

Changes to the Taxicard Scheme in Harrow

Consultation Report

June 2013

Version Number 1.0

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1. **BACKGROUND**

1.1 Over a twelve week period, from 8th March, 2013 to 31st May, 2013, Harrow Council undertook a consultation on proposed changes to the Taxicard Scheme. These changes are being proposed as a direct result of the need to make savings across the Council to ensure the Council is able to meet the budget deficit.

1.2 The Taxicard scheme only operates in London and provides members with subsidised door-to-door (taxi) transport. Taxicards are issued free to people who have serious difficulties with their mobility, or a severe sight impairment, and find it difficult to use public transport. Harrow Council currently has approximately 2,990 members.

1.3 The Taxicard enables members to book and make a journey either by a licensed cab or private hire vehicle. The licensed cab or private hire vehicle must be part of the Taxicard Scheme. The user makes a contribution of £2.50 towards each individual trip and the Council subsidises the remainder of the journey up to a cap of £8.30. Therefore the total trip can cost up to £10.80 with the Taxicard holder paying any additional spend over £10.80 along with the first £2.50 (member contribution). An example of this would be if a trip was to cost £15 the member would pay the first £2.50, Harrow Council would pay the next £8.30 and the Taxicard holder would then pay the additional £4.20.

Taxi Trip Total cost	£15
Member Contribution	£2.50
Maximum Harrow Council Contribution	£8.30
Remaining Member Contribution	£4.20

1.4 London Taxicard is not a statutory requirement but all London Councils currently participate in the scheme. However, each individual borough can decide on the levels of member contribution it requires and the total subsidy per taxi trip it will make.

1.5 Each borough is also able to decide on how many taxi trips it allows its members to take each year. Harrow currently allows members, who do not have access to any other concessionary travel (Blue Badge or Freedom Pass), 104 trips per year whilst members who have been awarded another travel concession are awarded 52 trips.

1.6 The Taxicard scheme is funded through London Councils by both the London Boroughs and by TfL. TfL provides the majority of funding and would not agree for this contribution to be used locally for other Council transport schemes.

1.7 The Council consulted members of the Taxicard Scheme, residents and voluntary organisations on a number of options which will increase each members' trip contribution, reduced the number of journeys permitted or is a combination of both. Each option is outlined below:

1. Increase to £5 each individual members' trip contribution (an increase of £2.50). Number of trips allocated would remain the same.
2. Reduce all trips to 40 a year.
3. A combination of the above 2:
 - a, increase to £5 each individual members' trip contribution for 2013/14 but trips are unaffected. Then decrease to £4 per trip for 2014/15; and
 - b, reduce all trips to 52 a year for 2014/15

1.8 This remainder of this document outlines how the consultation was undertaken and reports the response to it.

2. THE CONSULTATION PROCESS

2.1 Prior to the consultation starting the Council discussed the proposed changes with a multi-agency Steering Group to get feedback on the proposals and ensure the consultation was inclusive. The consultation was circulated to the Steering Group who also supported the Council to get feedback on the changes by holding consultation events/meetings.

2.2 The consultation was publicised through a number of channels including mail-shot questionnaires, website responses and discussion groups and work shops.

Taxicard Member Mail-shot

2.3 All current Taxicard members (2,841 at the time of mailing) were sent a letter along with the consultation document and questionnaire to return. The questionnaire was also available to complete on the Council's website and via the telephone with members discussing the questions with Harrow Council Officers.

2.4 The total number of responses to the mail-shot through all of these channels was 887 and this equates to 31.2% of the total Taxicard membership. It should also be noted that the consultation was sent to a number of Taxicard holders who had either moved out of the borough or are now deceased and therefore the actual response rate is even higher than 31.2%.

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Workshops and Discussion Groups

2.5 Harrow Council Officers ran a number of workshops and discussion groups inviting all members to attend to discuss their views as well as attendance at community group meetings. It is estimated that approximately 413 people attended and participated in this face to face activity.

** it should be noted that many of the attendees at the workshops and discussion groups also completed questionnaires.*

3. CONSULTATION RESPONSE

Questionnaire Responses (including telephone and web responses)

3.1 In total there were 887 responses to the questionnaire, the majority were hand written returned copies from the Taxicard mail-shot. There were 96 responses submitted through the Council's website and these are included within the 887. Where telephone responses were received feedback was input directly on to the web and therefore the numbers of returns on the web include those forms completed over the telephone.

3.2 Question 1: Please tick the option you feel we should take forward to make savings to the scheme.

The table below shows the response from each respondent (where a choice was made-see footnote of table).

Figure 1: Consultation Response:

	Option 1 Increase to £5 Members' contributions	Option 2 Reduce all members to 40 trips per year	Option 3 Increase to £5 Members' contributions 2013/14 then reduce to £4 and 52 trips 2014/15
Responde nts*	184	487	198
Percentag e	21.2%	56.0%	22.8%

** 26 respondents chose more than one option. In these cases a 'choice' for the option NOT selected has been deducted.*

44 respondents (5% of the total respondents) chose no option at all

3.3 Question 2: What do you think the effect of these changes will be for members of the Taxicard scheme?

3.4 The comments received in response to this question were mainly focused on members concerns with the financial impacts of the changes, proposed in Options 1 and 3, rather than the reduction in trips proposed in Option 2. There were also a reasonable proportion of comments stating that the Taxicard scheme would be both prohibitively expensive and also become uneconomic or 'not worth it' should the member contribution rise to £5 with many members stating they only make short trips.

3.5 Many members expressed a concern that the changes would impact greatly on social exclusion, general health and well-being and create greater isolation. Hospital and doctor appointments would become harder to attend and members would not be able to go out as often.

3.6 A sample of respondent comments have been extracted below:

“There will be an increase in loneliness and there a decrease in health and well being. It will be difficult to maintain practicalities of life.”

“It will mean less trips out for shopping and hospital appointments. It will mean we will be isolated and therefore more lonely.”

“For disabled people, especially those like me who use electric wheelchair- Black taxi are only way to get around. If our trips are reduced then it will mean not going out and in some instances not being able to get to doctors/ dentist app.”

“Any increase due to subsidy being reduced would make system too expensive to use other than urgent journeys.”

“I feel that changes to this scheme will mean that people who rely on this service will start to lose their independence - I am fortunate to have a family who will take me where I need to go but not everyone has this.”

“The higher charges will make it impossible for members to use the scheme and so severely limit their ability to get around. At least with the reduced number of trips that option, albeit much reduced, is still available.”

“I find the Taxicard a wonderful scheme for me a necessity. The changes proposed might effect some people

adversely, but of necessity many will accept the changes reluctantly.”

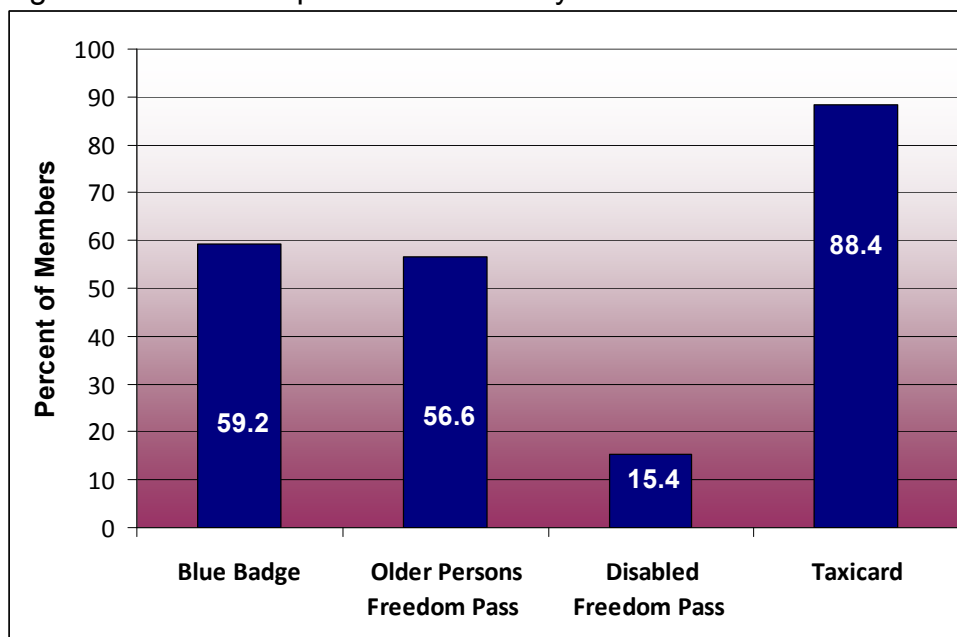
3.7 As all three options represented a reduction to members for the Taxicard scheme, either in trips or subsidy provided by the Council, it was inevitable that a large number of comments and responses were not supportive of any. However, the majority of respondents commented that to increase the member contribution would make the scheme either unaffordable or uneconomic for the shorter trips and therefore the reduction in trip allocation per year whilst maintaining the current £2.50 member contribution was more preferable.

3.8 The option for the reduction in trips is also supported when considering the majority of Taxicard holders make fewer than 40 trips per year and this again was evident in respondents’ feedback. However, it should be noted that a small number of Taxicard holders stated they are heavily reliant on the Taxicard, making many more than 40 trips per year, and this is supported by both the analysis of Taxicard trip usage (supplied by London Councils) and by many of the comments and feedback provided.

3.9 Question 4: Are you a member of any other concessionary Travel Schemes?

The graph below shows what other Concessionary Travel Schemes the respondents are members of.

Figure 2: Membership of Concessionary Travel Schemes:



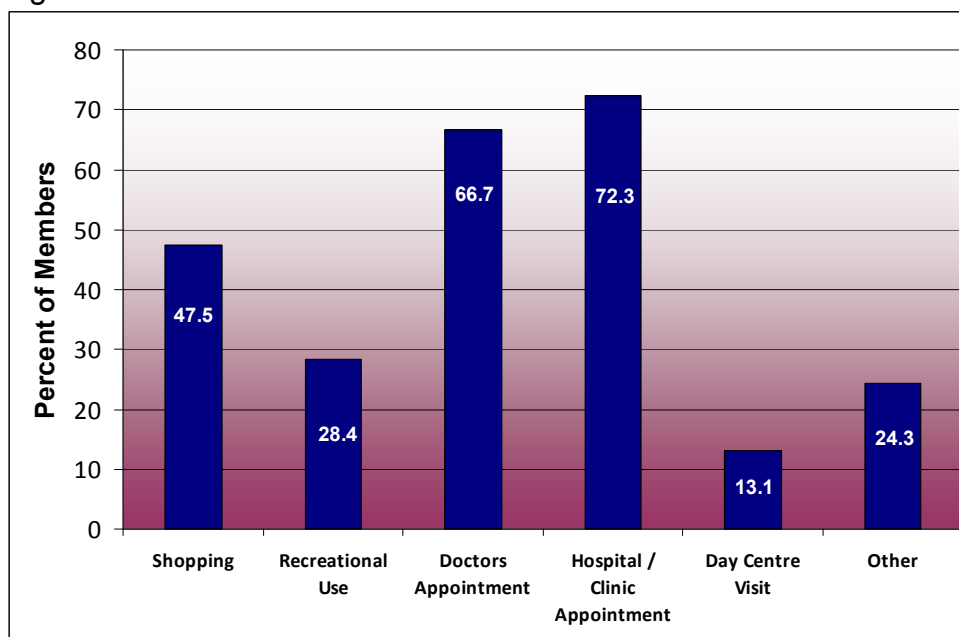
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3.10 Question 5: If you are a member of the Taxicard Scheme... what activities do you use it for

The graph below shows what activities the Taxicard members use their Taxicard to attend or undertake.

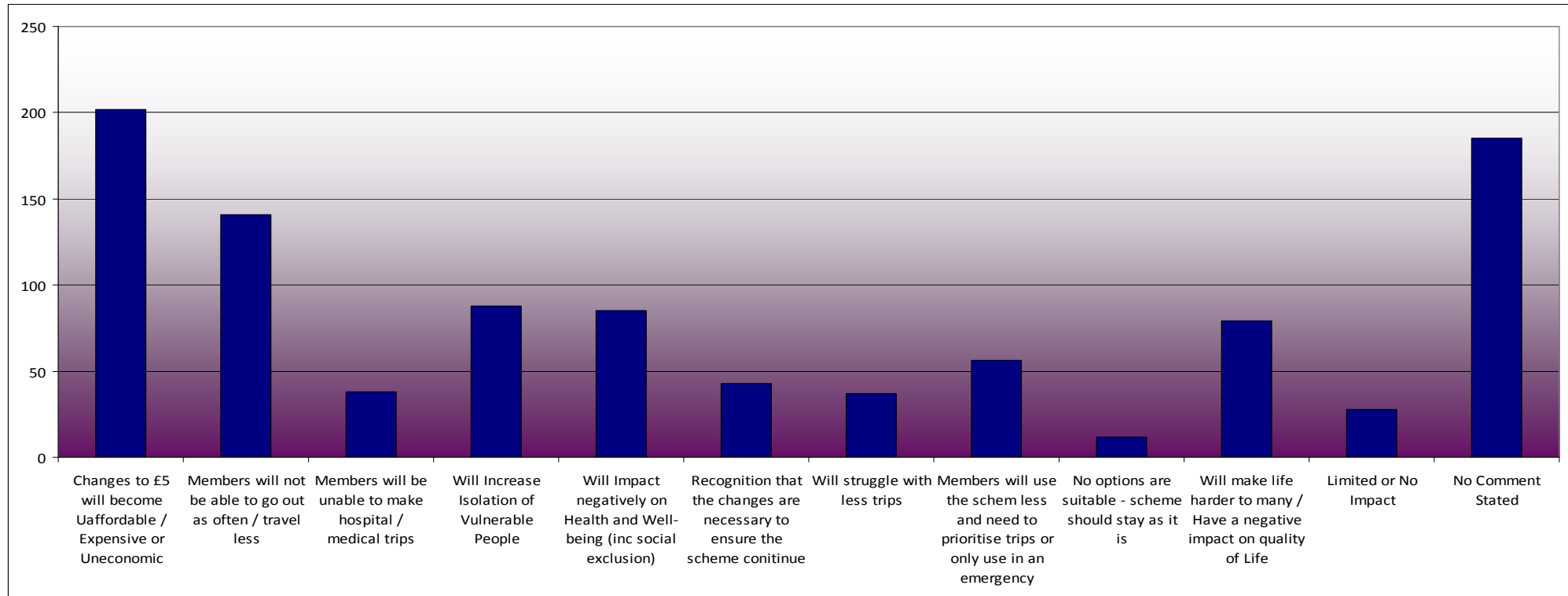
Figure 3: What Members use their Taxicard for:



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Figure 4: Respondents Comments and Impacts:



Respondents to the consultation questionnaire were also asked what they thought the effects of the changes to the Taxicard scheme would be and if they had any further comments. These have been recorded and categorised according to the main aspect or concern of the comment, presented in the above graph. It should be noted that this is not a scientific poll, however an officer's interpretation of the comments received. A full list of the comments can be seen in Appendix B.

Ignoring where respondent have made no comment the majority of concerns were regarding the financial or expense impact of raising the member contribution to £5. Following this a large number of respondents' expressed concerns that many Taxicard holders would not be able to go out as much, attend hospital or medical trips and the changes would have a negative impact

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on isolation and social exclusion. A small but significant number of comments recognised the changes are necessary to ensure the scheme continues and are grateful for the scheme.

Workshop and Discussion Groups

- 3.11 As well as the questionnaire a total of 12 workshops and discussions groups were held with various groups during both April and May 2013. This included meetings in the Neighbourhood Resource Centres with users of the service with physical disabilities, learning disabilities and older people. Meetings were also held with community groups and consultation workshops held at Hatch End Library, Wealdstone Library and Gayton Library as well as workshops at the Members Lounge at Harrow Civic Centre.
- 3.12 It is estimated that, over the course of all these workshops and discussion groups, at least 413 people were involved in discussions on the proposed changes.
- 3.13 Through both the questionnaire and workshop and discussion groups members reported a large amount of feedback regarding the service levels experienced when using the Taxicard scheme, including driver conduct, charging, routes etc... Harrow Officers have agreed to collate all of these and feed this back to London Councils and this feedback has been summarised in section 6 of this report.
- 3.14 The outcome and general feedback on the consultation is summarised below;
- 3.14.1 Members expressed concern that by changing the scheme, disabled and elderly people would become more isolated and will not be able to go out as much.
 - 3.14.2 Members wanted to know why the Taxicard scheme was being cut when there was so much waste going on in other areas of the Council. This sentiment was expressed again another session and a member stated they would be requesting a Freedom of Information report in to council spend.
 - 3.14.3 Many members stated they would not be able to attend as many activities, clinic appointments, sports centres and other social activities with the reduced trips.
 - 3.14.4 The number of people attending Day Centres has already dropped due to previous changes to the Taxicard scheme and implementing any further changes would only reduce Day Centre numbers further.
 - 3.14.5 A number of respondents claimed that the consultation process was simply a PR exercise and that the Council had already decided on what option it was going to take.
 - 3.14.6 Members thought Harrow Council should not be cutting services from the most vulnerable in society.
 - 3.14.7 Many of the members who attended the workshops and discussions are very reliant on their Taxicard for their

independence and quite distressed at the prospect of not being able to use it as often, or the rise in member contribution.

3.14.8 Taxicard gives some independence and that is being taken away.

Formal Response – Harrow Association of Disabled People

3.15 A formal responses was received from Harrow Association of Disabled (below):

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to this taxicards consultation.

We are deeply concerned with the intention to reduce taxicard entitlements further, and cannot agree that this should happen in any way. We are unable, therefore to select an option from those offered, for the following reasons.

When the taxicards were cut last year, unfortunately most people were so much more concerned about the other aspects of that consultation that most disabled people didn't even comment on the taxicards issue. As the reduction in journeys has taken effect, they have realised the full effect of this, and the impacts on their lives.

In all my time at HAD, I can't recall disabled people ever saying anything good about the taxicard service. It is generally incompetent, condescending, discriminatory towards disabled users, unreliable, and expensive (even with all the subsidies) to the end user. The cabs usually charge people for the time it takes to drive to their home, for the time it takes to get a ramp out, and then they have to pay the first £5 towards their trip. This means that a trip can cost the client £9 or £10 just to go a couple of miles, with the London and Harrow Council subsidy providing additional funds to the companies on top of that.

The majority of local mini cab firms do not cater for people who cannot transfer into a vehicle, or rely on heavy or cumbersome equipment such as power chairs. Public transport is accessible for some journeys, but by no means all, in fact there are still more routes into and across London which are not accessible than which are. Local buses are theoretically accessible but for many reasons, significantly around attitudes of drivers and fellow travellers, this is not the case in practice. And even when the buses themselves are accessible, the route between the person's home and bus stop is often not. Many people do not have cars, and even when people do, they may be reliant on someone else

who is not always available, to drive for them, or may not be able to park close enough to their destination to be able to use a car. The taxicab scheme, because it uses accessible vehicles which can go to the required destination. Black cabs in theory, do resolve all those issues, for many people in many circumstances. The real issues are the quality and cost of the service. Transport is one of the great concerns for disabled people, and poor transport is one of the biggest barriers they face.

However, I believe the scheme needs to be preserved with no further cuts until a better option is found. The service is necessary, and the fact that people use it at all indicates this, as few people would use such a poor value, poor quality, routinely discriminatory service if they had other options.

What I would like is for us to campaign for London Councils to release their share of the funding to be used locally, where I think organisations like Harrow Community Transport, about which I've only ever heard positive feedback, can develop and increase their variety of transport options vastly, with such good funding.

But in the meantime, HAD believes that the council should:

- Leave the scheme with no further reductions*
- Support us to have the funding released from London Councils to be used locally for a much better quality and more appropriate service.*

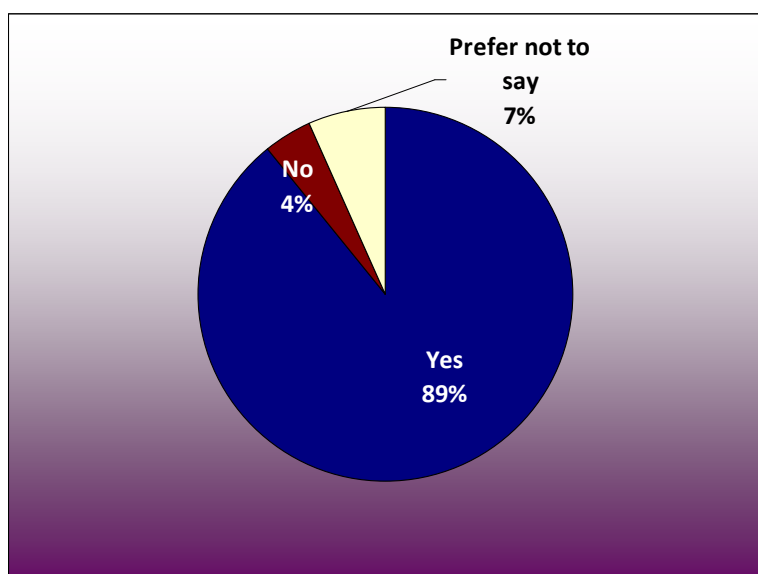
Monitoring Information

3.16 Do you consider yourself to have a disability according to the terms given in the Equality Act 2010?

The Equality Act 2010 defines someone has a disability if:

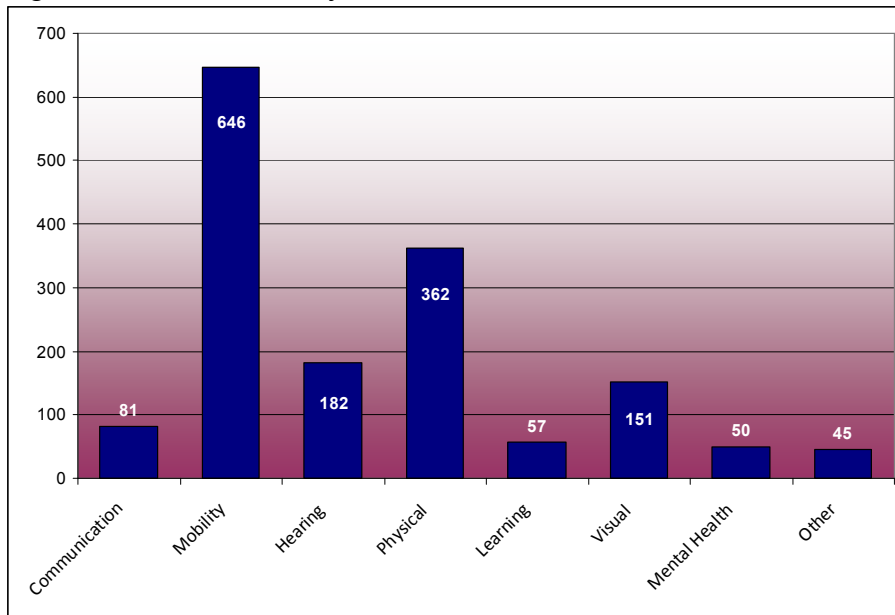
“they have a physical or mental impairment which has a substantial and long term effect on their ability to carry out normal day-to-day activities which would include things like using a telephone, reading a book or using public transport.”

Figure 5: Do members consider to have a disability:



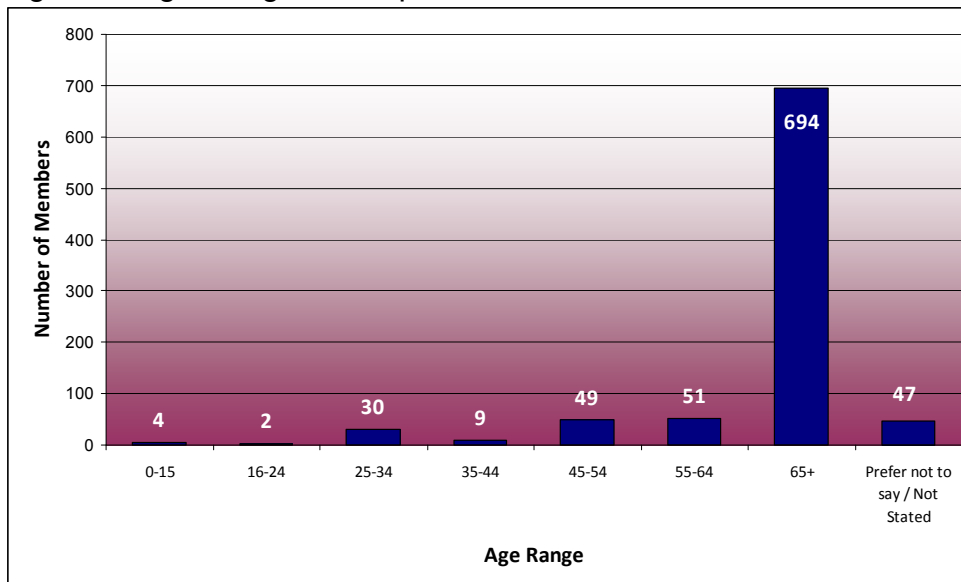
3.17 Of those respondents who answered yes the majority of which specified mobility as their main disability, although many respondents selected more than one category of disability.

Figure 6: What disability members consider to have:



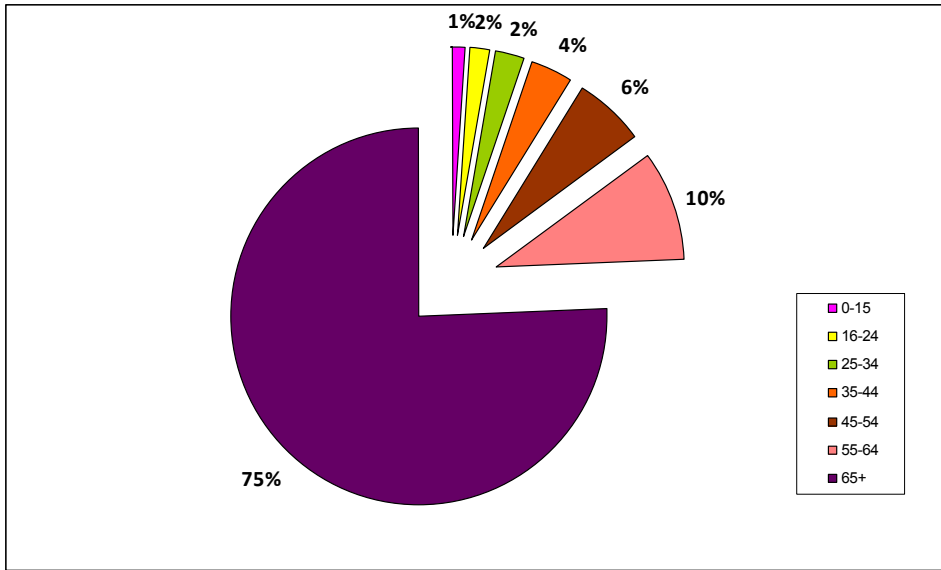
3.18 The graph below shows the age range of the respondents to the questionnaire. As can be seen the majority of respondents are 65 or above.

Figure 7: Age Range of Respondents to Consultation



3.19 The chart below now shows the actual age demographics of the total Taxicard membership in Harrow and 75% of all members are 65 or above.

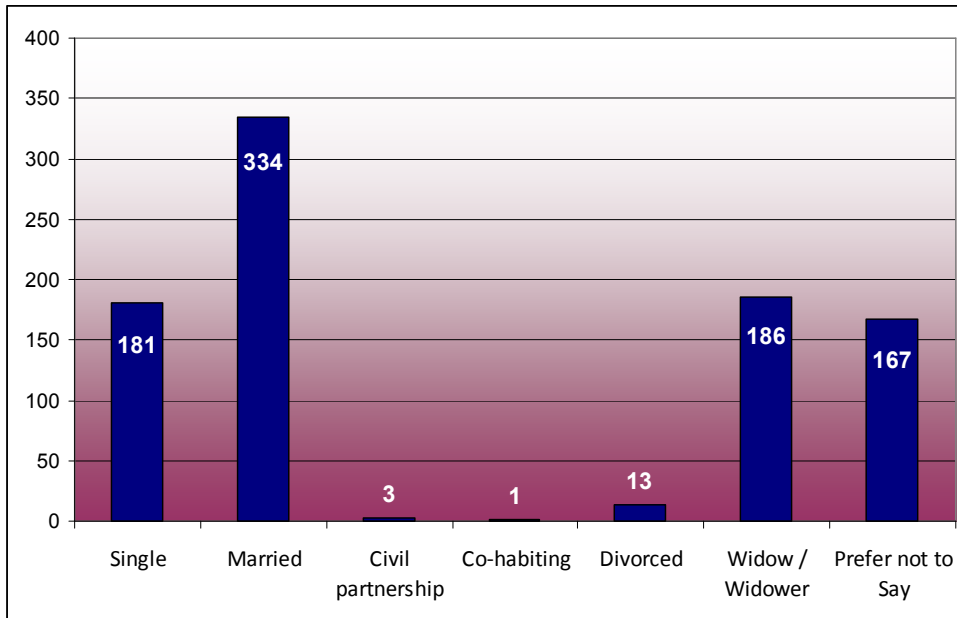
Figure 8: Age Range of Harrow Taxicard Membership



Gender

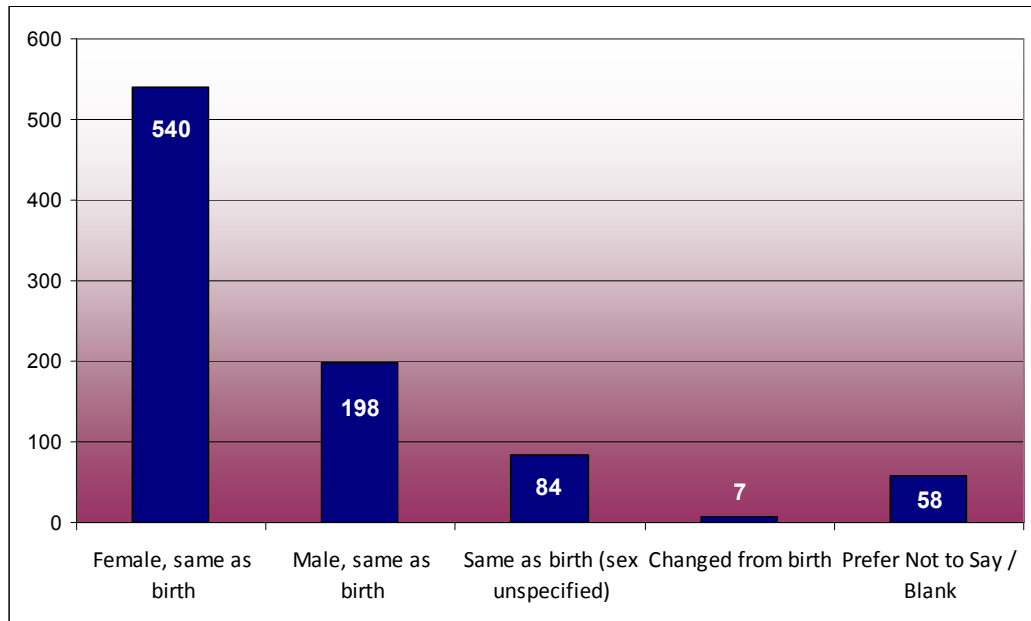
3.20 Of the 887 responses to the consultation 63% were from females, 23% males and 14% did not say. Of the full Taxicard membership 69.7% are female and 30.3% male.

3.21 Figure 9: What is your Marital Status:

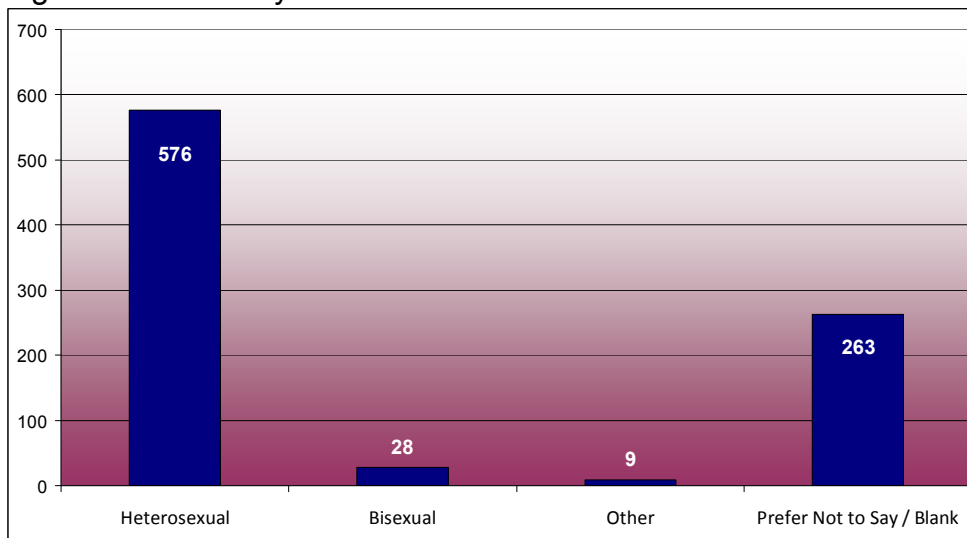


3.22 Gender Identity

Figure 10 Is your gender identity the same as the gender you were assigned at birth?

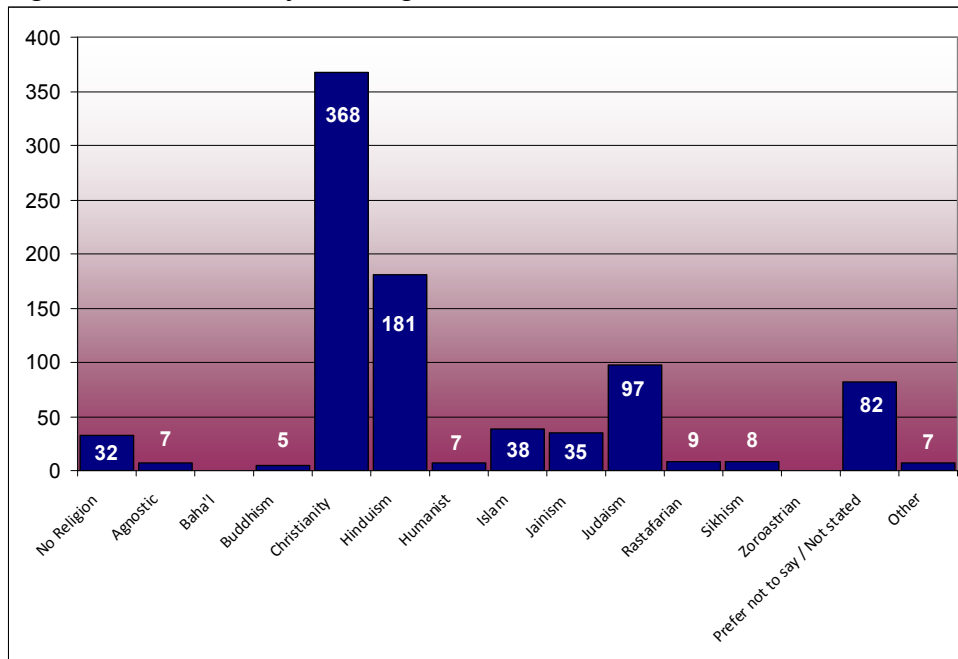


3.23 Figure 11: What is your Sexual Orientation:



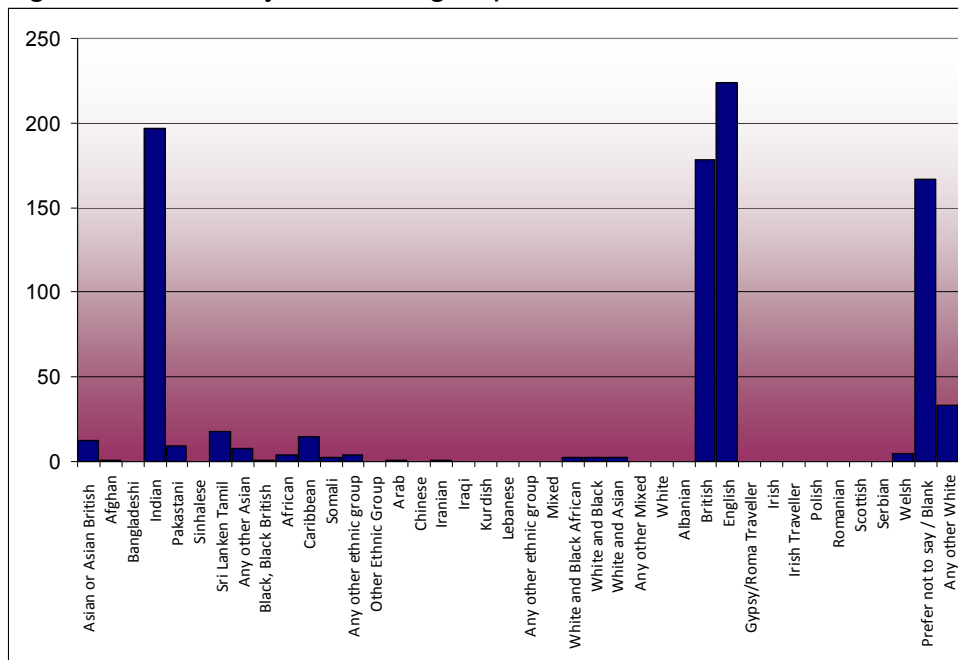
3.24

Figure 12 What are your religion / beliefs:

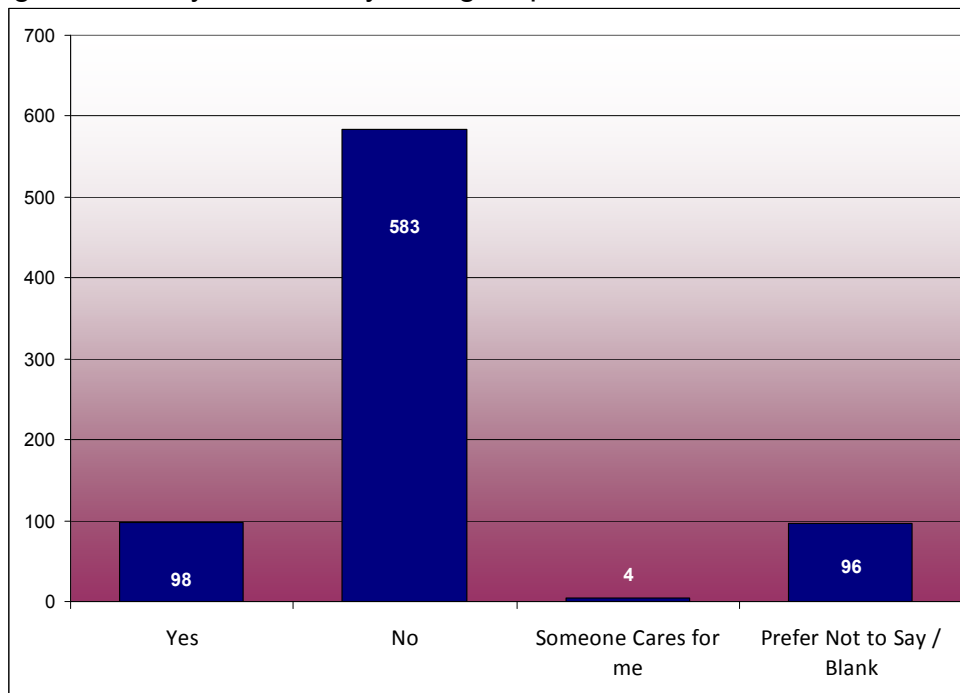


3.25

Figure 13: what is your ethnic group



3.26 Figure 14: Do you have any caring responsibilities for other:



4. SUMMARY

- 4.1 The overall response to the consultation was extensive with 887 written responses and over 400 reached through workshop and discussion groups. It is our view that it can therefore be assured the responses and themes are a fair reflection of the membership's views.
- 4.2 When respondents were asked for the option Harrow Council should take forward to make savings to the scheme 56% preferred Option 2 – reducing all members to 40 trips per year. The remainder of responses was split almost equally between Option 1 – increasing member contribution to £5 (21.2% of respondents) and Option 3 – increasing to £5 then reducing to £4 in 13-14 and 52 trips (22.8% of respondents).
- 4.3 A small proportion of respondents (5%) did not choose any option at all.
- 4.4 The preference for Option 2 was also widely supported in the comments and impacts respondents stated in their return. As can be seen in Figure 4 the largest number of comments was in relation to the impact or additional expense that raising the member contribution to £5 would bring. However, there were a large number of comments regarding members not being able to make as many trips, missing hospital appointments, becoming more isolated and/or socially excluded and those who will struggle with fewer trips.

- 4.5 A small proportion of comments stated Taxicard members would need to prioritise the trips they took whilst some recognised that changes are necessary to ensure the scheme can continue.
- 4.6 The impact of both Option 1 and Option 3 would be 100% as the increase in members' contribution would affect all Taxicard holders. However, based on recent analysis of London Council's trip data, the impact of Option 2 would only be on only 433 members or approximately 15% of the Taxicard members who currently take more than 40 trips.
- 4.7 Figure 3 identifies the purposes members are using their Taxicard trips for and the highest use is for attendance to hospital and clinic appointments (72.3% of members) and doctors appointments (66.7% of members). Originally the Taxicard scheme was introduced for social purposes such as going shopping, visiting friends and family and going to events. There are no restrictions on what the Taxicard can be used for however the advice of London Councils is that the scheme is not suitable for time specific appointments as it is not a guaranteed, and therefore it is not recommended to be used for hospital trips.
- 4.8 It is not practical to impose any restrictions on the use of Taxicard for certain trips as these would be very difficult to police. However it is suggested that all members are written to inform them of the intended purpose of the scheme and also to inform them of alternative NHS Patient Transport available should they need it.

5. COMMENTS ON LONDON TAXICARD SCHEME (for London Councils)

- 5.1 The Harrow Taxicard members raised a number of issues regarding the Taxicard scheme through the consultation process and Harrow Council has agreed to record these issues and raise them with both London Councils and ComCab, the taxis service provider.
- 5.2 The issues recorded below refer to general issues raised by more than one member.
- 5.3 **Running the Meter:** Many members stated that the taxi drivers have the meter running for a long time before they have even got to in to the taxi. This is a particular issue for members that have severe mobility problems (majority of members) who are slower at leaving the house with some even stating they wait outside their house on the pavement for the taxi to arrive so they can get in to it quicker.
- 5.4 **Different Charging / Taxi-trip Costs for the same journey:** Members raised concerns over the variation in costs charged for the same journey taken on different days and with different drivers. Members are aware that the charge will vary depending on the traffic conditions but do

experience a wide range in costs for the same journey with some journeys costing double what they usually would on occasions.

5.5 **Taking Longer Routes**: Members stated taxi drivers often take elongated or obviously longer routes than necessary in order to increase the cost to the user.

5.6 **General Unhelpfulness**: Many members reported that taxi drivers often appeared unwilling to assist members with mobility difficulties in to and out of the taxi and unwilling or unable to operate their wheelchair ramps. Some members reported taxi drivers to often be rude or intimidating when it came to charging at the end of the journey.

5.7 The official feed back from *HAD* regarding the scheme is extracted below:

“... I can’t recall disabled people ever saying anything good about the taxicard service. It is generally incompetent, condescending, discriminatory towards disabled users, unreliable, and expensive (even with all the subsidies) to the end user. The cabs usually charge people for the time it takes to drive to their home, for the time it takes to get a ramp out, ...”

5.8 It should be noted, regarding *HAD*’s last comment, that taxi drivers are allowed to charge an initial £2.40 on arrival at the pick up point (which is the standard tariff for all London Taxi journeys and not specific to Taxicard). The meter can then legitimately be left running for any time spent helping someone to, or into, the vehicle before departure.