

Community Car Scheme Grants – Proposal for Minor Amendment to Terms of Grant

Report of the Recycling, Street Cleaning and Transport Portfolio Holder

Recommended:

That, with effect from 1 January 2022, a minor amendment be made to the Terms of Grant for the Community Car Scheme, as set out in paragraph 4.1 of the report.

SUMMARY:

This report provides a background to the Community Car Scheme grants provided by the Council, and the impact of the proposed minor amendment to the Terms which would enable scheme groups to make claims for journeys they have made to assist clients, but where the client has been unable to physically make the journey for themselves.

1 Introduction

- 1.1 This report sets out the background to the grant arrangements for Community Car Schemes operating in the borough, and the impact to the Council of the proposed variation which would allow schemes to claim for journeys made to assist an eligible client but where the client was not themselves physically transported during said journey.

2 Background

- 2.1 In 2008, following changes to the national Concessionary Travel arrangements, the Executive, as it was then, considered the impact of free bus travel for older people by means of a Farepass. On payment of a small administration fee to Hampshire County Council, women who have reached normal retirement age and men at the pensionable age of a woman born on the same day can obtain a Farepass which then enables them to travel on bus services for free.
- 2.2 However, in a significantly rural area, the provision of bus services varies greatly across the Borough. The Executive identified that it wished to continue to support the Community Car Schemes operating in parts of the Borough which provide transport for those persons eligible for a Farepass but not able to use public transport, or for those journeys such as hospital appointments where individual transport by car is more appropriate.

- 2.3 The Executive considered how best to provide this support, and the then Leader and Economic Portfolio Holder met with representatives of the groups to hear their views. The consistent feedback from the groups was that, as volunteers working in their communities, they were best placed to decide how their customers could benefit from any financial support offered for journeys undertaken by each scheme. The groups were very keen that no universal criteria were set but that rather each scheme decided upon their individual criteria, reflecting the need in their area.
- 2.4 At that time, in order to manage the Council's expenditure, the scheme that was introduced included the calculation of a maximum grant available to each group operating the Community Car Scheme.
- 2.5 This 'cap' on the amount of grant that could be claimed was based on the formula £1,000 per 500 (or part thereof) of the population aged 60 or over, in the parishes served by the group. The age 60 was chosen as this was the female retirement age at that time, and hence when residents became eligible for a Farepass.
- 2.6 Groups can claim up to the maximum annual 'cap' by means of a regular return to the Council.
- 2.7 At its meeting on 2 April 2008 the Executive resolved:
- 1. That the Council increases the maximum grant available to a community car scheme from £1,000 to an amount to be determined by a formula of £1,000 per 500 (or part thereof) of the over 60 population of the parishes served by the group. The grant to be administered on terms to be agreed by the Head of Revenues in conjunction with the Economic Portfolio Holder.**
 - 2. That the views of the Community Car Scheme administrators of the impact and operation of this new grant scheme be considered as part of the review of the Concessionary Travel Scheme by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in Autumn 2008.**
- 2.8 With the phased introduction of uniformity in male and female pension ages and the phased increase in normal pension age, the eligibility age for a Farepass is no longer 60 years of age.
- 2.9 When the recommendations were drafted for the Executive meeting on 2 April 2008 (see 2.5 above), the method of calculation of the 'cap' was specified as being by reference to the "over 60 population" rather than the number of the population who are eligible for a Farepass. The effect of that was that the calculation of the cap unintentionally lost the link to eligibility to Farepass (which increases in line with normal pension age).
- 2.10 At its meeting on 15 February 2017, Cabinet considered a report which proposed to reinstate the link in the Community Car Scheme Terms of Grant to Farepass eligibility age and remove the reference in the Terms to the "over 60 population".

- 2.11 The consequence of reinstating this link was that this in some cases it would result in a reduction to a scheme's maximum grant cap (because the grant would then be based upon a smaller eligible population).
- 2.12 To mitigate this, Cabinet resolved at that 2017 meeting that transitional arrangements would be put in place so that, whilst the grant cap would in future be calculated by reference to the Farepass eligibility age, where this would result in a reduction in the maximum available grant (when compared to the cap for 2016/17), the 'cap' would be protected at the 2016/17 level.
- 2.13 The effect of the 'cap protection' is demonstrated in Annex 1, which illustrates that there are a number of the existing car schemes which are benefitting from these transitional arrangements.
- 2.14 The community car scheme grants have continued to provide support to the Council's local communities with an average of £52,000 paid out each year in total to existing car schemes in the financial years 2017-18 to 2019-20.
- 2.15 In April 2020 as part of the Council's emergency response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as a temporary measure community car schemes were permitted to also claim from their grant for journeys made to assist people (of an eligible age to apply for an older person's Farepass) who were self-isolating or shielding; for example, arranging food or prescription deliveries to them.
- 2.16 This measure was welcomed by the local community car groups, and claims (for both accompanied and unaccompanied journeys) were paid totalling almost £27,000 in 2020-21, and up to end August 2021 claims totalling £12,000 have been paid.
- 2.17 Following relaxations by the government on the rules applying to those people previously advised to 'shield', as well as the recent relaxation on the requirements to self-isolate, this temporary variation to the terms came to an end on 1 September 2021.
- 2.18 Whilst the pandemic has brought about its share of challenges for us all, it has also given us as a Council an opportunity to review the way in which we do things and an opportunity to be more flexible.
- 2.19 Having considered the merits of this small variation to the car scheme as part of our review of lessons learnt from the pandemic, we recognise that the need to be able to make journeys on behalf of a client who is unable to make the journey for themselves is not isolated to the circumstances that arose during the pandemic. Communities have older residents of Farepass age who are unable to go shopping or collect prescriptions for themselves due to illness or impairment, and at times it is not viable for them to use online services or deliveries because these services are not always available at short notice, as is the case say for a brand-new prescription.
- 2.20 It is therefore recommended that the temporary variation in 2.15 should continue moving forward as a permanent adjustment to the car scheme rules.

3 Corporate Objectives and Priorities

- 3.1 The provision of community car scheme grants supports the corporate priority “Contribute to and be part of a stronger community” by helping local communities to be more resilient and do more for themselves providing for the transport needs of the local community.

4 Options

Two options have been identified:

4.1 Option 1

Add an additional clause 5e (as below) to the existing Terms to enable Car Schemes to claim for journeys made to assist eligible clients, but where their client has been unable to make the journey for themselves:

“This scheme is in place to provide support to Community Car Schemes to enable them to provide transport for those persons eligible for a Farepass but unable to use or access public transport, or for example for those journeys such as hospital appointments where individual transport by car is more appropriate. Claims may also be made against the grant where journeys have been made to assist an eligible client but where the client is not able to physically make the journey for themselves (for example due to illness or impairment), and there is considered to be no other viable alternative. Any such claims are to be annotated on the Claim Return form ‘Client not present’.”

(See Annex 2, proposed amended Terms).

The community car groups found the temporary variation introduced as an emergency measure to be a great benefit, and they and their users are likely to welcome this change.

Option 2

- 4.2 Do nothing, leave the scheme rules as they are – Claims can only be made from the grant where the client has been transported by the community transport team.

With this option schemes could be left in a position where they are trying to coax clients unfit to travel into a vehicle in order that they are able to secure grant funding for the journey from the Council.

5 Risk Management

- 5.1 An evaluation of the risks indicates that the existing controls in place mean that no significant risks have been identified at this time.

6 Resource Implications

- 6.1 The calculation of the maximum grant (cap) available to the car schemes remains unchanged. Given that the purpose of the journey should remain unchanged, the only difference should be that the client may not have been transported on some occasions. Even if all schemes were to claim for more journeys than before, they can still only claim up to value of their maximum grant for that year.
- 6.2 The maximum grants which schemes are eligible to claim currently totals £68,000, based upon current population figures and factoring in the 2016/17 'cap'.
- 6.3 The budget forecast for the current financial year 2021-22 is set at £55,000. Not all of car scheme groups claim all (or even any in some cases) of their available full grant. There is always the potential for the budget forecast to be exceeded, where the maximum grant available to be claimed is greater than the budget forecast for the year. The budget forecast is set factoring in the levels of claims by each group in recent years in order to try to and accurately predict expenditure, and this budget is kept under regular review.
- 6.4 There is the potential for the overall cost of the scheme to increase in the future if additional Community Car Schemes are set up in parishes which are currently not covered by Community Car Scheme groups, or if the older persons' population figures were to increase. This situation will be kept under review and a report brought back to Cabinet if necessary.

7 Legal Implications

- 7.1 The Community Car Scheme is a discretionary scheme and as such the terms of the scheme are entirely determined by the Council.

8 Equality Issues

- 8.1 The Community Car Schemes are much valued by those residents who benefit from their services. Some of these residents face obstacles in accessing the free bus travel offered by the Farepass scheme.

9 Other Issues

- 9.1 None.

10 Conclusion and reasons for recommendation

- 10.1 When the grants to Community Car Schemes were introduced, they were intended to support journeys made by residents eligible for a Farepass who were unable to make that journey via free bus travel.

On the back of lessons learnt from our response to the COVID-19 pandemic, it is felt appropriate to build permanently into the scheme this small but worthwhile adjustment to the Terms, further benefitting our local communities.

Background Papers (Local Government Act 1972 Section 100D)

None

Confidentiality

It is considered that this report does not contain exempt information within the meaning of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as amended, and can be made public.

No of Annexes:	2	File Ref:	N/A
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