



at the heart of the National Forest



COUNCILLOR FRANK ST
LEADER OF **THE COU**

Cllr John Fort
Leader of the Executive
Harborough **District** Council
Council Offices
Adam and Eve Street
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31 January 2002

Dear John

Concessionary Travel Scheme

Thanks for your letter of 25 January which has now been considered by our Executive Board. I regret to advise you that this Council won't be in a position to agree any late changes to the agreement previously reached on **this** issue which is subject to annual review as a matter **of course** commencing in August 2002.

You will be aware that this came about only after difficult and protracted negotiations by our respective financial **officers**. It inevitably involved a number of compromises to come up with a worthwhile scheme that we could all live with within **the** resources available to each authority and the **timescales** being laid down by the County at that time.

Here at North West **Leicestershire**, we are having to cut our cloth according to our means. Diverging trends between income and expenditure have meant that we have a significant budget deficit and we are having to have a fundamental rethink about what we do. As a result, we are deep into a service priority review with the aim of **prioritising** the most important services and taking some tough decisions on the remainder.

There are **lots** of things we would **like** to do if money was no object, but it is. As you will know, the Government's draft proposals for Revenue Support Grant are very disappointing for **districts** and, **unless they** listen to our request to have a rethink, **we'll** be getting some **£90,000** less than we had originally expected in the next financial year. This is because the transfer of funding for post-16 **education** will be a saving for the County Council but not **result** in any reduction in **District services** or spending.

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We also note that the proposal is for a **50/50** share between County and Districts rather than the **65/35 split previously agreed** for the next financial year. This implies that any future revisions to the scheme over the next two years will immediately be funded on this 50/50 basis. Given the **scale of** our respective resources, we do not see this **as equitable**.

There are also question marks over the **necessity** for this concession. Those disabled people who are in work and therefore need to travel before **9.30am will** be wage earners so why should they be singled out for special treatment? How many people would benefit? We are not precluding anyone from **travelling** before this time, just saying that the concession will only be available **outside rush** hour periods which is, of course, in accordance with the minimum statutory scheme. Those who are not able to work are also likely to be in **receipt of other** benefits such as Disability Living Allowance, which **include** an **element** for mobility.

We also feel that the real issue should be mobility rather than disability. Many disabilities do not prevent "normal" **mobility**, but those who, for example, are confined to wheelchairs are still excluded from many **forms** of public transport. If you can't physically get on a bus, what use is a **concession**?

We are very sensitive to the special needs of people with disabilities and the need to work towards an inclusive society. However, we are not convinced that "knee jerk" changes to previous hard won agreements are the best and most effective way forward.

We would **welcome** further debate on these wider issues in consultation with **people** with **disabilities** and their representative groups.

Yours sincerely

Cllr Frank Straw

Leader of the Council

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