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From: **Shellina Prendergast, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**

Matt Dunkley, Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education

To: Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee

Subject: **Post 16 Transport Policy Statement 2022/23**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Future Pathway of Paper: Cabinet Member Decision

Summary: Each year KCC has a legal duty to consult on its policy for Post 16 Transport and publish a Post 16 Transport Policy Statement by the 31 May.

Recommendation(s): Members are invited to endorse the proposed policy ahead of a Cabinet Member Decision on the final Post 16 Transport Policy Statement to be published by 31 May 2022.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The report is designed to update Members in regard to decisions taken relating to the Kent 16+ Travel Saver and other post 16 transport initiatives.
- 1.2 The attached policy makes it clear that in the first instance there is an expectation that learners will make use of the Kent 16+ Travel Saver, seeking bursary funding support where necessary to secure this as a preferred means of accessing education, training or work-based learning settings. It also sets out the duties on the LA to consider requests for transport and is a continuum of existing policy.
- 1.3 KCC is required to enable access to education and will consider applications for support where a Kent 16+ Travel Saver pass is not suitable. Where support is agreed, the policy makes clear that learners will initially be assessed for Travel Training and alternative transport arrangements will only be provided where this training is not appropriate. Where additional support is refused learners can appeal to the Transport Regulation Committee Appeal Panel.
- 1.4 While the ongoing uncertainty around COVID-19 means that there is a small potential for changes to be required for school/college transport, the current policy did not limit KCC's ability to make these necessary adjustments throughout the pandemic, no significant changes have been made for the 2022/23 academic year. Officers continue to monitor the pandemic, alongside any changes in government guidance to ensure that the transport offering remains suitable.

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2. Policy Framework

- 2.1 The Post 16 Transport Policy will assist learners in accessing their preferred learning environments and contribute to Kent's strategic plans which state that children and young people in Kent will get the best start in life and achieve good outcomes by participating in education or training to age 18.

3. The Report

- 3.1 KCC has a duty to consider applications for transport and is required to enable access to education. In most circumstances it meets this duty through the Kent 16+ Travel Saver pass. This is a generous discretionary scheme which aids access to both education and employment with training. The card will be made available for 2022/23 at an annual cost of £500, available to purchase via instalments, with no limit on the level of use. This provides up to a 50% reduction in travel costs for the average user. Learning providers, at their discretion, can subsidise this using bursary funding and we would expect bursary to be provided for up to 50% of the cost for low-income families. Because schools and colleges use bursary funding at their discretion, some choose to subsidise other localised bus travel cards as opposed to the KCC scheme which offers a broader transport offer.
- 3.2 KCC has a duty to consult on and publish its Post 16 Transport Policy Statement every year. Whilst there is no statutory duty to provide transport for Post 16 Learners, there is a duty to consider applications for assistance with transport and to enable access to education and training to age 18. The transport policy sets out how KCC will meet this duty and what learners can expect by way of support.
- 3.3 Current and future potential pass holders and their parents have been contacted to provide an opportunity to respond to this consultation. Schools, colleges and learning providers have been consulted and also asked to inform their students to increase awareness. Public Transport have also been included in the consultation. The consultation on the proposed policy ran from 10 January 2022 until 20 February 2022.
- 3.4 The policy is attached as Appendix A.
- 3.5 Feedback from the consultation is attached as Appendix B. Due to statutory timescales associated with this policy review and the cabinet committee schedule, it was necessary to compose this report shortly before the conclusion of the public consultation. As a result, the initial Committee report was based on just over 5 weeks' worth of consultation responses. An addendum will be circulated shortly before the meeting to update statistics and key themes so that all response data from the consultation up to 20 February are considered.
- 3.7 A copy of the consultation documentation can be found at www.kent.gov.uk/post16transport
- 3.8 The consultation for the 2023/24 Post 16 Transport Policy statement will be held in conjunction with a wider policy review for all entitled scholars aged 4 to

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25 in mainstream or SEN education, expected to take place from late April 2022.

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The scheme is uncapped and costs will vary depending on take up levels and journeys undertaken by cardholders, it is therefore difficult to predict overall costs for 2022-23. The current cost of the post 16+ KTS is around £2.9m of which £2.0m is funded from the recharge of the pass. The remaining subsidy of £0.9m is met from the revenue budget. The 2022-23 MTFP includes a saving of £0.350m from increasing the KTS 16+ pass cost from September 2022 to £500. In addition, the Home to school transport revenue budget also subsidises the Post 16 SEN Transport offer. This numbers fluctuate from year to year, but the total subsidy remains between £4-5 million per annum.

5. Conclusions

- 5.1 The consultation is a requirement set out in our legal duties. Despite there being no material changes proposed to the main policy this year, we must undertake this consultation process. Invariably the majority of feedback centres on the cost of the pass and the fact that Post 16 learners are legally required to be in some form of education, training or employment and so free school transport should continue. Unfortunately, KCC is not directly funded to support any transport requirements that result for learners over the age of 16. KCC subsidises Post 16 Transport by around £4-5m each year ensuring learners can access their schools and colleges for Post 16 learning. Whilst this scheme does present a marginally higher cost for the Kent 16+ Travel Saver pass compared to its pre-16 sister scheme, it reflects the additional benefits that come with 24/7 access to the public bus network and the differences associated with a child and young adult fare.
- 5.2 While these were the most frequent negative comments, it is important to highlight that the next most frequent responses focussed on how helpful the scheme was and that many students value the independence it provides them, especially for evening and weekend travel.
- 5.3 This year saw a reduction in the number of negative comments that related to poor levels of service from public bus networks compared to previous years. This focussed on overcrowding during rush hour and examples of perceived unhelpful behaviour from drivers. Officers continue to work with providers in an attempt to ensure sufficient provision is in place, however, KCC is reliant on private companies for the majority of the public bus service. As a result, it is not unreasonable to expect rural travel options to be more limited than those available within town centres.
- 5.4 A small number of responses requested for the scheme to include rail travel and while it has not been possible to find a cost-effective solution to include this within the current scheme, recent national changes mean that reduced fare train options are now more widely available for 16 to 18 year olds.

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5.5 A small number commented on the usefulness of active travel options. Active travel means walking or cycling as a means of transport. Following responses from last year's consultation, greater emphasis has been placed on active travel options in parental guidance and web content and this appears to be having a positive impact.

6. Recommendation(s)

<p>6.1 The Education and Young People's Services Cabinet Committee is asked to note the content of the Post 16 Transport Policy and endorse its future implementation and determination by the Cabinet Member.</p>
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7. Background Documents

- Post 16 Transport Policy – Appendix A
- Consultation Summary – Appendix B
- Consultation documents
www.kent.gov.uk/post16transport

8. Contact details

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