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Mr Jim Eadie MSP

Convener

Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee

The Scottish Parliament

EDINBURGH

EH99 1SP

19 March 2015

Dear Jim,

Veterans' Eligibility for National Concessionary Travel Scheme

Following David Stewart's comments in the Infrastructure and Capital Investment Committee meeting on 4 March about veterans' eligibility for the National Concessionary Travel Scheme (NCTS), I undertook to provide some further information.

Since its introduction in 2006, the NCTS has included a range of disability-based criteria for eligibility. For the purposes of the scheme, disability is regarded as a physical or mental impairment that severely affects a person's mobility and, therefore, their ability to carry out day to day activities. The only criterion that relates specifically to veterans is receipt of a War Disablement Pension Mobility Supplement. The War Disablement Pension Mobility Supplement is normally awarded to those assessed as having a disability of 40% or more. War pensioners and veterans who do not meet this criterion are not eligible for NCTS, unless they satisfy one of the other disability criteria, in keeping with the eligibility of civilians with similar levels of disability.

In July 2008, the UK Government made a commitment in its Service Personnel Command Paper to extend eligibility of concessionary travel schemes to include seriously injured personnel and veterans by 1 April 2011. Discussions were held with the Department for Transport and Welsh Government over a number of months as to how this commitment could be taken forward to ensure a consistent approach throughout GB. It was initially felt that legislation could be amended to include seriously injured HM service personnel and veterans as a separate category of eligible person. However, this option was not pursued due to the potential for legal challenge on disability discrimination grounds from civilians with similar disabilities.

Instead, the commitment was met by including automatic eligibility for seriously injured veterans and service personnel who received a Guaranteed Income Payment under the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) (for injuries affecting mobility) and who fell within the existing disability eligibility categories of the concessionary travel schemes. In Scotland, this enables seriously injured service personnel and veterans who already meet the eligibility criteria of the NCTS to use their AFCS award letter as evidence that they qualify under the scheme without the need to undergo further medical assessments or provide further documentary evidence. These arrangements enable applications from eligible service personnel and veterans to be fast tracked, making the application process quicker and easier.


Mr Alan Young has campaigned for eligibility under the scheme to be extended to include more veterans. He has now raised a petition (PE01549) with the Public Petitions Committee, lobbying for all veterans in receipt of a war disablement pension to receive concessionary travel. The petition has recently closed, having received 103 signatures and is likely to be considered by the Committee in the next few weeks. Mr Young is a veteran himself, and receives a War Disablement Pension, but as he has been assessed as being 20% disabled he does not qualify for the Mobility Supplement and, therefore, does not qualify for a free bus pass.

The Scottish Government is fully committed to the principles and ethos of the Armed Forces Covenant in respect of our devolved responsibilities. The principle of the Covenant is that the Armed Forces Community should face no disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of services, and the arrangements put in place across the UK, including Scotland, aim to ensure that that is the case.

I will be following the discussions on this petition with interest but have no plans to extend the eligibility criteria for the NCTS at this time.

I am sending a copy of this letter to David Stewart MSP.

Kind regards



DEREK MACKAY