

Council still have Taxicard scheme in their sights



Taxicards may have escaped immediate action in the 2015-16 council budget but they are still very much in the council's sights as something that they can potentially save money on.

The saving might be a one-off £800,000 and the way it will work (if adopted) is that the council will get discounts of around 20-25% on taxi fares for those who need to use the service and then simply pass on the savings to the user. The user will also be asked to pay £20 per annum membership which will be introduced over the next three years, and a fee of £10 will be brought in to cover the administrative costs each year. The membership fees would raise income of about £180,000.

The Taxicard system is a scheme providing subsidised taxi journeys to residents who have difficulties getting around due to mobility or medical issues. It entitles the holder to 104 journeys a year and the council pays the first £3 of any journey above £5 which costs about £620,000 a year. Together with the membership fees this amounts to a revenue saving of £800,000.

Although the council anticipate objections to the proposed fees it believes that overall the discount would offset the membership fees.

At the recent budget meeting when the council set its financial framework for the next year the Conservative Group objected to the taxicard proposal and asked for the Director of Services for Communities to find alternative ways of making savings in this area.

ECAS is a voluntary organisation devoted to helping people with disability. They very much object to the council's proposals. Their spokesman explained this to The Edinburgh Reporter:

"By definition taxicards are only issued to people with severe mobility impairments. At the same time the Council plans to introduce an enhanced redundancy package. Because Councillors promised not to make people compulsorily redundant it seems they need to pay staff additional redundancy, over and above the legal entitlement, to persuade them to leave the Council.

"The Council also operates a "redeployment register" where staff can wait to be given a job if their job has come to an end. Ecas asked how much this was costing and the answer was that the Council does not keep a record – in other words they do not know how much it has cost to have up to 69 members of staff waiting for a new job.

"As one individual put it: "Is this some sort of perverse reverse Robin Hood – introducing charges to people on benefits whilst paying enhanced redundancy to Council managers?"

"Ecas, whose aim is to improve the lives of people with disabilities, has looked at these measures, and is urging all Councillors, of all parties, to consider whether it really is appropriate to introduce additional charges and changes for disabled, and other vulnerable, people whilst operating an uncosted no compulsory redundancy policy with enhanced redundancy schemes."

Following the recent decision to leave the scheme out of this year's budget, but to reinvestigate the CEO of ECAS, David Griffith said: "Whilst I welcome the Council's decision to require a report to the relevant committee once the additional equality and rights work is completed for the Taxicard proposal, it is disappointing that they still propose to introduce a new charge for people with disabilities.

“The Council’s own data suggests that the new scheme will actually result in higher costs for the average Taxicard user and so I am surprised that the Coalition Motion refers to “an effort to improve equalities and mobility”.”

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