial the use of public transport accessibility criteria to assess levels of trip entitlement, for example where low-floor buses have been introduced. This work offers the potential to offer varying grades of trip entitlement dependent upon an individual applicant’s service accessibility.

2.4 Mobility Assessments
Following Cabinet decision that the priority is to develop mobility assessments for Taxicard, a number of Boroughs came forward wishing to progress similar schemes. As a result, TfL agreed to undertake a central mobility assessment procurement process, with Harrow as one of the pilot authorities, starting in August 2004. However, as a result of a change in policy direction TfL withdrew its support in November, leaving each Borough to resource its own scheme.

A scheme has since been prepared and Harrow is currently seeking tenders from assessment specialists to reassess all existing members and all new
applicants as they apply over a 12 month period. Existing members who remain eligible will retain the current entitlement of 108 trips, with those who become ineligible as a result of the assessment retaining an entitlement of 20 trips. New applicants who do not meet the criteria will receive no allocation.

There is the potential for this contract, if successful, to be extended to cover further new applications beyond the first year, and/or to include an assessment of eligibility for the Disabled Freedom Pass and Blue Badge.

A standard assessment model has been developed such that it provides a transparent, equitable, systematic and auditable methodology. This will consist of a number of stages from an initial paper assessment through to a clinical assessment. A new application form has been developed through the ALG, who have agreed to assist in administration of the process.

In addition to managing the assessment contract, Harrow Council will be providing assistance to applicants in completing the Application Form, translation and interpretation services and accessible locations for the contracted clinical assessments.

Subject to the receipt of satisfactory tenders, the programme is for the new application forms to be sent out in early April, with clinical assessments taking place from June onwards and all existing members assessed by mid-November.

Any savings in operating the Taxicard scheme would normally be used to initially offset the Mayors supporting contribution before making savings on the Borough budget. However TfL recognises that those Boroughs taking a lead role in seeking to contain costs should benefit and negotiations are proceeding with TfL on this, particularly now that TfL has elected to withdraw support for the mobility assessment process.

2.5 Freedom Pass
There are currently 952,000 older and 121,000 disabled Freedom Pass holders in London, costing the Boroughs £199m in 2005/06. Harrow has the highest level of take up of all of the London Boroughs at 92%, with over 33,465 older and 3,613 disabled pass holders, a total of 37,078 (an increase from 32,511 in 2002/03). The number of adult disabled permit holders has increased by 28% in this period.

The total cost of the scheme is divided pro rata between all the London Boroughs, on the basis of the number of members per borough, at an average cost of £184.94 per pass, a total to Harrow of £6.848m in 2005/06. Harrow’s budget for 2004/05 was £6.2m but TfL fare increases have raised costs by 11%.

The ALG Leader’s Committee agreed in July 2004 that a number of measures should be implemented to contain costs. The main recommendations were:
1. Review eligibility for disabled pass holders every 2 years
2. Interview pass holders who apply for 3 passes or more within the 2-year period
3. Monitor pass holders who move out of London or who die and cancel their pass
4. Merge the older and disabled databases and check monthly for doubling
5. Consider the cost of new bus services to the scheme
6. Re-evaluate bus routes which go outside the London boundaries

Processes are now in place in Harrow to cover recommendation 3 and recommendation 6 is considered later in this report.

As part of recommendation 1, Members could undertake a review of the criteria used in Harrow in time for the next re-issue in February/March 2006. Applications for disabled Freedom Passes in Harrow must currently be accompanied by the Social Services disability card and therefore include a range of discretionary criteria outside the seven automatic Transport Act 2000 criteria. It is estimated that about 2,800 (75-80%) disabled Freedom Pass holders are outside these automatic criteria, at a cost to Harrow of £518,000. This compares to an average of 20% across other Boroughs, the next highest being 40%. Six Boroughs limit eligibility to the seven Transport Act criteria only.

ALG TEC Committee has been consulting on Freedom Pass eligibility on bus routes which extend beyond the London borough boundaries. There has been no major review of these routes for many years and there is no legal obligation to keep eligibility on routes beyond the London boundaries.

The routes relevant to Harrow are the 142 (Brent Cross-Watford Junction), 258 (South Harrow-Watford Junction) and 292 (Colindale–Borehamwood). Following consultation with Partnership with Older People and the Harrow Public Transport Users Association, Harrow has responded to ALG seeking the retention of all these routes and asking that the scheme should be extended to include route 350 to Watford Junction, where current ineligibility is inconsistent with the 142 and 258 services.

2.6 Blue Badge Parking Scheme

There are about 9,500 Blue Badge holders in Harrow, eligibility being based on a range of automatic criteria as for the disabled Freedom Pass, together with discretionary criteria based on mobility impairment that requires GP certification. About two-thirds of Harrow applicants access the service through a GP signature, but this process is seen as an ineffective way of determining eligibility as it uses information not necessarily related to mobility.

Members have agreed to consider the use of an assessment model for Blue Badges, once the Taxicard mobility assessment process has been piloted and its impact assessed.
2.7 **Service integration**
Harrow has been proactive in taking forward the integration agenda and in seeking a best value use of services. A designated post is being identified in People First to lead on the integration agenda and this role will include co-ordination of concessionary travel with the wider transport agenda.

2.8 **Consultation**
Local organisations, HAD and Age Concern, have been consulted on the mobility assessment proposals and are generally supportive of the process.

Partnership with Older People and the Harrow Public Transport Users Association have been consulted on the use of Freedom Pass on buses outside of London.

2.9 **Financial Implications**
None as a direct result of this report, although there are financial issues contained within the information set out.

2.10 **Legal Implications**
None

2.11 **Equalities Impact**
Concessionary travel is of particular importance to the disadvantaged in providing access to opportunities, encouraging diversity and independence and is heavily used in Harrow.

**Section 3: Supporting Information/ Background Documents**

Appendix A – Summary of Taxicard Membership and New Members 2004/05.