

From: Gary Cooke, Cabinet Member for Corporate & Democratic Services  
Peter Sass, Head of Democratic Services

To: County Council – 18 July 2013

Subject: Petition Scheme Debate

Classification: Unrestricted

Summary: Details of Petition received which will be the subject of a debate in accordance with the County Council's Petition Scheme.

For Decision

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### 1. Introduction

(1) In accordance with the Petition Scheme agreed at the County Council meeting on 13 September 2012, any petition on a County Council matter that has more than 10,000 signatures will trigger a debate at County Council.

(2) The process for the debate on each petition is that the Lead Petitioner(s) will be invited to speak to the petition for up to 5 minutes. There will then be a debate of up to 35 Minutes (with each Member speaking for 3 minutes) before the Cabinet Member is invited to respond for a maximum of 5 minutes. As the subject matter for this petition relates to a matter that is the responsibility of the Council's Executive, the County Council may decide whether to make a recommendation to the relevant Cabinet Member to inform the decision-making process.

### 2. Petition – Freedom Pass for ages 16 - 19

(1) A Petition requesting the extension of the Kent Freedom pass to cover 16 – 18 year olds has been received. At the time of submission the petition has attracted 10,098 signatures from Kent residents and therefore has triggered a County Council Debate. A statement from the Lead Petitioner, Mrs Lynne Miller is attached (**Appendix 1**). Matt Stanley (Students' Union President at MidKent College) will be attending the meeting and speaking to the petition on behalf of Mrs Miller.

(2) A briefing report from the Corporate Director of Environment, Highways and Waste relation to the petition and information about KCC's Post 16 Transport Duty are attached (**Appendices 2 and 3**).

### 3. Recommendation

The County Council is invited to respond to the Cabinet Members for Environment, Highways & Waste and Education & Health Reform in respect of this petition.

**Peter Sass**  
**Head of Democratic Services**

**01622 694002**

Background Documents: None

### Petition wording

“As the school leaving age is being extended to 18, please can the Bus Freedom Pass also be extended to cover from 16 to 18 (19 would better) so that parents do not have to pay through the nose to get their child to school?”

### 500 word statement for council, from Lynne Miller, Kent resident.

Over the past weeks thousands of Kent residents have spoken out against expensive travel costs for school children. We have handed in a 10,349 signature petition to Kent County Council, telling them that they need to do better and extend discounted school bus travel to all pupils in Kent. This petition has since risen to 14,858 signatures.

My name is Lynne Miller and I am a Kent resident. I started this petition on 38 Degrees' Campaigns By You site because 17 and 18 year olds will soon not be allowed to leave school, but discounted school bus travel in Kent - the Freedom Pass - still stops after GCSEs.

The current 16+ card costs a massive £520 per child each year. It's an added cost that me and thousands of local residents who signed the petition just can't afford. We want to persuade the council to extend Freedom Passes to everyone still in education.

Here's a link to the petition:

<http://you.38degrees.org.uk/petitions/freedom-pass-for-ages-16-19>

I have two children about to go to college. At the moment I pay £100 a year for each of their Freedom Passes. People just aren't happy with the 16+ travel card. It costs £520 for the year - how is this anything like the cost of a Freedom Pass! I think Kent council hasn't thought this through, and it's adding an extra burden on already stretched families.

The KCC will argue why did I send my child to a school outside my catchment area? Well the answer to this is simple. Our local school will not give my child the opportunities that this other school will provide. The contacts at the other schools are not available at our local school.

My daughter wishes to go into acting/singing and she is attending Canterbury High School Black Hole Academy of Performing Arts, she gets to meet actual actors that have appeared on television to help get her tips, there are scouts that visit the school who can offer her opportunities within the acting world - this type of opportunity is not available at our local school.

My son is staying on at Sandwich Technology School because the Football Academy is known as the Chelsea Football Academy so is already linked to premier division football - again this type of training is not available at our local school.

In this day and age you want the best for your children and if that means sending them outside your catchment area to obtain this, then as a parent you are going to do

it. My children do not work and still have to attend school, so why should I have to pay more to get them there.

Although government cuts have had a knock-on effect all round, parents should still be supported. With the cost of everything so high now, higher travel costs are hard to find for me let alone those on lesser incomes.

The swell of support from local people and students for the campaign has been amazing. Something needs to be done. I want the existing Freedom Pass from year 7 - 11 to be extended to year 13 for definite and 14 if possible.

Lynne Miller, Kent resident

From: David Brazier, Cabinet Member for Transport & Environment  
Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Education & Health Reform

To: County Council – 18 July 2013

Subject: Petition requesting the Freedom Pass for ages 16-19

Classification: Unrestricted

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### 1. Introduction

On 5 July 2013, a petition was submitted to Kent County Council containing 10,098 signatures.

The wording of the petition is:

*'As the school leaving age is being extended to 18, please can the Bus Freedom Pass also be extended to cover from 16 to 18 (19 would be better) so that parents do not have to pay through the nose to get their child to school?'*

### 2. Context – Raising the Participation Age

(1) The Government, through the Education and Skills Act 2008, increased the age to which all young people in England must continue in education or training, requiring them to continue until the end of the academic year in which they turn 17 from 2013 and until their 18th birthday from 2015.

(2) Raising the participation age (RPA) does not mean young people must stay in school and it is not a statutory raising of the school leaving age. Young people can choose how they participate: they could continue in full-time education; start an apprenticeship; undertake part-time education or training if they are employed, self-employed or volunteering for 20 hours or more a week.

(3) Every year, an annual activity survey is undertaken to see how many young people are in education, employment and training. The latest survey results, from November 2012, show that there are:

- 15,196 young people in year 12 in education
- 663 young people in year 12 in employment
- 226 young people in year 12 in training
- 598 young people in year 12 not in employment, education or training
- 178 young people in year 12 whose situation is unknown

Using these latest figures, the County Council expects the change in legislation to result in approximately 800 additional young people remaining in education, employment and training in September 2013. These young people may need transport to access their post-16 education or employment.

### **3. Context – Transport to the age of 16**

(1) From the age of 8 until the age of 16, young people are statutorily entitled to free transport assistance if they attend their nearest appropriate school and live over 3 miles away. For those young people not meeting the statutory eligibility criteria, it is the responsibility of the parent to arrange and pay for transport.

(2) Kent County Council runs a discretionary transport scheme, known as the Kent Freedom Pass. The pass provides free bus travel in Kent for young people living in Kent in academic years 7-11 (ages 11-16 years) on payment of an annual pass fee. It was introduced in pilot form in June 2007. *Freedom* was extended in phases to become countywide and for Kent children attending out of county schools by April 2010. The scheme was extended beyond year 11 for Young People in Care, Young Carers and Care Leavers (who are up to the age of 18) from September 2011. At the same time there was an increase in the standard annual card fee from £50 to £100. Those on Free School Meals pay £50 and the other categories do not pay. *Freedom* has proved to be highly successful, although at a significant cost to the County Council. There are currently over 27,800 pass holders and the projected cost to the County Council is £12.5m in 2013/14.

(3) Kent County Council is the only authority outside of London to offer such a bold and generous scheme for young people's concessionary bus travel. Extension of the scheme to further academic years would clearly bring significant benefits, but with the absence of external funding from Government for what is a discretionary scheme, significant additional funding would have to be found from other sources.

### **4. Context – Post 16 Transport**

(1) Local Authorities receive no Government funding for post 16 learners. There is though a statutory duty to publish a transport policy statement for each academic year (see Appendix C for further details on this duty).

(2) In September 2012 following consultation with young learners and learning providers, Kent County Council introduced the discretionary Kent 16+ Travel Card, providing unlimited travel on Kent's public bus routes to card holders for 52 weeks a year. This gives card holders the opportunity to take part in after-school clubs, evening clubs including youth provision, weekend and part-time work, and trips, without incurring any additional cost above the card's purchase price. To date 3,418 Kent 16+ Travel Cards have been issued.

(3) The scheme is an uncapped scheme with Kent County Council charged based on usage; the cost to Kent County Council of purchasing a Kent 16+ Travel Card from the bus companies is anticipated to average out at £750 per year. This price reflects that 16 to 19 year olds are charged adult fares by the bus companies.

(4) Kent County Council subsidises each Kent 16+ Travel Card by £230 and sells them to the schools, colleges and other training providers at a price of £520. The

level of subsidy was designed to reflect a price for young travellers of equivalent to just £10 per week which is generous for unlimited use of the public bus network. Kent County Council has supported this scheme with £1.44 million of funding in the financial year 12/13.

(5) Schools, colleges and training providers receive a 16-19 Bursary Fund that they can use at their discretion to help their poorest students with study-related costs; this fund totals £165million across England.

(6) Schools, colleges and training providers have been asked by the Council to use their 16-19 Bursary Fund to further subsidise the cost of the Kent 16+ Travel Card for young people from low income households.

(7) Guidelines given to the schools and colleges recommend the card costs between £260 and £520 for a young person whose household income is between £16,191 and £20,817 per annum. For young people whose household income is less than £16,191 per annum, the guidelines recommend the card costs between £0 and £260. The exact figure would be determined by the education provider.

(8) Recognising the difficulties some families may have in raising the whole card amount at the start of the year, Kent County Council agreed with learning providers that it will invoice 3 times a year towards the end of the old terms. This means that it is possible for each provider to split the charges for families so they need only pay a third of the cost up front at the beginning of each term. Provided that relevant payments are made in advance of the card's use, providers could choose to break this down further to monthly payments, should this be deemed appropriate.

## **5. Review of transport**

This petition raises a direct question with significant financial implications for the County Council. It also raises questions about how young people travel to and from their place of education, employment or training now that the participation age has been raised. A review of a range of matters relating to the County Council's sponsorship of bus services through the Freedom Pass is currently being undertaken, and it is proposed to include within that review specific examination of the issue raised by this petition. The overall review will be complete by September and the results will help inform the formal response to the petition which will be presented to full Council.

## **6. Conclusion & Recommendation:**

The County Council is asked to agree that the issues raised by the petition be considered within the context of a wider review currently being undertaken into the County Council's sponsorship of bus services through the Kent Freedom Pass, with a further report back to full Council in October.

## **7. Background Documents**

(1) Further information on the Kent Freedom Pass is available at: [http://www.kent.gov.uk/roads and transport/getting around/travel by bus/kent freedom pass.aspx](http://www.kent.gov.uk/roads_and_transport/getting_around/travel_by_bus/kent_freedom_pass.aspx)

(2) Further information on the Kent 16+ Travel Card is available at: [http://www.kent.gov.uk/roads and transport/getting around/travel by bus/16 plus travel card.aspx](http://www.kent.gov.uk/roads_and_transport/getting_around/travel_by_bus/16_plus_travel_card.aspx)

### Information about KCC's Post 16 Transport Duty

For 16 -19 year olds - Kent County Council must prepare for each academic year a transport policy statement, specifying the arrangements for the provision of transport or otherwise that KCC considers necessary to make for facilitating the attendance of persons of sixth form age receiving education or training at schools, academies and other institutions within the further education sector. The statement must specify the arrangements that Kent County Council considers necessary to make for the provision of financial assistance in respect of the reasonable travelling expenses of persons of sixth form age receiving education or training at any such establishment

In order to meet this duty to enable access to education KCC must have regard to several groups and circumstances including adult learners, details of which are set out in the legislation. However Kent's Post 16 Transport Policy Statement sets out its intention to meet these duties where possible and in the first instance through employing the Kent 16+ Travel Card.