

Decision Session – Executive Member for
Transport and Planning

11 February 2016

Report of the Acting Director of City and Environment Services

Free weekend bus travel for young people in January & February 2016 update

Summary

1. This report provides an update on the take-up of the free weekend bus travel offer, agreed by the Executive Member at his 9th December Decision Session
2. A one off sum of £100,000 was allocated by the Council for the provision of incentives which would make bus travel more attractive for young people. Following a period of commercial negotiation, the Council and operators agreed an in principle offer applying to every Saturday and Sunday for the months of January and February 2016. The offer will provide free local bus travel within the City of York administrative area for children and young people up to the age of 18 years old.
3. The 9th December decision included a recommendation for officers to return to this Executive Member Decision Session to provide an update on take up of the free travel offer with a view to whether or not the offer should be extended for a more sustained period.
4. Take up of the free travel offer has been modest and the increase in youth bus use desired has not materialised.

Recommendations

5. The Executive Member is requested to:
 - a. Cease provision of the free travel offer at the end of February 2016

- b. Agree to the undertaking of surveys of young bus users to establish awareness of the offer and more general reasons for bus use.

Reason: The scheme has not generated increased bus use in the target market (children and young people).

Options

6. The Executive Member has two deliverable options to consider:

Option 1: To cease provision of the free travel offer at the end of February and to undertake surveys of young bus users to establish awareness of the offer and more general reasons for bus use.

Option 2: To approve the funding for continuation of the offer for a further period to expire at the end of the York local authority schools' Easter holidays on Sunday 10th April 2016.

Analysis of Options

Option 1

7. York's bus operators have provided the Council with passenger data for the first three weekends of January 2016. This data reveals that for the first weekend of January, fewer than half the number of children and young people travelled than did in the first weekend of 2015. For the second and third weekends of the month, passenger numbers were broadly comparable to the equivalent weekends in 2015.
8. The offer was widely promoted ahead of its launch at the beginning of January. This included posters at bus stops and on buses as well as a sustained social media campaign and direct contact with schools and other youth and children's clubs and associations.
9. The flooding and poor weather experienced in York at the beginning of the month had a negative impact, not only on the potential awareness and success of this offer, but also on all bus patronage in the City, as people decided not to travel. The passenger numbers in the second and third weekends of January, however, suggest that the free travel offer did not increase the number of children and young people travelling on bus.

10. The Council would like to undertake surveys on weekend bus services during February to better understand the reasons for young persons' travel. Specifically, the surveys will aim to establish whether the free travel offer encouraged young people to make journeys by bus which they would otherwise not have made (or would have made using another mode of travel). The evidence from these surveys will then be used to prepare a further report to the Executive Member as to options for future bus incentivisation initiatives.

Option 2

11. The projected cost of providing the free travel offer to the end of February is £28,000. On this basis, it is highly likely that the offer could be extended to the end of the York schools Easter holidays within the budget of £100,000 originally allocated.
12. This option would recognise the detrimental impact which the flooding and poor January weather has had on the bus network and would allow the offer to potentially deliver its initial objective of increasing the number of young persons and children travelling on York's local bus network.
13. There is a modest concern amongst bus operators that providing the free travel offer for a more sustained period might make it more difficult to revert to normal fare paying arrangements when the offer ceases.

Council Plan

14. The potential benefits for the aims espoused in the Council Plan are:
15. A prosperous city for all – Efficient and affordable transport links enable residents and businesses to access key services and opportunities
16. A focus on frontline services - Every child has the opportunity to get the best possible start in life

Implications

This report has the following implications.

17. **Financial** – A one off budget of £100,000 has been allocated to this initiative.

The agreed free offer period to the end of February 2016 is projected to cost the Council £28,000. Option 1 recommends the undertaking of surveys, forecast to cost a maximum of an additional £2,000. Option 2 would result in the provision of an additional six weekends of free travel. It is projected that the total cost of delivery for the project is unlikely to exceed £50,000.

18. **Human Resources (HR)** – None.
19. **Equalities** – To ensure fairness of provision and opportunity, free travel is provided on the services of all eight of York's bus operators. This initiative will make it easier for young people to access leisure, retail and employment opportunities. The offer is available for all under 18s, irrespective of their ability to pay.
20. **Legal** – The City of York Council is allowed to introduce such concessions in line with Well Being powers contained in Section 2 of the Local Government Act 2000.
21. **Crime and Disorder** – None.
22. **Information Technology (IT)** – City of York Council is party to an ongoing contract for the provision of smart tickets. This includes production of YOzone passes. The Council's supplier has experienced a doubling in the number of YOzone applications over the offer period.
23. **Property** – None.
24. **Other** – None.

Risk Management

25. In compliance with the Council's risk management strategy, no significant risks associated with the recommendations in this report have been identified.

Contact Details

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report:**

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**Report
Approved**



Date: 03.02.16

Specialist Implications Officer(s)

There are no specialist implications

Wards Affected: *All*

For further information please contact the author of the report

Background Papers:

There are no background papers