

PERFORMANCE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 5 JULY 2018

THE PROPOSED HOME TO SCHOOL TRAVEL AND TRANSPORT POLICY

Report by Director for Children's Services

Introduction

1. In accordance with the Scrutiny Procedure Rules, the Proper Officer has agreed to a request from the following Councillors for a Call In of Cabinet's decision made on 19 June 2018 in relation to 'Proposed Home to School Travel and Transport Policy':
 - Councillor Waine
 - Councillor Howson
 - Councillor Bartington
 - Councillor Carter
 - Councillor Corkin
 - Councillor Fitzgerald-O'Connor
 - Councillor Matelot
 - Councillor Gill Sanders
 - Councillor Turnbull
2. The Cabinet decision was to approve the adoption of a revised Home to School Travel and Transport Policy 2019/20 onwards for Reception to Year 11 and a revised Post 16 Education Travel and Transport Policy for 2019/20 onwards. The proposed changes were brought to Cabinet as part of a broader programme of work to bring spending on Home to School Transport in line with the resources available within the agreed Medium Term Financial Plan.

Reasons for the Call In Request and Response

3. The statement by the Director that no SEND child would fail to have a Post 16 placement at an appropriate school or college because of transport costs was not in the policy document or accompanying papers, and therefore not understood by the Education Scrutiny Committee.
 - (a) Paragraph 14 of the report to Cabinet 19 June 2018 states, "... Post 16 students with special educational needs and disabilities would continue to receive assistance with travel if they or their parents can demonstrate that they are attending the nearest suitable placement at which their needs can be met and that without assistance from the Council they would not be able to attend that placement."
 - (b) In practice this means that if a student is unable to access education, at the nearest establishment that is able to meet their needs, due to transport the Council will assist them with their travel. For example, by providing them with a seat on transport already going to that establishment, or setting up specific arrangements for them.

4. Various funds, either held by OCC, schools or colleges, were referred to as being the necessary support for pupils' ineligible for free transport under the proposed policy. This was not the understanding of the Committee, both in regard to normal travel from home to school or respite provision, as these funds were either discretionary or cash limited and thereby insufficient to guarantee to meet the needs of those children affected. No information was given in the document as to how this funding would operate and what levels of funding would be available to individual children. It is not now clear whether there is now additionally a cash fund for travel to and from education provision as well as respite care and the after school fund mentioned in the policy, all managed by the County Council using County Council funds.

(a) For pupils who are not eligible for free home to school travel under the policy, the following financial support is available:

Post-16 students, including those with special educational needs and disabilities

Schools and colleges have access to funding which enables them to provide students with bursaries. These bursaries are available to help with education related costs, including travel costs.

Two types of bursaries are available: (i) Vulnerable student bursary for which there are nationally set qualifying criteria and (ii) Discretionary bursary where the qualifying criteria are set by the school or college. (see Annex 1 of report to Cabinet 19 June 2018)

To claim a bursary a young person should apply to their school and college.

Should a young person be refused a bursary, this would be part of the evidence that could be presented to the Council to substantiate that they cannot access college or school.

Travel to respite care

For some children and their families, respite care is an important part of their care and support package. Where these children need to travel between respite care and school arrangements will continue to be made and paid for by the Council. Arrangements will be made on an individual basis, and there will be not be cash limited fund for them.

Travel to after school clubs

It is proposed to establish a specific cash limited budget to assist children and young people who have the most complex special educational needs and disabilities to access after school clubs. This will enable them to travel from their school to clubs that are able to cater for their specific needs. It is proposed to set a budget of £50,000 in 2018/19, which is in-line with current spending on these arrangements

Additional information

5. The proposed Home to School Travel and Transport Policy for Reception to Year 11, is not suggesting changes to the current eligibility criteria for free travel.
6. If the proposed post-16 Home to School Travel and Transport Policy is adopted, it is anticipated that there will be a potential saving of £300,000 per annum for each year group affected. This saving is an indicative amount and will be realised in part due to contributions for travel assistance, which will not exceed those set out under the space seat scheme.
7. The Council is making investments in home to school transport:
 - (a) Creation of a Travel Options Team: Since April 2018, there have been three additional workers within the Supported Transport Hub. This team work with parents to understand the child's needs as they relate to transport and put in place transport arrangements that meet these
 - (b) Independent Travel Training: The Council are currently recruiting workers into this team, with the aim of having it in place in Autumn 2018. This team will work with individual children to support and train them to travel to and from school independently. While travel training will not be suitable for all children with special educational needs and disabilities, the development of these skills will increase the child's independence and confidence in all aspects of their lives
 - (c) Personal Travel Budgets: parents are now able to receive money from the Council to make their own transport arrangements for their child.