

By: Sarah Hohler, Cabinet Member for Education, Learning and Skills
Andy Roberts, Interim Corporate Director for Education, Learning and Skills

To: County Council – 21 July 2011

Subject: Post-16 Transport Policy

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: KCC is proposing to develop within the Post-16 Transport Policy 2012 a “Kent 16+ Travel Pass” (the Pass) for bus travel.

The Pass will be available to Kent resident learners in Years 12 and 13 (and Year 14 students who are completing their 14 – 19 studies) and 16-24 year-olds with Statements of Educational Need or a Learning Difficulty Assessment (139a).

The new scheme is intended to provide support for learners to:

- meet travel costs to schools, colleges and work based learning providers
- ensure Kent providers meet the requirements of Full Participation in learning to 18 by 2015
- ensure fair access and maintain choice to post-16 provision for Kent learners

Introduction

1. The purpose of this paper is to inform Council Members, by way of a progress update, on the practical approach KCC wishes to take to provide post-16 students with a subsidised travel pass, as part of KCC’s Post-16 Transport Policy for 2012. The timetable for the production of the Post-16 Transport Policy is outlined in Appendix 1.

Background

2. (1) The KCC Post-16 Transport Policy for 2012 is being written against the backdrop of the need to fulfil the Authority’s responsibility to ensure Full Participation for all 18 year olds by 2015 and the removal of the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA).

(2) From September 2011 Education Maintenance Allowances to low-income learners will be closed to new learners. The 16-19 Bursary Fund, which replaces EMA, will be given directly to schools, colleges and work based learning providers for them to allocate. This provides an opportunity to work with all schools, colleges and others to introduce a new post 16 scheme for transport for September 2012.

(3) The KCC 14-24 Innovation Team were commissioned to establish a cabinet member task and finish group to bring forward options for the introduction of the Travel Pass for post-16 learners in Kent to maximise the use of the new bursary scheme and KCC resources. This work started in April of this year and included officers from education, transport and finance.

Current Operation of Post-16 Transport Policy

3. (1) Under the existing Post-16 Transport Policy, KCC currently chooses to underwrite the financial risks for providing post-16 transport for eligible learners in the county through its discretionary policy to support learners from low income families. It also administers the various schemes. Schools, colleges and work based learning providers (WBL) are able to use existing Learner Support Funding to support post-16 transport for their students.

(2) Local Authorities only have a statutory duty to meet the transport needs for pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs aged 16 -24. KCC currently spends £2.48 million assisting 490 SEN students, but also £1.36 million assisting another 1,067 students who are exempt from home to provider fees under the discretionary policy.

Future Options

4. The Kent Post-16 Transport Policy 2012 must be published by 31st May 2012, for September 2012, and reviewed annually.

(2) Within the new 2012 Policy KCC will set out;

- the strategic direction for post-16 transport in Kent (e.g. Full Participation);
- a framework for a flexible and targeted use of resources in response to learner need through the issuing of a Kent 16+ Travel Pass (the Pass) for bus travel;
- consistent eligibility criteria for those learners with statutory travel requirements;
- eligibility criteria for those learners who will receive any subsidy; and
- a consistent framework within which all Kent providers will be asked to operate the new Pass.

(3) KCC will continue to fund statutory support for pupils with Statements of Special Educational Needs or Learning Difficulty Assessment (139a) up until the age of 24.

Trials for the development of the new pass

5. (1) KCC is currently considering two options for the operation for a new post 16-Pass and is comparing them with the status quo. The key element to each option is that learners will approach their School, College or WBL provider to apply for assistance with travel, although KCC will coordinate the scheme. Schools, Colleges and WBL providers will be expected to make a financial contribution to the scheme from Learner Support Funds and the new 16-19 Bursary Funds.

(2) The options for the Pass are described below:

- **Status Quo:** KCC currently spends £3.84 million (2010/2011) on travel for 16 – 24 SEN learners and learners exempt from travel costs. Approximately 1,500 learners are supported in this way. Under the status quo KCC would continue to fund free travel for those students from low-income families.
- **A Pass offering unlimited free bus travel at all times is issued at a cost of no more than £380 to Learners (Full subsidy model):** We expect that take-up of the pass will be approximately 4000 learners, at an estimated gross cost of £3million per year. Each Pass will cost approximately £750. KCC will buy the Passes from the bus companies and sell them to Schools, Colleges and WBL providers for £380. The difference represents the subsidy that KCC is making. They can sell the passes to learners for between £0 and £380 depending on the individual learner's assessment against their financial criteria. These costs will be met from the providers' Bursary Funds and Learner Support Funds. This option carries a risk for KCC if take-up exceeds the 4,000 figure, or costs escalate. This option carries minimal risk for providers.
- **A Pass offering unlimited free bus travel at all times is issued at a cost of no more than £380 to Learners (Capped subsidy model):** KCC will determine what resource it can afford to spend to support post-16 travel. KCC will continue to provide statutory travel support for 16-24 SEN learners. The KCC subsidy would be allocated directly to Schools, Colleges and WBL providers who wish to join the scheme, on a formula basis, where they agree to manage financial assistance against strict learner eligibility criteria. KCC would buy the passes and sell them at the full £750 cost to learning providers. Schools, Colleges and WBL providers would use the allocated KCC subsidy amount, Bursary Funding and Learner Support Funds to sell the Passes at between £0 and £380 to learners. The financial risk for this model is more evenly shared between KCC and providers.

(3) From September 2011 post-16 students will be eligible to apply for 16-19 Bursary Funding. Bursary Funding can be used to cover travel costs. Certain vulnerable students will be automatically eligible for a minimum £1,200 annual grant from this fund. It is proposed that they will not receive any KCC subsidy for travel as this is already covered within their bursary grant.

(4) Other low income post-16 learners who are eligible for Bursary Funding, but not the automatic £1,200 (and who will all receive considerably less funding than this) may be eligible to receive full subsidised travel, but this is the process of being developed. Full eligibility criteria will be developed as part of the trials.

(5) In this way KCC will coordinate and set the Transport Policy. The direct operation is passed onto Schools, Colleges and WBL providers enabling the support for travel to be more focused, flexible and responsive to learners needs. Between September 2011 and April 2012 it is proposed that KCC will be operating three trial schemes in Kent to inform the development of the Pass.

The trials will take into account;

- Travel to learn patterns
- The number of learners likely to take-up a pass
- The amount that learners can afford to pay for passes

- The level of subsidy available from Schools, Colleges and WBL providers
- Provider Curriculum offer
- Participation rates
- Impact on vulnerable learner groups

(6) Initial feedback from Schools, Colleges and WBL providers for the Pass to date has been very positive and bus companies are interested. The Pass fits well with the three Bold Steps priorities. It addresses Growth without Gridlock objectives and the Green Agenda.

Recommendation

6. Members of the County Council are asked to note the progress to date for the development of subsidised Kent 16+ Travel Pass. Further development of the Pass will be done in partnership with the Youth Council and other stakeholders.

Sue Dunn
01622 694923
sue.dunn@kent.gov.uk

Background documents

Consultation timetable for the Post-16 Transport Policy 2012 Appendix 1

YPLA letter on the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund allocation 2011/12

Appendix 1

Consultation Timetable for Post-16 Transport Policy

KCC has a statutory duty to consult on the Transport Policy statement. Schools, Colleges and WBL providers will be involved at an early stage to consult on the principles and operational details of the scheme, along with employers, learners, parents and carers. Initial discussions with Kent Association of Further Education Colleges (KAFEC) and sixth form providers indicate a strong willingness to engage with KCC over the development of the proposed scheme and the development the trials.

The consultation timetable will be as follows:

June 2011	Paper presented to 14 – 19 Strategic Forum.
July 2011	Paper presented to Cabinet Member briefing for approval of recommendations Progress Update to Council Meeting Negotiation with KEFAC over FE contribution to the scheme.
September 2011	Consultation with all post-16 providers over Transport policy. Manage transition from EMA and manage KCC financial risks. Policy Overview and Scrutiny Committee Three pilot schemes with a range of providers. Consultation with employers, learners, parents and carers. Youth Council Transport Group
December 2011	Priorities and eligibility fully agreed by Cabinet.
May 2012	Publish Transport Policy
September 2012	Implement, if agreed by Cabinet, a new post-16 Transport Policy for Kent, in collaboration with FE sector, schools, training providers and employers.