



Committee and Date

Cabinet

19 July 2023

Item

Public



Permission to consult on the removal of discretionary areas of School and College transport assistance

Responsible Officer:	James Willocks		
email:	James.willocks@shropshire.gov.uk	Tel:	01743 253041
Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder):	Kirstie Hurst-Knight		

1. Synopsis

The purpose of this report is to seek permission to consult on the removal of all discretionary provision (other than in exceptional circumstances) of home to school transport, this is Nursery and Post 16 SEND and mainstream Post 16 students.

2. Executive Summary

The Council is committed to providing efficient, integrated transport services whilst ensuring that its statutory duties continue to be met. However, the current significant financial pressures mean that the Council must review those transport functions which are discretionary in nature.

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

The Council's Passenger Transport Group have introduced a number of innovative transport solutions to reduce the pressure on the home to school transport budget and

whilst these have and continue to be successful, to realise a significant budget reduction a policy change is needed.

Currently Shropshire Council offer an enhancement to its statutory duty through a post 16/nursery contribution scheme, details of which are provided through the Council's website and accessed by parent's and carers.

Should Cabinet agree to this consultation, the Council would undertake an eight-week consultation during September and October 2023 (to avoid the school holidays) 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 for a decision on whether to adopt the draft policy.

Any changes would come into effect from 1 September 2024 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.

3. Recommendations

That Cabinet:-

- 3.1 Authorise the consultation process as set out in section 2 to removal all discretionary areas of home to school travel assistance (other than in exceptional circumstances)
- 3.2 Expect a future report setting out the outcome and recommendations arising from the consultation process.

Report

4. Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

An ESHIA, part 1 has been completed and attached marked **Appendix A**.

- 4.1 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.

5. Financial Implications

The council currently supports the discretionary areas of transport (i.e. Nursery and Post 16 SEND and mainstream Post 16 students) via £0.647m of funding as highlighted in Table A.

(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 2022/23
Post 16 Mainstream	56	£76,418
Post 16 SEND	104	£543,281
Nursery SEND	6	26,906
Total	166	£646,605

5.1 Mainstream Post 16 Transport

The council's annual spend on mainstream post 16 transport stood at £76,418 for the 22/23 financial year with entitled students numbers at 56.

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 £933 for the higher level and £299 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 6th form and college bursaries and a number of students are currently accessing this support.

5.2 Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Post 16 Transport

The council's annual spend on SEND post 16 transport stood at £543,281 for the 22/23 financial year with entitled student numbers at 104. SEND post 16 pupils are also subject to the contribution scheme.

The contribution levels for this scheme are currently set at £933 for the higher level and £299 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 6th form and college bursaries and a number of students are currently accessing this support.

5.3 Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Nursery Transport

The council's annual spend on SEND Nursery transport stood at £26,906 for the 22/23 financial year with entitled pupil numbers at 6. Nursery transport numbers have reduced significantly year on year as provision locally has become more widely available.

The contribution levels for this scheme are currently set at £933 for the higher level and £299 for those parents of students who are on a low income.

5.4 Net Financial Impact to the Council of consultation proposals

In respect of the potential cost reductions to the Council, the transport network would need to be re-designed to realise the financial savings highlighted within the Council's financial plan.

It is anticipated that £0.350m of cost reductions would be achieved through network changes resulting from the withdrawal of these discretionary areas.

6. Climate Change Appraisal

- 6.1. A “no effect” outcome is expected against energy and fuel consumption, renewable energy generation, carbon offsetting and climate change adaptation as it is not anticipated that any additional vehicles will be on the road, existing vehicles/seats will be utilised for eligible, statutory aged pupils.

7. Background

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

Shropshire Council applies policy by meeting the statutory obligations that apply to School transport from the Education Act 1996 as amended by section 77 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006 (in particular sections 508A –E and Schedule 35B) coupled with ‘The Department of Education’s Home to School Travel and Transport Guidance’

7.1 Post 16 – Mainstream Sixth Forms and Colleges

- The Council currently provides transport assistance for 56 post 16 students to mainstream school 6th forms or other Further Educational establishments.
- Of the 56 post 16 students receiving transport assistance, 40 students are paying the higher rate of the contribution and 16 students paying the lower rate
- 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

7.2 Post 16 – SEND Students

- The Council currently transport 104 Post 16 SEND students to a number of specialist FE establishments. Of the 104 students, 65 are paying the higher rate of contribution and 39 students paying the lower rate

- 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.

7.3 Nursery SEND Pupils

- The Council currently transport 6 Nursery aged students, who all attend Severdale Nursery
- 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.

8. Additional Information

8.1 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.

This research has highlighted that some Local Authorities do not offer Nursery SEND 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 (such as a separate taxi).
- Post 16 contribution schemes are applied to those SEND students entitled to assistance (as with our current mainstream post 16 scheme).

Table B

	Post 16 Transport Provided (SEND and mainstream)	Previous Contribution (Full Payer/Proof of Benefit)	2023/24 Contribution (Full Payer/Proof of Benefit)	Historic SEND Contribution	2023/24 SEND Contribution (Full Payer/Proof of Benefit)	Nursery Transport Provided (Y/N)	Independent Travel Training Provided (Y/N)
Shropshire	Y	£875 / £142.50	£933/£299	Free	£933/£299	Y	Y
Herefordshire	Y	£789	£960/refer to college for bursary if low income, or in	-	£960/refer to college for bursary if low income, or in	Y	Y

Cabinet – 19th July 2023 – Permission to Consult on the Removal of Discretionary Areas of School and College Transport Assistance.

			receipt of benefits		receipt of benefits (19-25 y/o SEND, it is free)		
Worcestershire	Y	Variable charges based on zones	Variable charges based on zones	-	Variable charges based on zones	Y	Y
North Yorkshire	Y	£490 / £245	£747.50 / £373.75	-	£747.50 / £373.75	N	Y
Wiltshire	Y	£710 / £210	£900/£300	£499 / £184	£650/£300	N	Y
Devon	Y	£600	£690/Dependent on school	-	Dependent on school	N	Y
Solihull	Y	£705	£750	£645	£750	N	Y
Warwickshire	Y	£836/£209	£870/£217.50	-	£870/£217.50	N	Y
Staffordshire	Y	£494 (low income only)	£746 / £589	£625 / £494	£746 / £589	-	-
Lincolnshire	Y	£570	£570	-	-	-	-
Powys	Y	Free	Free (only provided for those that qualify)	Free	Free (only provided for those that qualify)		

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)

Local Member: All County wide

Appendices [Please list the titles of Appendices]

Appendix A - ESHIA