

## Environment and Communities Scrutiny Committee

2 July 2020

### English National Concessionary Travel Scheme - Discretionary Rail Cards HI02 (20/21) – Focus for Scrutiny

#### Report by Director of Law and Assurance

#### Summary

A proposal (HI02 (20/21)) was published for decision by the Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure on 10 June 2020 in relation to the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme. The Cabinet Member is being asked to agree the withdrawal of the current offer of a free senior rail card as an alternative to a free bus pass to eligible older West Sussex residents from October 2020.

A request to call-in this decision for scrutiny has been accepted by the Monitoring Officer. The Committee is therefore asked to scrutinise the proposal set out in the decision report attached.

#### The focus for scrutiny

Key lines of enquiry for the Committee to consider include:

- 1) Any detrimental impact on the County Council's policies to encourage use of public transport;
- 2) Whether affected residents may abandon sustainable transport in favour of more car journeys;
- 3) The impact on those who are unable to drive and whether this may risk increased social isolation;
- 4) Any conflict with efforts to tackle climate change and with the West Sussex Transport Plan 2011-26, which has an objective to 'increase usage of sustainable modes of transport and provide access to services';
- 5) How consultation feedback received has informed the proposal; and
- 6) Whether the projected saving justifies the impact on those affected.

The Chairman will summarise the output of the debate for consideration by the Committee.

## 1. Details

- 1.1 A call-in request has been accepted for the decision in relation to the English National Concessionary Travel Scheme. The request was made by county councillors (Mr Michael Jones, Ms Karen Sudan, Mr Brian Quinn, Mr Chris Oxlade). The reasons for the call-in request were:
  - a) Concerns about the message that this decision is sending to the residents of West Sussex - conflict with the County Council's policies to encourage people to use public transport and removal of choice between different forms of public transport.

- b) The risk that many residents would abandon sustainable transport in favour of more car journeys and some might be able to travel less, leading to greater social isolation.
  - c) The current scheme is very helpful for residents who live in urban areas and in more rural areas with a train line where bus provision is very limited.
  - d) This decision appears to conflict with the West Sussex Transport Plan 2011-26 - 'increase usage of sustainable modes of transport and provide access to services'. Tackling climate change (or the climate emergency) is a high priority for the Council and giving residents options in public transport usage helps the Council to make a positive difference.
  - e) The decision taken is opposed to the results of the consultation undertaken.
  - f) The projected saving from this decision is around £50,000, which seems a relatively small saving to make while adversely impacting 2000 people.
- 1.2 The call-in request was accepted as there has been no previous scrutiny of the proposals and that the call-in provides legitimate grounds for consideration prior to the proposals being determined. There are no factors to suggest that delaying the decision would be contrary to the interests of the Council.
- 1.3 The decision report is appended. Scrutiny should focus on the substance of the proposals contained in the attached report.

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**Annex 1** Decision HI02 (20/21) – English National Concessionary Travel Scheme - Discretionary Rail Cards

**Background Papers**

None