

Cabinet Member for Highways and Infrastructure

ENCTS

The Cabinet Member Key Decision to cease providing older residents the option of a free Seniors Rail Card was 'called in' by the Environment and Communities Scrutiny Committee. A meeting was held on 2 July 2020 to hear the call-in and allow a response by the Cabinet Member and officers.

The Committee rejected the call-in but supported further work on mitigations to be carried out by officers. Also, that further work is carried out to advertise the availability of the concessionary rail card so that people know that they can still apply for it before October 2020.

The Key Decision is proceeding with the free Seniors Rail Card no longer being available as an alternative to the free Older Persons Bus Pass as of end October 2020. The Committee did make a number of comments that have been considered below:

- 1. Whether it has been considered to means test applicants for both bus passes and the rail card?*

Provision of the free off-peak bus pass for older people is a statutory duty with no means testing included. The rail card is not a part of the duty but has been available as alternative to the free bus pass since the county council acquired the duty when it was transferred from District/Borough Councils.

It has been considered that means testing for rail cards, albeit senior rail cards would require additional resources that would not make it cost effective or the savings being realised. Therefore, means testing has been discounted.

- 2. Whether disabled people would still be able to get a rail card.*

The alternative free Disabled Persons Rail Card will continue and will also apply to companions of disabled people to be used when they accompany them.

- 3. Raised concerns that the scheme is not well advertised and that it needs promoting more widely.*

The ENCTS scheme including the option of rail cards as alternative to bus passes has always been advertised clearly on the county council's websites as well as in correspondence with applicants. The alternatives were also made clear when the county council took on the responsibility locally of the national scheme in local press as well as to local interest groups and to Members.

As a part of the cessation of Senior Rail Cards a press release will be issued that makes it clear that eligible residents can apply for the card until the end of October. It shall make it clear that the Disabled Persons Rail Card will continue to be available.

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

Agreed

5. *That the possibility of a railcard alternative nationally is raised with central government.*

There is already the [Senior Railcard](#) alternative available nationally. This is available for £30 per annum or £70 for three years if paid for in advance. There are also discount codes available online.

6. *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 deserve some decent period of readjustment.*

We have contacted all existing card holders making them aware of the decision to cease the alternative of a free Senior Rail Card. This will allow them to consider renewing their railcard if it is expiring, provide information on the national railcard (see 5) and alert them to consider a Disabled Persons Railcard if they are eligible as an alternative. Therefore, the free Senior Railcard will cease at the end of October 2020. Many card holders will still have time to use their free cards if they choose to return to rail during the pandemic or alternatively apply for a free bus pass.

7. *That in future where there is a proposal to withdraw a service and we have contact details for the service users, that they are contacted directly to make them aware of any consultation.*

All existing service users were contacted to make them aware and given the opportunity to contribute to the consultation on this decision.