



Subject:	Motion: Half Fare SmartPass Scheme – Response from Dfi
Date:	22 nd March, 2019
Reporting Officer:	Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager
Contact Officer:	Stephen McCrory, Democratic Services Manager

Restricted Reports	
Is this report restricted?	Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
If Yes, when will the report become unrestricted?	
After Committee Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
After Council Decision	<input type="checkbox"/>
Some time in the future	<input type="checkbox"/>
Never	<input type="checkbox"/>

Call-in	
Is the decision eligible for Call-in?	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>

1.0	Purpose of Report/Summary of Main Issues
1.1	To consider a response which has been received from Mr. Chris McLean, Public Transport Division, Department for Infrastructure, in relation to the Council's motion on the Half Fare SmartPass Scheme.
2.0	Recommendation
2.1	The Committee is asked to <ul style="list-style-type: none">Note the response and take any such action as may be determined.
3.0	Main Report
3.1	<u>Key Issues</u> The Council, at its meeting on 7th January, passed the following motion on the Half Fare SmartPass Scheme, which had been proposed by Councillor Corr Johnston and seconded by Alderman Copeland:

““This Council calls upon the Department for Infrastructure to extend the eligibility criteria for the Half Fare SmartPass Scheme to all Universal Credit claimants and to authorise the use of the SmartPass on all public transport services, such as the Belfast Taxis Community Interest Company and Shankill Road Taxis.”

3.2 A letter was forwarded subsequently to the Department for Infrastructure in relation to the motion.

3.3 A response has now been received from Mr. Chris McLean of DfI’s Public Transport Division, a copy of which is attached.

3.4 Mr. McLean explains that the Northern Ireland Concessionary Fares Scheme (the Scheme) provides free and discounted public transport as an important means of reducing social exclusion and highlights the fact that the Northern Ireland Executive supported over 22 million public transport journeys in 2017/18.

3.5 He points out that, to extend the eligibility criteria to all Universal Credit claimants, as called for within the first part of the motion, would be a major policy change and would not be a decision which a civil servant could take in the absence of a Minister. However, the request would be brought to the attention of an incoming Minister for Infrastructure and would have to be considered in light of the significant financial pressures being faced by the Scheme, as summarised within the response.

3.6 In terms of authorising the use of the SmartPass on all public transport services, such as the Belfast Taxis Community Interest Company and Shankill Road Taxis, Mr. McLean confirms that the scheme is open to private operators delivering public transport services under a commercial bus service permit. Those operators applying to participate in the Scheme were required to meet the necessary application and audit requirements set by the Department for Infrastructure. He points out that the Belfast Taxis Community Interest Company had submitted an application to join the Scheme and that it was being considered currently. He adds that, once an operator can demonstrate that they meet the criteria to join the Scheme, Ministerial approval would normally be sought. However, in the absence of a Minister, this issue would have to be considered in the context of the Executive Formation and Exercise of Functions Act 2018.

3.7	<p><u>Financial and Resource Implications</u></p> <p>None</p> <p><u>Equality or Good Relations Implications/Rural Needs Assessment</u></p>
3.8	None
4.0	Appendices – Documents Attached
	Appendix 1 - Response from Mr. McLean, Public Transport Division.