

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

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

To: Children, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee – 9 March 2021

Subject: **Post 16 Transport Policy Statement 2021/22**

**Decision Number and title – 20/00012 - Post 16 Transport Policy 2021/22**

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 Post 16 Transport Policy Statement to be published by 31 May 2021.

## **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 some questions remain as to how school/college transport will be provided in the forthcoming academic year, it is important that sufficient transport provision is available for those families and learners who need it. While current government guidance on transport advises that journeys be kept to a minimum, it does acknowledge

that alternative options will not be available for all travellers and so ensures that remaining transport options are as safe as possible. As the current year's policy did not limit KCC's ability to make these necessary adjustments, no significant changes have been made for the 2021/22 academic year. Officers will continue to monitor how the pandemic develops, alongside any changes in government guidance to ensure that the transport offering remains suitable.

## **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 which aids access to both education and employment with training. The card is made available at the current cost of £400 a year (subject to annual review) 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 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 25 January 2021 until 5 March 2021.
- 3.4 The policy is attached as Appendix A.
- 3.5 Feedback from the consultation is attached as Appendix B. Due to the pre-election period, the outcome of the consultation was considered at an earlier Committee meeting than usual. As a result, the initial Committee report was based on nearly 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 5 March is considered.

- 3.7 A copy of the consultation documentation can be found at [www.kent.gov.uk/post16transport](http://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, it is therefore difficult to predict overall costs for 2021/22. 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.

#### **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 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 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 the majority 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. Following improvements trialled in last year's consultation, this year Officers 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/users 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 Understandably, concerns related to COVID-19 and the impact it has had on transport provision and pupil's ability to access school featured in this year's responses. Officers provide up to date information to Kent families on [kent.gov](http://kent.gov) and via targeted mailshots to ensure that information is disseminated as quickly as possible and will continue to do so until the pandemic passes.
- 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.

- 5.5 For the first time a small number of parents raised queries about the availability of active travel options. Active travel means walking or cycling as a means of transport and does feature in the policy statement, however, queries focussed on whether or not more could be done in this area. Further work will be completed so that this can be address in future updates.

## **6. Recommendation(s)**

6.1 Members are invited to endorse the proposed policy ahead of a Cabinet Member Decision on the Post 16 Transport Policy Statement to be published by 31 May 2021

## **7. Background Documents**

- Post 16 Transport Policy – Appendix A
- Consultation Summary – Appendix B
- Consultation documents  
[www.kent.gov.uk/post16transport](http://www.kent.gov.uk/post16transport)

## **8. Contact details**

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