

**EXETER CITY COUNCIL**  
**SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY**  
**3 JUNE 2010**

**EXETER COMMUNITY TRANSPORT ASSOCIATION**

**1 PURPOSE OF REPORT**

- 1.1 This report is to inform Members of the overrun experienced by Exeter Community Transport Association (ECTA) in respect of the budget for the Taxicard scheme for 2009/10, and of the measures proposed to address the issue for 2010/11. It is also proposed to bring ECTA's funding within the Council's grant allocation process so that with effect from 2011, funding can be agreed in principle for three year periods if the Grants Committee considers this is appropriate.

**2 BACKGROUND**

- 2.1 ECTA provides a number of transport services for people with disabilities in Exeter, namely:-
- Shopmobility – provision of wheelchairs and scooters for use by disabled residents and visitors;
  - City Sights – volunteers to guide blind and partially sighted residents and visitors in the city centre;
  - Ring and Ride – a wheelchair-accessible minibus service;
  - Exe Access – a wheelchair-accessible taxi service;
  - Taxicard – entitles severely disabled people to a refund of half their taxi fares, up to an annual limit.
- 2.2 These services receive various funding from Exeter City Council and Devon County Council. The following figures are for 2010/11.

	ECC £	DCC £
Shopmobility		8,654
City Sights		
Ring and Ride	13,140	15,661
Exe Access		
Taxicard	4,100	4,100

In the case of the City Council, the contributions to Ring and Ride and Taxicard have been paid from the Economy and Development Directorate's transportation budget and have remained at the same level since 2008/9. Additionally, in 2007/8 and 2008/9 ECTA received a contribution of £11,650 (in total) for Shopmobility from the transportation budget.

An application by ECTA for £12,000 towards Shopmobility was rejected by the Grants Committee on 25 February because no money was available, and it had been made clear that the previous contribution was on a one-off basis.

### 3 CURRENT PROBLEMS WITH TAXICARD

3.1 In March 2010, ECTA became aware that the budget for Taxicard would be exceeded by some £2,000 (the shortfall being met by ECTA from its own resources). Officers from both Councils have since been working with ECTA to develop plans to keep the service within budget for 2010/11. The following measures are proposed:-

- Currently, ECTA require all claims by card holders to be submitted by the end of a financial year. That is how ECTA only became aware of the overspend in March. In future, card holders will be advised that claims have to be submitted monthly, so that the budget can be monitored and managed.
- It is proposed to limit claims to £75 per person annually instead of the current limit of £125.

3.2 The proposed reduction in the annual limit has been considered and compared with the following ways of reducing outgoings:-

- Closing the scheme to new applicants. This is considered less fair, in that a new applicant may have greater need than some existing card holders.
- Restricting reimbursement to specific journey purposes. This is considered unsatisfactory due to the difficulty in deciding that one purpose is more important than another. It would result in ECTA having to spend time making and justifying such decisions on a regular basis. From the point of view of users it would mean that the severely disabled people who use Taxicard would have their movements scrutinised in a way that able bodied people who use public transport, for example, are not subjected to.
- Tightening the eligibility criteria. This would better be done as part of an overall assessment of the transport services available to people with disabilities, rather than as a reaction to a funding shortfall.

3.3 ECTA have provided details of their users grouped according to size of claim for 2009/10, as follows:-

Amount of claim in £	Number of claimants
0.01 to 20.00	7
20.01 to 40.00	6
40.01 to 60.00	13
60.01 to 80.00	7
80.01 to 100.00	9
100.01 to 120.00	10
120.01 to 125.00	35
Total	87

Thus a significant minority of claimants (around 30) would be unaffected by the reduced limit, whereas the others would be affected to varying degrees.

3.4 A full equalities impact assessment has been carried out in view of the impact that this change will inevitably have on people with disabilities. The assessment is available on the Council's website. It concludes that there will inevitably be such an impact, however ECTA choose to balance their books, but that the proposal to reduce the limit spreads that impact more evenly among the people affected than would be the case

with other solutions. The situation will be reviewed in October 2010 and Taxicard users are being given the opportunity to comment prior to that.

#### **4 EXETER CITY COUNCIL FUNDING ARRANGEMENTS**

- 4.1 Devon County Council has suggested that ECTA's funding should be governed by a three year agreement, setting out ECTA's responsibilities in return for grant funding. Whereas the City Council approves funds in principle for some organisations in the form of core grants, ECTA is currently funded from the transportation budget which is agreed from year to year. There is merit in including ECTA in the core grants process from 2011, with the corresponding money being taken out of the transportation budget.
- 4.2 Given the progress that is being made towards the setting up of a new unitary council for Exeter, which would be responsible for agreeing various grants, it is not recommended that the Council make a three year commitment to ECTA at this stage. It is however recommended that ECTA be included in the core grants process from 2011, with the corresponding money being transferred from the transportation budget. This will be included in a report to the Grants Committee later in the year.
- 5 RECOMMENDED** that Members note the report, in particular the steps proposed by ECTA to deal with the budget shortfall for Taxicard, and the proposal to include ECTA in the core grants process from 2011.

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**Local Government Act 1972 (as amended)**

**Background papers used in compiling this report:-**

ECTA's usage statistics and claims information

Equalities impact assessment