

EDUCATION TRAVEL POLICY FOR 2016-17

Report of the Head of Education and Learning

Please note that the following recommendation is subject to approval by the Cabinet and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution before taking effect.

1. Note the travel policy was proposed and consulted on by the Local Authority
2. Consider the recommendations at section 2.1.
3. Approve the proposed timetable for determination of future policies at section 3.6.
4. Determine the recommended travel policy for 2016-17 at www.devon.gov.uk/admissionarrangements (and for 2017-18 with dates rolled forward).

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The Local Authority (LA) has statutory responsibilities to provide free transport to and from school for children of statutory school age who meet set criteria. It may also exercise its discretion to provide assistance for children in other circumstances, for which it may charge a fee or contribution. The LA must also support travel for post-16 students only where there is a need to do so and may charge a contribution.
- 1.2 This paper is to report the outcome of a consultation on amendments to the education travel policy which would affect travel during the academic year 2016-17 and to seek approval for the amended policy.
- 1.3 None of the proposed amendments would affect statutory entitlements to free education transport.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Members are requested to:
 1. Increase the contribution level for all subject to pay a contribution from £520 to £560.
 2. Remove the reduction in contribution for those on low income, currently at 50%.

3 CONSULTATION ON ADMISSION ARRANGEMENTS

- 3.1 The LA consulted on the proposed policy for 2016-17 during February and March 2016. Consultation took place for six weeks with a notice at www.devon.gov.uk/admissionarrangements. Information was sent to all schools and colleges in the county.
- 3.2 In previous years, the Education Travel Policy has been included in the admissions consultation and Members have been requested to consider them at the same time. For 2016-17, additional time has been taken to review and formulate policy, with particular reference to discretionary arrangements. This is in response to increasing pressure on the home to school transport budget and the need to secure savings. There has been an overspend of £1.7 million in the academic year 2015-16. This presents an unsustainable financial pressure for the LA. The 2016-17 policy includes provision for post-16 students.

- 3.3 Notice was also given of a consultation on proposed amendments to arrangements for post-16 students for the 2017-18 academic year. This features a change in policy to remove support for post-16 students except where there is an exceptional need for support from the LA, evidenced by the student or parent¹. It should be noted that colleges and schools receive funding from central government to provide a bursary scheme for post-16 students. The bursary is intended to support students' expenses including transport. Devon has been funding transport support in this area on a discretionary basis. While savings to the budget from increasing the contribution and removing the low-income discount are anticipated to be relatively modest, they would add to savings achieved by withdrawing discretionary provision for post-16 students who can access the school and college bursary. Over 4 years, this is anticipated to be £675,000. Members will be asked to consider these arrangements in July 2016 to give more time for consultation.
- 3.4 There are no current proposals to make further amendments to the Travel Policy for children of statutory school age for 2017-18. It is intended that the arrangements for 2016-17 for children of statutory school age will form the arrangements for 2017-18, with dates rolled forward.
- 3.5 The next consultation will coincide with the admission arrangements consultation in December 2016 to January 2017. This will be for transport in 2018-19 for both statutory school age children and post-16 students. This will allow more notice for parents and enable them to make better informed decisions about admissions and transport².
- 3.6 The following table details when Members will be asked to consider education travel arrangements, following consultation:

| | statutory school age children | Post-16 students |
|---------|-------------------------------|------------------|
| 2016-17 | April 2016 | April 2016 |
| 2017-18 | April 2016 | July 2016 |
| 2018-19 | February 2017 | February 2017 |
| 2019-20 | February 2018 | February 2018 |

4. PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

- 4.1 Where travel support is provided by the LA on a discretionary basis, LAs may charge a fee. Devon does this by providing a concessionary seat scheme on appropriate routes. It charges a contribution towards costs which was set at £520 per annum for the 2015-16 academic year. It is proposed that this contribution level be increased to £560 per annum from the 2016-17 academic year. There would be no impact on the families of post-16 students as the school and college bursary scheme is intended to support these costs.
- 4.2 Where a contribution to costs is required, the current arrangements allow a 50% reduction for those children and post-16 students who live in a household in receipt of a low income. It is proposed that this discount be removed. All passengers taking advantage of discretionary entitlement would be liable to pay the full contribution towards costs in 2016-17. There would be no impact on the families of post-16 students as the school and college bursary scheme is intended to support these costs.

¹ This would potentially affect new applicants for 2017-18, those children currently in Year 10 who will be post-16 in September 2017. Students in Year 13 and above with existing provision would be unaffected.

² Should there be an overriding need to review discretionary transport. Members may be asked to consider arrangements outside this timescale.

5 FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 5.1 The proposals in this document are intended to reduce the financial liability of the LA. By removing some discretionary entitlement and increasing the expected income from contributions, the LA would be seeking to lower the overall spend on education transport.

6 SUSTAINABILITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 6.1 The travel policy supports the principle of promoting access to education and meeting the LA's statutory responsibilities.

7 EQUALITY CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 Equality of access to education opportunities is a fundamental feature of transport arrangements. The policy for consideration has been subject to an Equality Impact Needs Assessment, at www.devon.gov.uk/admissionarrangements

8 LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 Education transport for eligible children is a statutory function of the LA. Setting fair and transparent arrangements ensures that the LA meets its duty and enables parents, schools and other interested parties to have confidence in them. The policy has been proposed and the subject of consultation.

9 RISK MANAGEMENT CONSIDERATIONS

- 9.1 The key risk is that the Education Transport is not determined by the LA ahead of applications for transport from September 2016 submitted over the summer by parents and post-16 students.

10. CONCLUSION

- 10.1 The LA has two functions to consider in education transport: it has statutory responsibilities to provide free transport in certain circumstances. These responsibilities are unaffected by proposed amendments. The LA's additional function is to exercise its discretion to provide free or chargeable support for other children as it deems appropriate. In exercising its discretion, it must balance the desirability to support parental choice of establishment with financial pressures.

The recommendations in this paper recognise ongoing pressure to reduce costs and provision that is not statutorily required. The proposed policy ensures that Devon County Council meets its statutory responsibilities in respect of school transport.

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ELECTORAL DIVISION: All

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Local Government Act 1972. Background Papers: