

Environment and Communities Scrutiny Committee

2 July 2020 – At a virtual meeting of the Environment and Communities Scrutiny Committee held at 10.30 am.

Present: Cllr Barrett-Miles (Chairman)

Cllr S Oakley
Cllr Baldwin
Cllr Barnard
Cllr Barton

Cllr Goldsmith
Cllr McDonald
Cllr R Oakley
Cllr Quinn

Cllr Waight
Cllr Millson

Apologies were received from Cllr Oppler and Cllr Walsh

Absent:

Also in attendance: Cllr M Jones and Cllr Elkins

Part I

11. Declarations of Interest

In accordance with the Code of Conduct the following interests were declared:

Cllr Barrett-Miles declared a personal interest as a holder of a Discretionary Rail Card.

Cllr Quinn declared a personal interest as a holder of a Discretionary Rail Card.

12. Call-in: English National Concessionary Travel Scheme - Discretionary Rail Cards HI02 (20/21)

12.1 Cllr Jones introduced the request to call-in the decision by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure concerning the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme -Discretionary Rail Cards HI02 (20/21) (call in request appended to the signed minutes) and highlighted the following points:

12.2 In his view he believes that the Cabinet Members thinks that this is a luxury but for the elderly it is essential. It provides a service for people who live in areas that have no buses.

12.3 Railcards are now even more important as some socially important bus routes have been cut, some of which were cut because the railcard was available as an alternative.

- 12.4 It is not widely known that the Rail Card option exists and when asked many people said that the Rail Card would have been a better option.
- 12.5 That this proposal conflicts with the West Sussex Local Transport Plan and Climate Change Strategy by reducing sustainable travel options.
- 12.6 Asked why the current holders of the Rail Card were not contacted as part of the consultation and also questioned why the consultation was advertised on buses.
- 12.7 Cllr Elkins, Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure addressed the Committee, highlighting the following points:
- 12.8 This is a financial decision and the Rail Card is purely discretionary and is therefore not required to support the Local Transport Policy.
- 12.9 This withdrawal will bring West Sussex County Council in line with other authorities in the South East.
- 12.10 The Rail Cards are used predominately for longer journeys and there is no evidence that it's withdrawal will lead to an increase in car journeys.
- 12.11 It is not at odds with the Climate Change Strategy as there is still the option to purchase for £30 for one year or £70 for three years.
- 12.12 Buses have been funded where people did not have access to rail such as the Compass 100 route. Focus is being given to where the funding can be used such as providing a village shopping bus twice a week or putting the funds towards community transport.
- 12.13 It was confirmed by officers that all holders of the rail card were written to and that less than 20% replied.
- 12.14 The Committee made a number of comments including those that follow. It:
- Stated that although the saving was small it was still a saving and asked whether any thought had been given to means testing for both bus passes and the rail card.
 - Sought clarification on whether disabled people would still be able to get a rail card and were reassured that this would still be the case and that this would also apply to any companion.
 - Raised concerns that the scheme was not very well advertised and that it needs promoting more widely.
 - Sought clarification on whether the savings would still be made if all the current rail card holders switched to a bus pass.

- Asked whether this decision could be looked at again in a year or two should the situation change.

The Committee noted the following additional suggestion made by a member:

- That those who responded to the survey stating that they have a disability are contacted and made aware of the disability rail card option and that the possibility of a railcard alternative nationally is raised with central government. Also that the date to withdraw the service (Currently Oct 2020) is pushed back to no earlier than Jan 2021, given that the majority of rail card holders will have been unable to use the card during the lockdown period, and the users actually need some decent period of readjustment.

12.15 The Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure summed up by thanking the Committee for the good the debate and that he still feels that the savings need to be made and that he doesn't believe that this decision is in conflict with the Local Transport Plan.

12.16 Cllr Jones summed up that he disagreed with the suggestion of means testing as this is expensive and has been shown to cause a drop off in applications and stated that as large areas of West Sussex are un-parished consulting with parish councils was not the best way to communicate. Also why was it not stated in the report that all rail card holders had been written to as part of the consultation.

12.17 A vote was held and the proposal carried.

Resolved - That the Committee

- Rejects the call-in but supports that there is further work on mitigations to be carried out by officers.
- Also that further work is carried out to advertise the availability of the concessionary railcard so that people know that they can still apply for it before October 2020.

13. Date of Next Meeting

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 14 September 2020 at 10.30am. Probable agenda items include:

- Highways and Transport Delivery Programme 2020/21
- Serious Violence
- Report from the Waste Strategy Task and Finish Group

Any member wishing to place an item on the agenda for the meeting must notify the Director of Law and Assurance by 2 September 2020.

The meeting ended at 11.55 am

Chairman