

(Please don't add page numbers or an item number).

From: **Matt Dunkley, Corporate Director for Children, Young People and Education**

To: **Richard Long, Cabinet Member for Education and Skills**

Subject: **Post 16 Transport Policy Statement 2020/21**

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): The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills as asked to agree Post 16 Transport Policy Statement to be published by 31 May 2020.

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 a 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.

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 Outcomes 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

(Please don't add page numbers or an item number).

which aids access to both education and employment with training. The card is made available at the current cost of £400 a year with no limit on the level of use. 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 each 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 February 2020 to 29 March 2020.
- 3.4 The policy is attached as Appendix A.
- 3.5 Feedback from the consultation is attached as Appendix B.
- 3.6 An updated equalities impact assessment is attached as Appendix C.
- 3.7 A copy of the consultation documentation can be found at www.kent.gov.uk/post16transport

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The scheme is uncapped and costs will vary depending on take up levels and journeys undertaken by cardholders. Last year saw an overall reduction in uptake of about 1000 learners. This has had a financial implication which has meant that income levels are reduced and those using the passes were doing so extensively which increased the unit cost of the scheme. The scheme requires the cards to be purchased on-line and some learning providers had difficulty developing a purchasing mechanism for their bursary learners which resulted in them buying saver cards direct from operators for some of their learners. These issues have been resolved this year, so it is expected that costs will return to levels similar to previous years, however, it is difficult to predict overall costs for 2020/21. The LA commits in excess of £5 million on Post 16 Transport and draws an income of less than £2 million. Numbers fluctuate from year to year, but the total subsidy remains in excess of £3 million per annum. On average, KCC subsidises just under 70% of the overall cost of Post 16 Transport to ensure learners can access their schools and colleges.

(Please don't add page numbers or an item number).

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 feedback centres on the cost of the pass. Respondents also highlighted that Post 16 learners are legally required to be in some form of education, training or employment and so should pay the same as 11 to 16-year-old students for school transport. 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 over £3m 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.
- 5.2 While these were the most frequent negative comments, it is important to highlight that for the first time, the largest number of responses focussed on how helpful the scheme was and that many students value the independence it provides them, especially for evening and weekend travel. This year, the consultation communicated the factors that limited KCC's Post 16 transport offering when compared to transport for 11 to 16 year olds and highlighted what improvements have been made in recent years, such as the reduction in Vacant Seat Payment Scheme costs and the introduction of an instalment program. This appears to have allowed parents to better understand the differences between the schemes and could explain the reduced level of negative responses about cost, compared with previous consultations.
- 5.3 This year saw a significant increase in the volume of negative comments that related to poor levels of service from public bus networks, although this still only accounted for around 15% of overall responses. 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 and it is likely 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 a cheaper Kent 16+ Travel Saver pass that excluded evening and weekend travel. Because the schemes have been devised with the intention of providing opportunities for learners to access leisure and work opportunities in evenings and weekends it is unlikely to be viable to develop a cheaper version with such restrictions. If the 16+ Travel saver does not prove cost effective for individual learners, more bespoke weekly and monthly discounted tickets can be purchased directly from operators that will offer more restricted travel and may be better suited to their requirements. Requests were also made 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.

(Please don't add page numbers or an item number).

- 5.5 The last area of interest was from parents who wish for the Kent 16+ Travel Saver pass scheme to offer discounts where multiple children within the same family require a pass. Responders stated that this should consider whether other children within the family are purchasing Kent Travel Saver passes, so that a discount is still received where children take part in either scheme. Officers will investigate the practicalities of implementing such a discount and where appropriate, consult to add this feature in the future.
- 5.6 Work was completed during the 2020-21 consultation window to analyse demographic information of the current cohort of Kent 16+ Travel Saver users to allow for findings to be considered before the determination of the policy. KCC's discretionary Post 16 transport offering provides a wide range of learners with transport options that would otherwise not be available to them. It is offered to all learners, so no protected group is negatively impacted directly by its availability. Protected groups are empowered to attend school or college or undertake an apprenticeship, which will likely result in better employment and further education options. The policy allows for wider selection of learning establishments and offers a subsidised option to accessing further education opportunities. Provision is included within the policy to support learners from low income backgrounds.
- 5.7 The analysis of current 16+ Travel Saver pass users has shown, however, that there are potentially groups that are not making use of this option as widely as others. There is a statistically significant lower uptake of the pass for BME families and children who are eligible for free school meals. It is currently unclear what is driving this reduced uptake, so further analysis will need to be commissioned, with the intention of the Service developing targeted interventions to improve engagement. Results of this work will be reported following next year's consultation.

6. Recommendation(s)

- | |
|--|
| 6.1 The Cabinet Member for Education and Skills as asked to agree Post 16 Transport Policy Statement to be published by 31 May 2020. |
|--|

7. Background Documents

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

8. Contact details

Report Author

- Craig Chapman – Interim Head of Fair Access

(Please don't add page numbers or an item number).

- 03000 415934
- Craig.chapman@kent.gov.uk

Relevant Director

- David Adams – Interim Director of Education
- 03000 414989
- David.adams@kent.gov.uk