

LONDON BOROUGH OF HARROW

CABINET – 12 SEPTEMBER 2013

Reference from Call-In Sub-Committee – 5 August 2013

Call-in of Cabinet Decision (18 July 2013) - Concessionary Travel - Changes to the Taxicard Scheme

The Sub-Committee received papers in respect of a call-in notice submitted by over 150 members of the public.

The Chairman invited the representative of the signatories, Ms Angela Dias, to present the reasons for the call-in of the decision to the Sub-Committee. Ms Dias explained that the action was disproportionate in that it would have an enormous impact on some lives, and particularly for those with complex needs who were unable to use public transport, regardless of discounts and passes available to them. For people without family and friends to assist and support them it would mean the difference between being totally housebound and isolated, and being able to socialise and partake in 'normal' activities enjoyed by people without disabilities. She also believed there was a potential human rights challenge, in that the right to participate in community life would be compromised.

She added that disabled people were already suffering cuts in services and benefits, and that this action compounded the hardship and distress being experienced by a vulnerable sector of the community. Changes to the scheme would achieve minimal savings but at great cost to the quality of life of disabled people.

Avril Coombs and Maureen McGrath made additional points:

- disabled people, often on low incomes, have higher expenses in carrying out normal activities;
- 40 trips amounts to 20 trips in total as each outing will require a return journey;
- disabled people are already seriously disadvantaged in their lives and support should not be reduced.

Councillor Idaikkadar stated that while he was deeply sympathetic to the needs of service users, it was imperative to balance the Council's budget. He added that he had experience of disability in his own family and understood the impact the decision would have, but savings in this area were preferable to cuts in other services. In reviewing the service, Cabinet had looked at practice in other boroughs and had decided to remove the subsidy, rather than lose the service altogether. They had also analysed the available data, which demonstrated that 15% of scheme users would be adversely impacted, as not all users exceeded the proposed allowance. He acknowledged that the service could be improved, and had asked officers to meet with London Councils to discuss this. He was happy to liaise with Harrow Association of Disabled People (HAD) to look at issues raised.

He noted that disabled residents had recourse to other support, such as personal budgets, in managing their needs. He commented that Cabinet had included transitional arrangements in their decision, and while they had taken no comfort in deciding on these changes, it was the right decision at this time.

Members discussed the points raised, and requested clarification on the following points:

- were there alternative income streams (e.g. interest on the underspend) which could fund the shortfall?
- if alternative methods of transport were available for scheme members, how were these publicised and promoted?

Members noted that interest accruing from an underspend would be available only in the short term and was not a viable long term proposition.

In response to a query about what training on disability and equalities was provided for officers and Members, it was confirmed that officers received training relevant and appropriate to their area of work, and all Members received mandatory training on equalities.

An officer informed the Sub-Committee that consultation results showed a high level of taxicard use was for attendance at doctor and hospital appointments.

Members noted that housebound residents could insist on home visits, and that volunteer schemes were in place to assist patients with transport for medical reasons. Members were of the view that if alternative transport arrangements were available, it was imperative to ensure that scheme users were aware of these and of their rights in accessing alternative provision.

(The Sub-Committee then adjourned from 7.35 pm – 8.05 pm to receive legal advice).

The Chairman announced the decision of the Sub-Committee and it was

RESOLVED: (unanimously) That:

- (1) the call-in on ground (d) - the action is not proportionate to the outcome – not be upheld;
- (2) the following statement, by the Chairman on behalf of the Sub-Committee, be noted by Cabinet:

“The Sub-Committee notes the transitional arrangements put in place for high end users; the Sub-Committee further notes that the changes to the scheme are due to be implemented on 1 October 2013, and requests that the changes are not implemented until the scheme users are made aware of alternative arrangements with other transport providers, particularly in respect of transport for doctor and hospital appointments.”

FOR CONSIDERATION

Background Documents:

Draft minutes of the call-In Sub-Committee – 5 August 2013

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