

The Review of Taxicard and Cost Analysis of the Current Taxicard Scheme versus the Proposed New Scheme

A review of Cambridge City Council's Taxicard scheme has recently been carried out as it was some time since a review had been undertaken. This review was carried out in discussion with the Executive Councillor for Transport and Community Safety. Information on the review and outcome is set out below;

Research and findings

As part of this review we;

- Looked at membership numbers and voucher usage
- Reviewed what parts of the scheme worked well and not.
- Researched and benchmarked with the County Council on their Taxicard scheme, Taxicard in general and other local authorities schemes
- Reviewed links with other schemes / concessionary bus passes / Dial-a-Ride
- Reviewed the eligibility criteria of the Taxicard Application form with colleagues in Revenues and Benefits
- Reviewed renewal lengths (we currently do annually)
- Carried out cost modelling options for Taxicard Vouchers
- Reviewed where Taxicard Vouchers can be used i.e., allow use on Cambridge Dial-a-Ride
- Reviewed the number of vouchers that can be used at any one time
- Looked at the budget allocation and spend for the past few years
- The scheme had not changed since being introduced – did it support its members in the same way as it used to?
- Considered the further development of the scheme to a card based system, which would be a separate project in itself

Discussions with other local authorities centered on - pattern of membership/reduction, how many vouchers are in their books, value of vouchers, if they increase the voucher values annually and how many vouchers are permitted each journey. It seemed that a reduction in members was a general trend.

Some authorities have ceased to provide this service due to other financial pressures. From those conversations it was highlighted that

Cambridge City Council's scheme was more comprehensive compared to others.

In 2020 the City Council provided books of 100 vouchers each worth £3.70 off a journey. This price increases by 10p each year. We also pay a 5% admin fee to taxi companies who accept the vouchers. Some other authorities vouchers vary in numbers issued to users from 20-75 with the total value of vouchers ranging from £36.00 to £100, with no annual increase so the Council's scheme of offering 100 vouchers at £3.80 (£380 pa) with an annual 10p increase is more generous. Others would allow unlimited numbers of vouchers to be used, up to £20 at one time, and once they were gone, there were no more issued until the next financial year. Our voucher supplier has indicated that our scheme has more vouchers/amount than other schemes they administer.

A factor for a reduction in members use of Taxicard may be due to the use of a bus passes, which enable passengers to use public transport free of charge. This alleviates the requirement to pay the remainder of any taxi fare once the £3.80 subsidy has been applied. The eligibility criteria for a concessionary bus pass is very similar to a Taxicard.

In each of the other authorities spoken to, the taxi voucher scheme is used as an alternative to the Bus Passes which are issued from within the same team, with taxi vouchers being available to those who use a wheelchair day-to-day and expect this to continue. Those authorities were also responsible for issuing the concessionary bus passes and applicants can choose whether they wish to apply for a concessionary bus pass or taxi vouchers but users are only allowed to apply for one.

That is not the case within the City, with the City Council issuing Taxicards and Cambridgeshire County Council issuing the concessionary bus fares. Applicants are able to apply for, and use both, which may be a factor in a reduction in use.

The eligibility criteria for a concessionary bus pass is very similar to the City Council's requirements for a Taxicard. Each council sets its own eligibility criteria for the Taxicard scheme.

Some data analysis work was carried out to identify the number of vouchers issued in one particular financial year to our Taxicard members. From that, a large piece of data analysis work was carried out to identify how many vouchers each member used in that year.

Consultation on Proposals for 1 April changes

Conversations were also had with our existing supplier of the Taxicard vouchers to see whether the books could be produced in different ways going forward, i.e., a mix of voucher values in each book, and issuing throughout the year to new members. They agreed this could be done, with sufficient notice.

We consulted with representatives from Camsight, Healthwatch Cambridgeshire & Peterborough and Disability Cambridge over the proposed changes to the Taxicard scheme from 1 April and also on our proposals from 1 October. These organisations supported the proposals and thought what was trying to be achieved was positive, including the use of vouchers on Cambridge Dial-a-Ride whose drivers are trained to work with those with disabilities, the use of 2 vouchers rather than one if chosen to and the move to a card based system in the future was also welcomed. There were concerns around the low number of members, lack of publicity around the scheme, some organisations weren't aware of the scheme. Going forward publicity will include a press release, an article in Cambridge Matters, consideration for an article in Open Door and flyers / posters in public buildings, community centres and Shopmobility.

We ensured Taxi Drivers and Operators were kept informed of the changes to the scheme from 1 April, and also made them aware of the proposals which may be introduced from 1 October, if approved. Cambridge City Council's Taxi Trade Forum was attended and communication sent to all Taxi Drivers and Operators making them aware of the changes to 1 April. At the Forum attendees were given the opportunity to ask questions or to make contact should they have any comments or concerns. No feedback was received. Further communication and conversations will be required going forward with regards to how the scheme will operate from 1 October and ensuring information provided on invoices is uniform across the providers.

Use of the Scheme

The review looked at journey information, spend, and use of the vouchers issued. A sample of invoices received from Taxi Companies during the 2019/20 financial year were analysed to identify how members use their vouchers to travel.

This analysis identified that the top destinations for trips taken are;

- shops / town
- hospital
- recreational purposes
- railway station
- doctors

The review also enabled analysis of the data for invoices received relating to journeys taken for the financial year ending 31 March 2019. This showed an estimated 14,618 single journeys had been made (or vouchers used) out of the 51,900 issued to the 519 Taxicard members. Therefore, on average, members used around 28 of the 100 voucher allocation i.e, 28%. As the average member uses around 28 of their existing 100 voucher allocation, it is felt that a scheme which offers less vouchers with varying denominations of subsidy would be more beneficial to users going forward.

Figures were not taken for end March 2021, as the usage had reduced significantly due to the Coronavirus Pandemic.

Information has been obtained from 1 April when the change was made to allow members the option to use 2 vouchers per trip, if choosing to do so. From the information we currently have for April and May indicate there have been 1171 journeys made using vouchers for the £3.80 subsidy. 923 journeys using 1 voucher and 247 of those journeys having used 2 vouchers. The change introduced to support our members is being taken up by some of the existing members.

Application Form Eligibility

Discussions were had with colleagues in Revenues and Benefits over the current eligibility for the scheme and how this may be amended to include other residents of the City who could benefit from the scheme.

As a result it is proposed to include the following eligibility criteria to the application form from 1 October 2021;

- The Higher Care Component of the Disability Living Allowance
- The Daily Living Enhanced Personal Independence Payment

Going forward further additional eligibility criteria could include;

- The Mobility and Daily Living Enhanced Personal Independence Payment be reduced from Enhanced to Standard
- War Disablement Pensions
- Armed Forces Independence Payment

Cost Analysis of the Current Taxicard Scheme Versus the Proposed Scheme

Based on the information collated as part of this review, the data we have and average percentage of vouchers used for the end of financial year 2019 and 2020, the approximate total usage of vouchers is 28%. This figure of 28% is used in modelling in the tables below.

For modelling purposes, we have assumed 314 scheme members using £150 of vouchers (£47,100). Whilst this could be viewed as not being as generous as £380 of vouchers the current usage of the scheme has shown that not all users take up all 100 vouchers. The financial provision has never been based on full take-up of the vouchers.

If we were to offer 2 books per person for an improved scheme with increased take up and usage of vouchers we would exceed the budget.

The proposal has been designed to allow more people to use the vouchers in a meaningful way, within the current budget.

The proposals are to;

- Change the existing voucher denomination
- Allow members to choose how many vouchers per trip they use (so more than one)
- Make changes to the application form to improve the eligibility criteria
- Increase publicity around the scheme

For this reason no additional book of vouchers is planned to be issued to members in the same year once vouchers have been used. The onus will be on members to manage the use of their vouchers as is the case with some other local authorities who administer such schemes. This will be reviewed, once further promotion and publication of the scheme has been carried out and we can see how many additional members that publicity may bring to the scheme.

The cost analysis showing what this might look like and how many new members could benefit from the scheme if the changes are approved are as below.

Examples of what the budget might look like for the issue of two books as against one book per financial year is also shown in the table below.

Therefore by issuing one book of vouchers per financial year to members will allow for an increase in membership of up to 391 per year based on all 50 vouchers being used, so the scheme has the potential to have 705 members on board, membership figures we haven't seen since 2015. Thereby giving other eligible residents of Cambridge City the opportunity to benefit from the scheme as opposed to 38 new members if two books were to be issued in a financial year – a significant difference.

Existing Scheme and Voucher Arrangement						
No. of Members as at 21 May 2021	Vouchers Per Member	Voucher Subsidy Value	Total Amount of Subsidy Per Member	Average Cost Per Member based on 2019 Average Usage (i.e., 28%)	Total Cost of Scheme if All Members Use All Vouchers	Total Cost Based on 2019 Average Usage (i.e 28%)
314	100	£3.80	£380.00	£106.40	£119,320.00	£33,409.60

Proposed Scheme and Voucher Arrangement (based on issue of 50 vouchers)						
No. of Members as at 21 May 2021	Vouchers Per Member	Voucher Subsidy Value	Amount of Subsidy Per Member	Total Amount of Subsidy Per Member	Total Cost of Scheme if All Members Use All Vouchers	
314	25	£5.00	£125.00	£150.00	£47,100.00	
	25	£1.00	£25.00			
500	25	£5.00	£125.00	£150.00	75,000.00	
	25	£1.00	£25.00			

The above table shows what the spend would be should membership increase to 500.

Proposed Scheme and Voucher Arrangement If Issuing an Additional Book If Requested										
No. of Members as at 21 May 2021	Total Amount of Subsidy Per Member	Total Amount of Subsidy Used - 1st Book	Total Amount of Subsidy Used - 2nd Book	Cost Per Member Based on Total Use of All Vouchers	Total Cost of Scheme if Issuing Additional Book to Members	Total Budget for Usage 2020/21	Difference from Issue of 2 Books	New Member Availability Based on issue of 2 Books	Difference from Issue of 1 Book (£47,100)	New Member Availability Based on Issue of 1 Book
314	£150.00	£150.00	£150.00	£300.00	£94,200.00	£105,850	£11,650	38	£58,750	391

The above table provides modelling showing the capacity of the scheme if two books of vouchers are issued versus one book.