

## **Council – 12 January 2009**

### **Notice of motion – Charges for Social Care Transport Services**

**Service Area:** Social Care and Inclusion

**Wards:** All

#### **1. Summary of report**

This report provides background information with regard to the following notice of motion submitted by Councillor Oliver

“This Council calls upon the Cabinet to suspend the recently introduced flat rate fee of a £4 daily return travel charge for disabled people who attend our local day centres - in order to enable proper discussions with user and carer groups as to the implementation of this charge, and a better understanding as to how this charge relates to the Council's "fairer charging" process.”

#### **2. Background information**

The decision to start charging for social care transport services was consulted upon and taken forward as part of the 2007 budget planning process. It was implemented on 1 December 2008 and was applied universally to those living in the community who access transport paid for by the Local Authority.

As things stood, we were unusual both regionally and nationally in not passing on a charge to people for whom travel is a daily activity they share with other adults in the community. If an individual's disability means that they incur additional expense, then this can be objectively assessed and where appropriate they can be awarded a state mobility allowance and/or vehicle. If they are not judged to have a need over and above that of others, then there seems to be limited case for the council fully meeting the cost of their transportation needs. The current level of charge still falls short of the full recovery of the costs of providing the service and there remains a 29% subsidy. Members have therefore supported the principal of recovering at least a proportion of the costs of transport on a universal basis and those people who, due to special needs, are awarded a state benefit are expected to contribute at least a part of this toward transport.

It is the Cabinet's view that levying what is seen as a reasonable charge for transport, best serves those people in need of care, but where none can be afforded due to limited council resources. It has been judged inappropriate and inequitable for Walsall Council (at odds with other councils across the country) to continue to under recover income from transport in order to add a

council subsidy to the support already fully available through the state benefit system.

With regard to the relationship with Fairer Charging, the position is very clear. Transport is not formally defined as a “care service”, indeed an increasing number of authorities have gone beyond the levying of a charge and have ceased to provide any transport service via the council. Dudley is the closest neighbour who have adopted this policy. Given the above, this provision does not sit within the Fairer Charging for Care Services umbrella.

That said, we have applied one of the key principles from within the Fairer Charging framework; that of seeking to ensure service users income maximisation. To this end when service users were given advance notice of the introduction of charges, they were invited to contact their social worker/care co-ordinator to ensure that they were in receipt of any mobility benefit to which they may be entitled.

There have been some high profile cases highlighted by the press and others, to seek to demonstrate the inequity of the charges. On each occasion care has been taken to look into the specific circumstances and, to date, the individual or their carer have been in receipt of full state benefits and/or a mobility vehicle for the purpose of easing the transport burden.

In the above context and having taken the action it has, the Cabinet believes that it has achieved an equitable and defensible balance between its core responsibilities toward current service users with disabilities, but has also toward those people not yet in receipt of care who rely on the council, to use its resources fairly to enable the development of new and innovative provision to meet ever growing levels of demand.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of several overlapping loops and a long, sweeping horizontal stroke extending to the right.

**Signed:**

**Executive Director:** Dave Martin

**Date:** 5 January 2009