



Committee and Date

Cabinet

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Item

Public

Discretionary School and College Transport

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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 has introduced a number of innovative transport solutions in recent years 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 savings 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. Personal Transport Budgets (PTBs), in particular, have been a popular choice for parents and carers enabling them to have a greater freedom of choice in how their child travels to school, whilst also reducing the Council's spend on high cost single occupancy vehicles.

The Council has undertaken a seven-week consultation about the proposals within the report during March, April and May 2019 with various stakeholders including elected members, schools and colleges, parent advocacy groups, voluntary and community sectors and Town & Parish Councils. The consultation was extended into May 2019 following feedback received by parents and carers during the consultation period. Following this period, the results of this consultation have now been analysed and compiled before returning to Cabinet for a decision. It is important to note that the original proposals were amended in light of the comments received during the consultation. Details of the feedback received from the consultation can be found in Appendix A.

The initial proposals were as follows:

- A. To increase the lower rate contribution to 50% of the cost of the full Post 16 mainstream scheme (£437.50), maintaining the upper limit of the scheme at its current £875 pa. This is consistent with many other councils' Post 16 schemes.
- B. To expand the contribution scheme to include SEND Post 16 students, ensuring a consistent approach across all Post 16 transport, whilst also reflecting practice in a number of other councils.

- C. To withdraw the council's financial support for nursery, SEND transport assistance. Nursery transport numbers have reduced significantly year on year as local provision has become more widely available. A phased approach to the implementation of this proposal would ensure there is no impact on existing pupils.

Having considered the views and concerns raised within the consultation responses from the various stakeholders, parents and carers the recommendations set out below have been amended from the initial proposals submitted to Cabinet on 6 March 2019.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To note the feedback received from the various consultees and stakeholders, detailed in Appendix A of this report. and to approve the amended Recommendations as follows:-
 - A. To set the lower rate of the contribution to £280 per student, whilst maintaining the upper limit of the Post 16 mainstream scheme at its current £875 pa.
 - B. To expand the contribution scheme to include SEND Post 16 students at the contribution rates, ensuring a consistent approach across all Post 16 transport, whilst also reflecting practice in a number of other councils.
 - C. To continue to support nursery SEND transport assistance, incorporating nursery school SEND transport within the Council's contribution scheme for discretionary travel as laid out in the amended recommendation above.
- 2.2 That any changes would come into effect from 1 September 2019 and will only be applicable to new applicants. As with previous practice, the removal of provision will be on a phased basis, protecting all those pupils and students entitled within the existing schemes.

REPORT

3. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

- 3.1 Proposals to withdraw all financial support for discretionary school and college transport, which would have resulted in £512k savings, were considered by officers during 2018. An ESIIA was undertaken which identified high negative impact on protected characteristic groupings
- 3.2 As a result, proposals were amended in order to mitigate the impact. The ESIIA also recommended a further Stage One screening ESIIA for the proposals (contained in this report) would need to be undertaken. This has been completed and is attached at Appendix B.

3.3 The ESIIA has identified that there is potential of Medium Negative Impact on protected characteristic groupings, in particular those for age, disability, 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.

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 sixth forms or other Further Educational (FE) establishments.
- Of the 200 Post 16 students currently receiving transport assistance, 59 students are paying the higher rate of the contribution of £875 pa and 141 students are paying the lower rate of contribution of £142.50 pa.
- 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 FE establishment they are attending.
- Transport entitlement is defined as “a student living 3 miles or more from their designated FE establishment”.
- The Council does not normally offer bespoke transport solutions such as minibuses or taxis.
- 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.
- 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 circa 900 to 200, as many have opted to purchase tickets directly from the operators to access these benefits.
- 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.
- Those students who face hardship in paying for their travel are also able to access support through sixth form and college bursaries and a number of students are currently accessing this support.

4.3 **Post 16 – SEND Students**

- The Council currently transports 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 practice in a number of other councils.
- The Council's annual spend on SEND Post 16 transport stood at £502k for the 2017/18 financial year with entitled student numbers of 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.
- Those students who face hardship in paying for their travel are also able to access support through sixth form and college bursaries and a number of students are currently accessing this support.
- Introducing a contribution for students with SEN in line with the mainstream scheme, i.e. £875 for the higher level and £280 for those parents of students who are on a low income, would result in an estimated £81,970 savings for the Council (full year effect).

4.4 **Nursery SEND Pupils**

- The Council currently transports 17 nursery aged students, who all attend Severndale Specialist Academy Nursery for which no contribution is applied.
- Nursery pupils who attend Severndale Specialist Academy 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.
- The council's annual spend on SEND nursery transport stood at £72k for the 2017/18 financial year with entitled pupil numbers of 17. Nursery transport

numbers have reduced significantly year on year as local nursery provision has become more widely available.

- Introducing a contribution scheme for SEND nursery transport would result in £8,925 savings for the Council (full year effect).

5. Financial Implications

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

Entitlement Category	Number of Pupils/Students	Net Spend 2017/18	Estimated Net Financial Impact (full year effect)
Post 16 Mainstream	200	£105,000**	+£19,388
Post 16 SEND	144	£502,000	+£81,970
Nursery SEND	17	£72,000	+£8,925
Total	361	£679,000	+£110,283

(** 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 sixth form)

The revised recommendations will at full year maturity provide £92,342 less of budgetary savings, compared to the recommendations consulted upon. To address this shortfall the Council's Passenger Transport Team will continue to develop innovative transport solutions, such as Personal Transport Budgets and Independent Travel Training, as well as reducing costs in the areas of single occupancy taxis, TMBSS (Tuition, Medical and Behaviour Support Service) and Exclusion transport.

5.2 Net Financial Impact to the Council of Consultation Proposals

In respect of the potential savings to the Council, as laid out in section 5 above, the following budget reductions would be realised:

- Nursery SEND transport: £8,925 saving at maturity
- Mainstream: £19,388 of estimated increased revenue at maturity
- SEND Post 16 (full year effect): £81,970 of estimated increased revenue at maturity
- **Total: £110,283**

6 The consultation and how feedback was generated

The Council carried out a seven-week consultation and contacted various stakeholders including elected members, schools and colleges, parent advocacy groups and Town and Parish Councils. A press release was issued and all media outlets utilised including social media, as well as placing the consultation on the Council's online portal.

The following proposals went to consultation:

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

Feedback was received from a number of different groups, including: parents and carers, schools and colleges, members of the public, Town and Parish Councils, and Shropshire's Parent and Carer Council (PACC), which represents some parents of pupils with SEND within Shropshire.

There are 361 families that are currently in receipt of the services described above and 33 responses were received from these families which is a 9% response rate - all of the responses were opposed to the proposals.

Many of the consultees/stakeholders commented on all three areas of the consultation, a small minority commented on only one area.

The responses received were varied and detailed, focusing on a number of areas, with the key themes including:

- Equality and discrimination
- Social isolation
- Significant negative impact on the ability of disabled students to access education
- Hindering young people from accessing education and reaching their full potential
- Increasing the number of young people in Shropshire who are not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET)
- Negative impact on the equality of opportunity for disabled learners
- Further isolation of rural communities and the students within them
- Further disadvantage to already vulnerable or low-income families
- Affordability
- Cumulative impact on parents and carers of financial hardship through reductions in other grants and benefits e.g. universal credit.
- Negative impact on the Councils own Economic Growth Strategy, by restricting learners from gaining skills and qualifications that perspective employers will require.

Please refer to Appendix A for full comments and feedback.

7. Net Financial Impact to the Council of Consultation Proposals

In respect of the potential savings to the Council, as laid out in section 5 above, the following budget reductions would be realised:

- Nursery SEND transport: £8,925 saving at maturity
- Mainstream: £19,388 of estimated increased revenue at maturity

- SEND Post 16 (full year effect): £81,970 of estimated increased revenue at maturity
- **Total: £110,283**

8. Additional Information

- 8.1 Officers 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.
- 8.2 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, officers have not been able to identify another local authority that currently does not offer Post 16 SEND travel assistance. It is important to note that the list of local authorities contacted is not exhaustive, and a number did say that they were considering similar options to Shropshire.
- 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 (e.g. a separate taxi).
 - Post 16 contribution schemes are applied to those SEN students entitled to assistance (as with Shropshire's 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.
 - The research has not identified a local authority that has completely withdrawn SEND Post 16 (although not every local authority nationally has been contacted).
- 8.3 The revised recommendations as laid out in section 2, would still see the Council's contribution scheme represent better value than others shown within the table below, with the Council continuing to recognise a need for a lower level contribution for those families on benefits. In addition, the Council will continue to support nursery SEND travel through the contribution scheme, whereas many other councils do not offer any assistance.

Table B

	Post 16 Transport Provided	Contribution	SEND Contribution if different	Nursery SEND Transport Provided	Independent Travel Training Provided
Shropshire (Existing levels)	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

		0 to 5 miles = £600 5 to 7.5 miles = £831 7.5 to 10 miles = £1164 10+ miles = £1330			
Hampshire	16-19		-	N	N
Buckinghamshire	16-19	Free	Free	N	Y
Powys	16-19	Free	Free	N	N
Monmouthshire	16-19	£440	-	N	N

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

Cabinet Report 6 March 2019: Discretionary School and College Transport.

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 Ed Potter

Local Member

All

Appendices

Appendix A – Responses from consultation
Appendix B - ESIIA