

Report to:	Cabinet	
Date:	22 March 2023	
Title:	Proposed retention of the discretionary elements of the England National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) and provision of bus passes for Care Leavers	
Portfolio Area:	Transport	
Divisions Affected:	All	
Local Member(s) briefed:	N/A	
Relevant Scrutiny Committee:	Economic Growth and Development	
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Approval and clearance obtained:		Y
Date next steps can be taken		2 April 2023
For Cabinet and delegated executive decisions only		
Key decision? (≥£500k in value or significant effect on communities in two or more electoral divisions)		Y
Published in advance on Cabinet Work Programme?		Y
Urgency Procedure(s) used if 'N' to Work Programme?		N

Recommendations:

1. That the continuation of the existing unrestricted ENCTS scheme for pass holders be supported, meaning that the ENCTS would continue to offer free local bus travel to all pass holders at all times of the day and night, facilitating continued unrestricted access to employment, education, healthcare, social and leisure opportunities.

2. That partnership working with Bus Operators to deliver a scheme to provide free bus passes for care leavers be supported. The aim is to deliver this scheme by June 2023.

1. Executive Summary

- 1.1 The England National Concessionary Travel Scheme (ENCTS) is a mandatory bus concession for older and disabled people that has been in place since 2001. It provides eligible older people and people with disabilities free off-peak travel on local bus services throughout England.
- 1.2 The statutory responsibility is to provide free bus travel to card holders between 9.30am and 11pm, Mondays to Fridays and at any time on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays.
- 1.3 In recent years, Cornwall Council has offered free bus travel to card holders at any time of the day or night, above and beyond the statutory requirements.
- 1.4 The Council is experiencing unprecedented budgetary pressures and is reviewing all the discretionary services to focus resources in providing excellent statutory services.
- 1.5 As part of the review, the Council has explored removing this discretionary element of the ENCTS scheme and reverting to the statutory minimum times of eligibility. Before making a decision, the Council has undertaken a public consultation to assess the impact on Cornish residents.
- 1.6 The context for reviewing the results of the consultation is that the use of concessionary bus passes has not recovered to pre-Covid levels and is about 70% of pre-covid use. This is similar nationally, and it is a priority of Government to increase their use.
- 1.7 Respondents stated that they used their passes for reasons such as appointments (1363 responses), shopping trips (1470) and social activities (1034) which are important in respect of people's health and wellbeing. A significant number of respondents said they would shift to using private cars (1134 responses), motorcycle (110) or taxis (204) which would be contrary to our carbon and modal shift objectives. We have the capacity within the bus network at peak times unlike parts of the country with more typical commuting and peak time patterns. Our estimated savings are relatively small

because people could just move their journeys and still travel for free.

- 1.8 It is therefore recommended that this saving is not made by altering the ENCTS scheme.
- 1.9 This report also seeks support for the development of a scheme to provide free bus travel for care leavers in Cornwall, following a successful pilot between 2019-21 ran by Barnardo's, in partnership with Carefree Cornwall.
- 1.10 The provision of free bus travel for care leavers ages 18-25 in England is the focal point for Barnardo's national campaign, 'Transport for Freedom' which highlights the myriad challenges faced by young care leavers, many of which can be improved and resolved through the provision of free bus travel.
- 1.11 The importance of such a scheme was recently highlighted by the pilot's participants to Richard Holden MP Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Roads and Local Transport) during a visit to Cornwall in February where he met Cornwall Council, Barnardo's and Carefree Cornwall, along with care leavers to hear more about the positive impact of the pilot on the lives of those who took part. Furthermore, this report is seeking to recommend to Cabinet to approve that a scheme to provide free bus passes for care leavers is developed, with the aim to be "live" by Spring 2023.

2. Purpose of Report and key information

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet of the outcome of the public consultation and to consider the results of the consultation prior to making any change to the hours of operating ENCTS. It also informs Cabinet of the opportunity to develop a free bus travel scheme for care leavers (see section 2.5).

ENCTS

- 2.2 A public consultation was undertaken between 12 December 2022 to 23 January 2023. The consultation was designed to understand the impacts of the proposal to remove to discretionary element of the ENCTS and aligning with the statutory minimum requirement.

Overview of Consultation Responses

- Over 115,000 Concessionary cards have been issued to Cornwall residents. 110,407 were issued to residents of senior age and a further 5,295 issued

to residents with qualifying disabilities. This has, so far, resulted in over 1.3m card holder journeys between April 2022 and September 2022.

- Cornwall Council is considering ceasing the discretionary element of its scheme and aligning with the statutory requirements of the England National Concessionary Travel Scheme.
- The statutory requirement is to allow free bus travel for journeys starting between the hours of 09:30am and 11:00pm (inclusive), Monday to Friday and at any time on Saturdays, Sundays and Bank Holidays.
- Under discretionary powers, Cornwall Council currently offers free bus travel to card holders at all times of day between Monday and Sunday inclusive.
- Where the scheme adjusts to meet only statutory requirements, card holders would be required to pay a standard fare when travelling by bus prior to 09:30am and after 11:00pm.
- Should any changes in the scheme occur, sufficient time must be allowed to ensure notice of these changes is given to operators and residents alike, meaning any changes would not come into force prior to 1 June 2023.

2.3 The consultation was available to all residents of Cornwall online through the Let's Talk website between 12 December 2022 and 23 January 2023. All residents were invited to complete the survey, whether they were current concessionary pass holders or otherwise and the opportunity to add further comments or suggestions was also provided.

2.4 Links to the survey and communications about the survey were shared widely via Cornwall Council's website and social media to help ensure inclusivity. Paper copies of the survey could also be requested if needed.

2.4.1 Through the online consultation process, 2136 responses were received. A further seven responses have been received by email which responses have been added into the final report. Of the responses, 1746 were current Senior pass holders and 170 were Disabled pass holders.

2.4.2 Of the responses, 938 were regular bus users between the times of 9:30am and 11pm Monday to Friday, using the bus a minimum of once a week.

2.4.3 Of the responses, 1035 indicated they use their free bus pass for travel for socialising purposes.

2.4.4 Of the responses and, specifically to the question around the availability and use of an alternative mode of transport were the Concessionary Scheme to change, 236 indicated they would revert to using a private vehicle or taxi.

2.4.5 Given the relatively low number of responses in comparison to the number of Concessionary pass holders, it is difficult to determine a clear indication of how the outcome of the consultation can influence and determine the decision made.

Care leavers

2.5 Between 2019-21, Barnardo's, in partnership with Carefree Cornwall, ran a pilot to provide free bus travel for care experienced young people in the county as part of a national campaign 'Transport for Freedom', which called for free bus travel for all care leavers in England aged 18-25 years.

2.6 Without access to transport, care leavers face a whole host of challenges. These include:

- struggling to meet with friends and family
- difficulties accessing education, employment or training
- limited opportunities to take part in hobbies
- difficulties in going food shopping
- barriers to attending medical appointments
- feeling cut off and isolated, especially when living alone at such a young age.

2.7 The pilot gave 25 care leavers free bus travel over the course of a year, providing them with improved access to education, training, employment and leisure.

2.8 Care leavers who were participants in the scheme highlighted the impact that the pilot scheme had had on their lives to Richard Holden MP Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Roads and Local Transport) during a visit to Cornwall in February.

2.9 The scheme under development by Together for Families and will be based on the adaptation of existing fares schemes in order to ensure the most efficient

approach to delivery. The cost of scheme is expected to cost £0.150m per annum

- 2.10 Around 300 young care leavers are expected to benefit from the evolving scheme.

3. Benefits for Customers/Residents

- 3.1 Good public transport provides a number of benefits for customers/residents. Cornwall's Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP), our vision for public transport in Cornwall, developed in October 2021 in response to the Government's first National Bus Strategy (March 2021), identifies the following priority benefits:

- A public transport network that meets the needs of customers – first choice not choice of last resort
- Simpler and more cost-effective fares for all
- Cheaper fares for young people to encourage them to become life-long bus users
- An integrated bus and rail network and alignment with active travel - enhanced services that are better aligned to connect and allow onward travel by active travel modes
- One set of integrated information for all – easier to plan and use the network
- More reliable bus journey times and better routing to make journeys faster
- Continued improvement in our infrastructure that supports our services
- Improved air quality
- Reduction in carbon emissions

- 3.2 The benefits of good public transport cut across a number of service delivery areas. Maintaining the existing ENCTS access to the public transport network benefits transport users and residents of Cornwall.

- 3.3 Climate Change - the benefits of the use of public transport in addressing air quality mean that measures to encourage modal switch from the car can be transformative. Buses reduce congestion - a fully loaded double decker bus

can take up to 75 cars off the road (Tackling Pollution & Congestion, Greener Journeys, 2017). Poor air quality causes 40,000 to 50,000 early deaths in the UK and the cost of these health impacts is estimated at £20 billion every year.

- 3.4 Capacity and Connectivity – improvements to the capacity of the network will create more journey opportunities for the public to access essential services, employment, education and leisure. It will also improve the connectivity across public transport with the network becoming more integrated, thereby reducing the waiting time penalties for passengers between services.
- 3.5 Cost of transport - the important issue of high bus fares for short journeys remains a barrier to encouraging people onto public transport and is a particular problem in Cornwall. This fact is further endorsed by the most recent Transport Focus Bus Passenger Survey, which sees value for money as the matter with the least customer satisfaction (57% in 2019).
- 3.6 Cornwall's unique Bus Fares Pilot scheme offers exceptional value for money to passengers and combined with the current concessionary pass discretionary offer, is essential to encouraging modal shift to bus and removing the barrier of cost from the passenger. In the case of care leavers, the cost of fares to the user will be removed.
- 3.7 Health and wellbeing - Rising pressures on healthcare provision and social care services make it more important to target resources to develop efficient approaches to transport delivery. There is a growing bank of research that documents the benefits of public transport to the health and wellbeing of the population:
- A 10% improvement in local bus service connectivity is associated with a 3.6% reduction in deprivation (The Value of the Bus to Society, Greener Journeys, 2016). Every £1.00 spent on investment in local bus priority measures can deliver up to £7.00 of net economic benefit.
 - For 1 in 5 bus journeys, a practical alternative does not exist - this may mean not taking a job, not taking advantage of educational opportunities, not taking care of health needs or simply not seeing friends and family (DfT, WebTAG Table A, 2017).
 - Understanding the social and economic consequences of loneliness (Campaign to End Loneliness, 2018) – Research commissioned by the Eden Project initiative The Big Lunch found that disconnected communities could be costing the UK economy £32 billion every year.
 - 33% of Britons admit that they deliberately catch the bus to interact with others

- A bus can be the difference between a person being able to go out and see friends and family, or being isolated at home.
- Improved health outcomes, lower healthcare costs and facilitating people living independently for longer (Why Community Transport Matters, Deloitte & Ealing Community Transport, 2016).

4. Relevant Previous Decision

4.1 None.

5. Consultation and Engagement

5.1 ENCTS covered above in section 2. Care leavers covered below:

5.2 As part of the important role that free travel plays to support vulnerable sectors of society, between 2019-21, Barnardo's, in partnership with Carefree Cornwall, ran a free bus travel pilot for 25 care leavers in Cornwall. This pilot informed Barnardo's Transport for Freedom campaign which highlights the benefits of extending free bus travel to all care leavers aged 18-25 in England.

5.3 The pilot scheme has been nationally recognised and during a recent visit from Richard Holden MP Parliamentary Under Secretary of State (Roads and Local Transport) to Cornwall, the Minister and colleagues from the Department for Transport were provided with the opportunity to discuss the work of Cornwall Council, Barnardo's and Carefree to take forward a solution to provide free bus travel for care leavers in future. During the visit, a desire for this scheme to continue and be utilised as a national example was expressed.

5.4 Therefore, the maintenance of the discretionary element of the ENCTS scheme aligns with the Council's aspiration to see such schemes expanded to support a wider variety of sectors of the society.

6. Financial Implications of the proposed course of action/decision

6.1 The overall annual budget for the England National Concessionary Travel Scheme reimbursement to operators is £5.500m 2022/23, the approved budget is £5.738m in 2023/24.

6.2 The proposed saving was included as part of the approved MTFP 2023/24-2026/27 and included in the Council's savings dashboard, it was proposed that a saving of c£0.150m could be achieved by removing the discretionary travel period. This assumed some users would opt to change their travel patterns to

coincide with the statutory times commencing at 9.30am and others would decide to make alternative travel arrangements or pay the relevant fare.

- 6.3 If the saving proposal is removed, there would be a budget pressure of £0.150m for the discretionary element of the Concessionary fares offer.
- 6.4 Following the recent pilot for Care leavers, it is estimated that the provision for free travel will cost in the region £0.150m per annum, there is currently no budget provision for this scheme. Further review is underway to identify the existing bus travel demand within this cohort to ensure the scheme that is delivered is considerate of and appropriate to the travel demand generated by this group. Any further financial implications resulting from this review will need to be considered separately.
- 6.5 By recommending this to Cabinet, consideration will need to be given to the emerging budget pressure in 2023/24 of c.£0.300m. The pressure will need to be managed within the Financial Regulatory Framework. Furthermore, the 2024/25 budget within the recently approved MTFP is balanced and therefore this decision will require further action to close the gap during the 2024-28 Business Planning and MTFP process.

7. Legal/Governance Implications of the proposed course of action/decision

ENCTS

- 7.1 The England National Concessionary Travel Scheme reimburses operators for carrying concessionary pass holders at no cost. The current rate of reimbursement is 60% of the fare foregone.
- 7.2 The scheme supports both the supported and commercial network alike with a handful of routes excluded from the scheme based on the required criteria.
- 7.3 Operators are required to submit patronage data on a monthly basis to evidence and support their claims in line with the annual scheme document that is issued to and agreed by all operators and Cornwall Council in April of each year, based on Government and DfT guidelines.
- 7.4 Any changes to the scheme, such as moving from free travel for pass holders at any time, would require a minimum of 28 days' notice to operators in line

with the guidance in the scheme to ensure sufficient time for the reconfiguration of ticket machines.

- 7.5 There is currently no statutory guidance on a required notice period to the customers on any changes to the ENCTS scheme.

Care Leavers

- 7.6 The Care Leavers scheme will be based on existing fares schemes that Cornwall Council administers in order to utilise efficiencies with existing processes.
- 7.7 Bus operators are fully engaged on the objectives and requirements for the scheme and are supportive of the need for the reporting process.
- 7.8 The governance of the scheme will include an officer group to regularly monitor the demand for passes and their usage to ensure that impacts on scheme delivery and costs are minimised and assess the effectiveness of the scheme.

8. Risk Implications of the proposed course of action/decision

- 8.1 There are no associated risks to the recommendations outlined in the report, which supports the continuation of the scheme as currently stands.

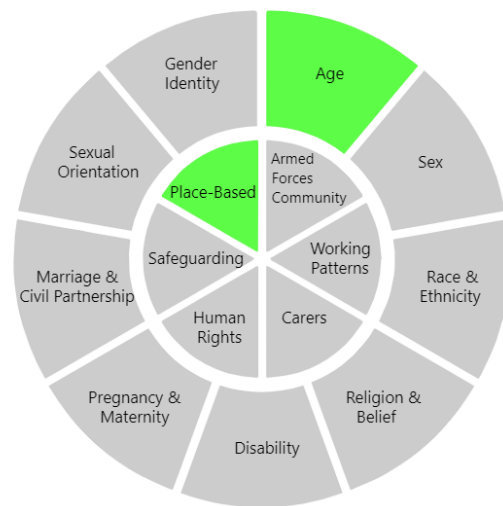
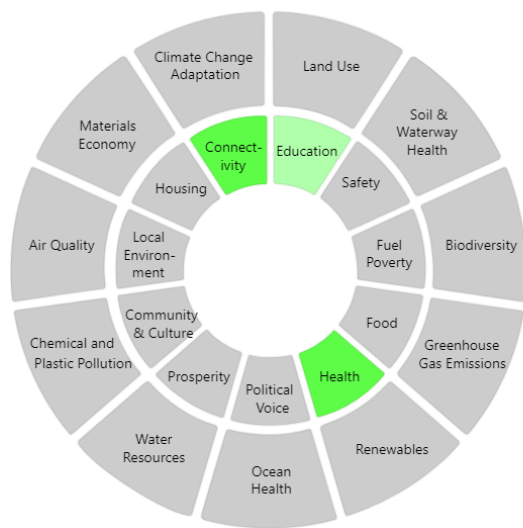
9. Cornwall Development and Decision Wheel

- 9.1 A Cornwall Development and Decision Wheel has been developed for the Care Leavers scheme development. The wheel demonstrates a positive impact, as per the graphs below.

Care Leavers Cornwall Development Decision Wheel

Environmental and Social

Equality and Inclusion



Legend

	Long lasting or severe negative impact
	Short term or limited negative impact
	No or neutral impact
	Short term or limited positive impact
	Long lasting or extensive positive impact

10. Options available

10.1 Option 1 – Retain existing unrestricted times of ENCTS operation

(Recommended): That Cabinet endorses the recommendation to continue the existing ENCTS scheme as it is. This would mean that the ENCTS would continue to offer free local bus travel to all pass holders at all times of the day and night, facilitating continued unrestricted access to employment, education, healthcare, social and leisure opportunities.

10.2 Option 2 – Revert to the statutory minimum hours of ENCTS operation:

That Cabinet discards the option of reverting to the statutory minimum offer. Based on the responses to the consultation exercise, the financial impact to those who rely on using the bus and the potential impact on demand for transport condensing to off-peak times, requiring the Council to support additional resource going into the network, reverting to the statutory minimum hours of ENCTS operation is not recommended. It is likely that the costs of introducing additional resource into the network to cope with the

shift in demand will outweigh any savings made through the restriction of hours.

- 10.3 Further, it is requested that **partnership working with Bus Operators to develop a scheme to provide free bus passes for care leavers be supported (Recommended)**: The benefits of free bus travel for this cohort of young people were realised in the pilot that ran between 2019-21. The impact on the lives of those care experienced young people who would have free transport to access education, employment and social/leisure opportunities will positively impact their wellbeing, confidence and future independence.

11. Supporting Information (Appendices)

- 11.1 Appendix 1 – Consultation Report.

12. Background Papers

- 12.1 None.

13. Approval and clearance

All reports:

Final report sign offs	This report has been cleared by (or mark not required if appropriate)	Date
Governance/Legal (Required for all reports)	Vanessa Davis	7 March 2023
Finance (Required for all reports)	Jo Smith	16.03.2023
Equality and Diversity (If required)		
Service Director (Required for all reports)	Vicky Fraser	15.03.2023
Strategic Director (If required)	Phil Mason	16.03.2023