

**ENVIRONMENT AND TRANSPORT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE****THURSDAY 14 JANUARY 2021**

The following supplementary questions were received from Mr. M Hunt CC

1. “Do we have any latitude within Government guidelines in paying over £5million concessionary fares to bus companies and where can the guidelines be accessed.”

**Response**

The methodology set out in the Government guidance in paying Concessionary Travel represents their preferred approach for calculating reimbursement. Authorities are free to use the methodology of their choice in estimating reimbursement subject to ensuring compliance with European regulation No 1370/2007, as well as relevant domestic legislation that governs concessionary travel reimbursement. While the Government has drafted this guidance to be wholly consistent with legal requirements pertaining to the compensation payable to bus operators, in specific certain circumstances it may be appropriate to deviate from it.

Authorities must reimburse bus operators for all concessionary journeys starting within their boundaries, regardless of whether the concessionary passholder making the journey is resident in the area. Reimbursement to operators are normally paid as a product of the number of concessionary passholder journeys, which has obviously dropped significantly during the pandemic. The Council has been paying operators at the same amount as 2019/20 throughout this financial year, in accordance with government Covid-19 guidance which urged authorities to reimburse at these levels despite the reduction in passenger numbers.

By maintaining concessionary fares funding at pre-Covid levels, the Council are playing an important part in supporting local bus services. In turn, this is allowing the government to maintain its support for the bus network. The most recent government guidance while asking that payments are made at pre-Covid levels, does allow authorities to consider reducing concessionary fare reimbursement funding to the level of service that operators are providing, so if an operator is only providing 80% service levels then the authority may consider reducing concessionary fare funding to 80%. Since the introduction of the most recent lockdown local operators have begun to consider such reduction in service levels.

Government guidance can be accessed here:

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/909536/reimbursing\\_bus\\_operators\\_for\\_concessionary\\_travel\\_2020\\_to\\_2021\\_guidance.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/909536/reimbursing_bus_operators_for_concessionary_travel_2020_to_2021_guidance.pdf)

2. “In what way have our bus services transitioned from ‘on traditional fixed routes operated by conventional buses’?”

**Response**

Since the development of the LTP3 over a decade ago there has been a notable change in the bus market with more and more flexible demand responsive transport services in operation, the Arriva Click service around Lubbethorpe is a recent

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example of this. The Government's drive for better rural mobility through demand responsive solutions, together with the rapid advancements of mobile apps and platforms emphasise the way in which the bus and passenger transport market as a whole is changing and heading. The County's recently adopted Passenger Transport Policy and Strategy (PTPS) aims to reflect this.

3. "The Passenger Transport Policy and Strategy states that "The Bus Services Act 2017 has opened possibilities for new partnership models (e.g. Advanced Quality Partnerships and Enhanced Partnerships) ...." When would this become relevant?"

Response

Whilst the 2017 Act has opened further possibilities for new partnership models, this is very much dependent on the funding available and the desire of commercial operators to enter into such partnerships. Advanced Quality Partnerships and Enhanced Partnerships tend to be most viable where there is a healthy and established commercial bus market in operation and this is more generally the case within large Cities. Leicestershire has an extensive supported bus network and the focus of our Passenger Transport Policy and Strategy (PTPS) has been to complete a full review of this network to ensure access to essential services is being provided in the most cost-effective way (albeit review progress has been impacted by the pandemic). The passenger transport market has been changing and the Covid-19 pandemic will generate significant challenges for operators with even further changes likely in the future, the need to adapt to these changes flexibly will therefore be key. With such challenges and changes on the very near horizon it will be important to assess the impacts before considering the value of entering into any such formal partnerships.

4. "Would you not agree that in the provision of bus shelters, just as with many public services, to paraphrase Bruce Springsteen, nobody takes responsibility if everyone's responsible?"

Response

The County Council is clear on the bus shelters it is responsible for and maintains and cleans those shelters accordingly.