Mr. Michael McAdam

A/Senior Executive Officer,

South Dublin County Council,

County Hall,

Tallaght,

Dublin 24.

Your Ref: M71462

DEPREP– 2021 – 26157 July 2021

Dear Michael,

Ms. Heather Humphreys TD, Minister for Social Protection, has asked me to reply to your correspondence on behalf of the members of South Dublin County Council regarding the extension of the free travel scheme to people who suffer with epilepsy and have their drivers licences temporarily suspended.

The Free Travel scheme provides free travel on the main public and private transport services for those eligible under the scheme.  These include road, rail and ferry services provided by companies such as Bus Átha Cliath, Bus Éireann and Iarnród Éireann, as well as Luas and services provided by over 80 private transport operators.  There are currently approx. 999,000 customers with direct eligibility.  The estimated expenditure on free travel in 2021 is €95 million.

In general, access to a free travel pass for those aged under 66 is linked to a person being in receipt of certain primary Social Protection payments such as Disability Allowance, Invalidity Pension, Carer’s Allowance, Blind Pension and Partial Capacity Benefit.

Any possible extension to the eligibility criteria for free travel to include those diagnosed with epilepsy regardless of whether they receive a qualifying payment would have significant implications for the free travel scheme. It would be expected that any such decision would immediately lead to calls for all people who had a disability and/or significant health issues to be eligible for a free travel pass.

If the Free Travel scheme was to be extended to all people who had a disability and/or significant health issues, regardless of whether they receive a qualifying payment, a medical assessment process would be required for all such applications, significantly changing the nature of the scheme and requiring additional administrative processes to be put in place in order to adjudicate eligibility. Significant extra funding would also be required and accordingly, it could only be considered in the context of overall budgetary negotiations.

Under the Supplementary Welfare Allowance scheme, the Department may award a travel supplement, where the circumstances of the particular case so warrant.  The supplement is intended to assist with ongoing or recurring travel costs that cannot be met from the client’s own resources and are deemed to be necessary.  Every decision is based on consideration of the circumstances of the individual case, taking account of the nature and extent of the need and of the resources of the person concerned.

I hope this clarifies the position.

Yours sincerely,

David O’Callaghan

Pensions Policy and Free Scheme Unit

***The Minister is a Designated Public Official under the Regulation of Lobbying Act, 2015***

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