



<u>Committee and Date</u>
Cabinet
27 February 2019

<u>Item</u>
<u>Public</u>

Discretionary School & College Transport – Permission to Consult

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1. Summary

The Council is committed to providing efficient, integrated transport services whilst ensuring that its statutory duties are met. Financial pressures mean that the Council has identified a £717k savings target attributed to school transport, including those transport functions which are discretionary in nature.

The Council's Passenger Transport Services have introduced a number of innovative transport solutions to reduce the pressure on the home to school transport budget and whilst these have been and continue to be successful, in order to realise a significant budget reduction a policy change is needed.

There are a number of other projects that are being undertaken to achieve this target in addition to the proposals within this report. These include a further development of the personal transport budget programme, network reviews and digital procurement.

This report sets out proposed policy changes and seeks approval from Cabinet to consult on the proposals as detailed below.

Should Cabinet agree to this consultation, the Council would undertake a six-week consultation during March and April with various stakeholders including elected Members, schools and colleges, Parent Advocacy groups, Voluntary & Community Sectors, Town & Parish Councils etc. Following this period, the results of this consultation would be analysed and compiled before returning to Cabinet on 1 May 2019 for a decision on whether to adopt this policy.

Any changes would come into effect from 1 September 2019 and will be applicable to new applicants, as with previous practice the removal of provision will be on a phased approach, protecting all those pupils and students entitled within the existing schemes.

2. Recommendations

2.1 That Cabinet approve a consultation on the following proposed policy changes:

- To increase the lower rate contribution to 50% of the cost of the mainstream scheme from £142.50 to £437.50, maintaining the upper limit of the scheme at its current £875 pa.
- To expand the contributions scheme to include SEND post 16 students, in line with the mainstream scheme.
- To withdraw the Council's financial support for Nursery SEND pupil transport.

2.2 That Cabinet agree to receive a further report following the consultation process.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

3.1 An ESIIA, part 1 has been completed and is attached at Appendix A.

3.2 Should the Council propose to withdraw its financial support for discretionary school and college transport it would have a high negative impact on protected characteristic groupings, in particular those for Age, Disability, Pregnancy and Maternity, Sex, and Social Inclusion. It would also potentially be seen as running against the corporate aims of the Council with regard to children and young people and their life chances.

3.3 It has also been recommended by the Rurality and Equalities Specialist that, based upon what is known to date and the predicted negative impacts for vulnerable groupings, the service area should proceed to carry out a Part 2 ESIIA, with all the forensic scrutiny that such an exercise would involve.

3.4 Further analysis would need to be informed by results of the proposed consultation and will be explained within the subsequent report to Cabinet.

4. Background

4.1 The Council currently provides the following support for Mainstream post 16, SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) post 16 students and Nursery SEND pupils.

4.2 Post 16 – Mainstream Sixth Forms and Colleges

- The Council currently provides transport assistance for 200 post 16 students to mainstream school 6th forms or other Further Educational establishments.

- Of the 200 post 16 students receiving transport assistance, 59 students are paying the higher rate of the contribution of £875pa and 141 students are paying the lower rate of contribution of £142.50pa.
- These students are provided with either a bus pass on a public service vehicle or a seat on a school transport contract, this is usually dependent upon which type of Further Education establishment they are attending.
- Transport entitlement is defined as “a student living 3 miles or more from their designated FE establishment”.
- We do not normally offer bespoke transport solutions such as minibuses or taxis.

4.3 **Post 16 – SEND Students**

- The Council currently transport 144 post 16 SEND students to a number of specialist FE establishments for which no contribution is applied.
- These students will travel to their FE establishment in either a shared vehicle with other SEND pupils, or a bespoke vehicle as a result of their additional needs or geographical location.
- Before a seat on a vehicle is allocated, if appropriate, the initial offer to parents will be in the form of Independent Travel training, where by the student receives one to one training to give them the confidence and skills to use public transport. This has proven to have much wider benefits to the students and their families than just accessing college transport, through creating independence and establishing life skills.
- The proposal to include SEND post 16 students will ensure a consistent approach across all post 16 Transport and also reflects a practice taken by a number of other councils.

4.4 **Nursery SEND Pupils**

- The Council currently transports 17 Nursery aged students, who all attend Severndale Nursery for which no contribution is applied.
- Nursery pupils who attend Severndale special school receive free transport if it is deemed appropriate because of their additional needs.
- These pupils are located county wide, which represents a logistical challenge in order to keep costs to a minimum.
- Before a vehicle is allocated for a pupil, parents are offered travelling expenses at a pre-agreed daily mileage.

5. Financial Implications

Table A below shows the discretionary areas of transport currently supported by Council via £679,000 of funding, alongside the estimated net financial impact that would result from the proposals.

(** It should be noted that this figure does not include the proportionate costs of post 16 students travelling on contracted routes to their local school 6th form.)

Entitlement Category	Number of Pupils/Students	Net Spend 2017/18	Estimated Net Financial Impact 2019/21
Post 16 Mainstream	200	£105,000**	+£42,000
Post 16 SEND	144	£502,000	+£100,625
Nursery SEND	17	£72,000	+£60,000
Total	361	£679,000	+£202,625

5.1 Mainstream Post 16 Transport

5.1.1 The Council's annual spend on mainstream post 16 transport has reduced significantly year on year from circa £900k pa to its current level of £105k pa (2017/18), following the introduction of the revised contribution scheme as well as reduced season ticket rates for students negotiated with local operators.

5.2.1 Following negotiations with our transport operator's students can continue to access their respective post 16 establishments, but now with greater flexibility of travel and in many cases a significantly lower rate. At the same time the number of students accessing the Council's scheme has reduced from c900 to 200, as many have opted to purchase tickets directly from the operators to access these benefits.

5.1.3 The Council currently provides a contribution scheme for those entitled mainstream students that qualify for post 16 transport assistance. The contribution levels for this scheme are currently set at £875 for the higher level and £142.50 for those parents of students who are on a low income.

5.1.4 Those students who face hardship in paying for their travel are also able to access support through 6th form and college bursaries and a number of students are currently accessing this support.

5.1.5 To increase the contribution level to 50% of the full cost for those parents of students who are on a low income would result in an estimated £42,000 savings to the Council (2019-21).

5.2 SEND Post 16

- 5.2.1 The Council's annual spend on SEND post 16 transport stood at £502k for the 2017/18 financial year with entitled student numbers at 144. Student numbers in this category continue to increase year on year by an average of 5%. SEND post 16 pupils are not currently subject to the contribution scheme.
- 5.2.2 Those students who face hardship in paying for their travel are also able to access support through 6th form and college bursaries and a number of students are currently accessing this support.
- 5.2.3 Introducing a contribution for students with SEN in line with the mainstream scheme, i.e. £875 for the higher level and £142.40 for those parents of students who are on a low income, would result in an estimated £100,625 savings for the Council (2019-21)

5.3 SEND Nursery Transport

- 5.3.1 The council's annual spend on SEND nursery transport stood at £72k for the 2017/18 financial year with entitled pupil numbers at 17. Nursery transport numbers have reduced significantly year on year as local nursery provision has become more widely available.
- 5.3.2 The removal of SEN nursery transport would result in £60,000 savings for the Council (2019-21).

5.4 Net Financial Impact to the Council of consultation proposals

In respect of the potential savings to the Council, as laid out in 2.1, then should support for Nursery SEND transport cease, SEND post 16 be included within the terms of the contribution scheme and revised contribution levels adopted, it is estimated that this would realise the following:

- Withdrawal of Nursery SEND Transport: £60,000 saving at maturity
- Mainstream: £42,000 of estimated increased revenue at maturity
- SEND post 16 FYE: £100,625 of estimated increased revenue at maturity
- **Total: £202,625**

6. Additional Information

- 6.1 We have engaged with a number of other local authorities and gained direct comparisons on what travel assistance is offered for these discretionary areas, as shown in Table B.
- 6.2 This research has highlighted that some local authorities do not offer Nursery SEND travel assistance and some do not offer mainstream post 16 travel assistance.

However, we are unable to identify another local authority that currently does not offer post 16 SEND Travel Assistance. It is important to note that our list of local authorities is not exhaustive, and a number did say that they were considering similar options to ourselves.

- A number of local authorities do not provide nursery transport.
- Where they do provide nursery transport it is in the form of a seat on an existing vehicle and not bespoke (a separate taxi).
- Post 16 contribution schemes are applied to those SEN students entitled to assistance (as with our current mainstream post 16 scheme).
- In some cases, Independent Travel Training and a bus pass are the only post 16 offers available to students and their families.
- We are unable to find a local authority that has completely withdrawn SEND post 16 (although we have not exhausted every local authority nationally)

Table B

	Post 16 Transport Provided	Contribution	SEND Contribution if different	Nursery SEND Transport Provided	Independent Travel Training Provided
Shropshire	16-19	£875 / £142.50	Free	Y	Y
Herefordshire	16-19	£789	-	N	Y
Worcestershire	16-19	Variable charges based on zones	-	N	Y
Cheshire West	16-19	Only on hardship grounds	-	N	Y
Chester & Cheshire East	16-19	£800 / £440 on hardship grounds	-	Y	Y
North Yorkshire	16-19	£490 / £245	-	Y	Y
Wiltshire	16-19	£710 / £210	£499 / £184	N	Y

Devon	16-19	£600	-	N	Y
Solihull	16-19	£680	£645	N	Y
Warwickshire	16-19	£780 / £390	-	N	Y
Staffordshire	16-19	£494 (low income only)	£625 / £494	N	Y
Lincolnshire	16-19	£570	-	N	Y
Cumbria	16-19	£410	-	N	N
Lancashire	16-19	None, only SEN Post 16 provided	Free	N	Y
Wolverhampton	16-19	Free	Free	Y	Y
Hampshire	16-19	0 to 5 miles = £600 5 to 7.5 miles = £831 7.5 to 10 miles = £1164 10+ miles = £1330	-	N	N
Buckinghamshire	16-19	Free	Free	N	Y
Powys	16-19	Free	Free	N	N

Monmouthshire	16-19	£440	-	N	N
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The Council applies both its mandatory and discretionary statutory duties in providing transport to support student attendance at school/colleges and is considering changes to ensure levels of support are sustainable for those students to whom there is a mandatory statutory duty.

There is also the potential that students can be supported for transport cost through college bursaries that are allocated at their discretion, should the Council amend the contribution scheme to include these discretionary areas.

List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)

Cabinet Report 15 June 2011: School and Post 16 Transport Policy Report.

Application for Post 16 Transport Contribution Scheme & Information for Parents/Students (available on the Shropshire Council web page)
<https://www.shropshire.gov.uk/media/9976/37034-app-for-post-16-trans.pdf>)

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Councillor Nick Bardsley

Local Member

All

Appendices

Appendix A – ESIIA