

18 June 2013

Introduction of Assisted Transport Policy

Ward(s) All

Portfolios: Councillor McCracken

Executive Summary:

This report proposes consultation about the introduction of the Social Care & Inclusion Directorate (SC&I) draft Assisted Transport Policy (ATP).

A revised transport policy has been drafted which will encourage service users to pay for their own transport costs, in line with the implementation of Personal Budgets for social care. The policy will be finalised following consultation with service users and family carers. Cabinet approval is needed to commence consultation.

2. Recommendations to Cabinet

That cabinet approve the consultation process to commence.

That Cabinet receive a further report on the outcome of the consultation and recommendations on the finalisation of this policy.

Reason for scrutiny:

The draft assisted transport policy was developed following an internal audit report in 2010 which highlighted that the Council did not have a transport policy in place. In order to inform the development of the new policy, transport issues associated with a small number of service users were explored in June 2012.

The policy is based on the view that transport costs are an everyday expense for service users which should be met through their own personal resources (including welfare benefits), so the council should not continue to subsidise transport and will apply a full cost recovery model. Prior to this policy those who were deemed to need transport received this for a minimal charge and the cost was subsidised by the council whatever the person's personal circumstances.

Those people who are eligible for a personal budget from the Council can use it to fund transport to achieve support plan outcomes; for example for people with dementia to attend day care

The proposal for the future is that transport will only be provided by the Council following an assessment of the persons' needs and an agreement as to how these needs will be met. The draft policy clearly sets out which types of service users will most likely be eligible for assisted transport.

Scrutiny and Performance Panel will seek to ensure that there is a comprehensive programme of consultation with all stakeholders over the proposed changes.

There are 260 existing services users who receive support with transport. Those who will continue to be eligible to receive support will use transport provided via the Council's contract arrangements with taxi and minibus providers, or via transport options currently being developed with Community Associations.

Recommendation to Scrutiny and Performance Panel

That Scrutiny Panel approves the consultation process to commence.

That Scrutiny Panel receive a further report on the outcome of the consultation and recommendations on the finalisation of this policy.

Background papers:

Draft Assisted Transport Policy, guidance for employees and assessment criteria

Resource and legal considerations:

Financial implications

The budget for 2013/14 was £236k and the year end expenditure for 2012/13 was £324k. Service users are currently charged £2 per journey, and during 2012/13 this generated £102k income, therefore less than 1/3 of the current costs of operating the assisted transport scheme are recovered via charges. Adoption of the new policy could realise around £100k of budget savings in a full year.

Legal implications

The council must meet its obligations and legal duties to meet service users assessed need.

Officers are committed to ensuring the consultation process complies with legislation to mitigate the risk of legal challenge.

Citizen impact:

Some current service users will no longer be eligible to receive support for transport as a result of the new policy.

Environmental impact:

There is no direct impact on the environment arising from this new policy.

Performance management:

There are no direct measures of performance relating to transport of adults receiving social care services. Scrutiny and Performance Panel will seek to ensure that consultation on the revised policy is thorough, and provides an opportunity for all interested parties to be involved.

Equality Implications:

An Equality Impact Assessment will be conducted as part of the consultation process. Some service users will no longer be eligible to receive support for transport as a result of the new policy, but this is a matter of eligibility for service and not of equality.

Consultation:

A communication and consultation plan has been developed to ensure clear and consistent messages are delivered for all stakeholders in a timely manner enabling them to understand the proposals and share their views. This will include all those service users who are currently using their personal budgets or have transport arranged for them through the Adult Social Care and Inclusion services.

Stakeholders will be able to share their views on the policy proposals through a variety of mediums, including by phone, letter, email, the councils website and face to face consultation meetings for example with those people and their carers directly affected by the proposals.

Feedback from stakeholders will be included in the review of the pilot and used to form the final policy proposals for recommendations to cabinet. A report will be produced sharing the outcome of the consultation and shared with all stakeholders.

Key messages include:

- Transport costs are an everyday expense for everyone and should be met through personal resources;
- The policy seeks to maximise the use of public and community transport; and
- There will be exceptions for some service users and the policy will make clear where these may apply.

Contact Officer:

Tracy Simcox

Lead Commissioner for Older People and Vulnerable Adults

☎ 01922 602454

✉ simcoxt@walsall.gov.uk