

From: Roger Gough, Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education

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

To: Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee – 8 May 2018

Subject: Post 16 Transport Policy 2018/19

Decision Number: 18/00016

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 Children's, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee 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 2018.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The report is designed to update Members regarding decisions taken relating to the 16+ Travel Card and other post 16 transport initiatives.
- 1.2 The attached policy makes it clear with the exception of Kent Children in Care - who receive a Free Young Persons Travel Card to age 18, that in the first instance there is an expectation that learners will make use of the 16+ Travel Card, seeking bursary funding support where necessary to access this as a preferred means of accessing education, training or a work-based learning setting. 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 16+ Travel Card is not suitable. Where support is agreed, the policy makes clear that learners will initially be assessed for Independent 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 16+ Travel Card. This is a generous discretionary scheme which aids access to both education and employment with training. The card will continue to be made available at the agreed cost of £400 a year with no limit on the level of use. Following feedback to last year's consultation, the pass will now be made available through a centralised application process to KCC. 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.
- 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 Schools, colleges and learning providers have been consulted, as have their students. Neighbouring local authorities and Public Transport have also been included in the consultation, as have parents. The consultation on the proposed policy ran from 26 February until 8 April 2018.
- 3.4 The Vacant Seat Payment Scheme allows some learners, including those in sixth forms and colleges, to purchase a spare seat on vehicles that KCC hires to transport eligible learners to their place of learning. There is currently a disparity between the cost of VSPS and the 16+ Travel Card, which can create an additional financial burden on Kent families who cannot make use of the 16+ Travel Card. This year's consultation proposed to reduce the price of VSPS from £490 per annum, to £400, the same price as the 16+ Travel Card.
- 3.5 The policy is attached as appendix 1 and a copy of the consultation document and the equalities impact assessment can be found via the following link: www.kent.gov.uk/post16transport
- 3.6 Feedback from the consultation is attached as appendix 2

4. Financial Implications

- 4.1 The scheme is uncapped and costs will vary marginally depending on take up levels and journeys undertaken by cardholders. We would expect the level of subsidy required for the 16+ Travel Card to be broadly similar in 2018-19.

4.2 On average, around 100 learners make use of VSPS each year. The proposed reduction in VSPS pricing will likely result in a yearly loss of revenue in the region of £9,000 in the context of a £2.37m overall spend.

5. Conclusions

5.1 The consultation is a requirement set out in our legal duties. Despite there being no material changes to the main policy we must undertake this consultation process. Invariably feedback centres on the cost of the pass. Where cost was mentioned as a limitation of the scheme, the majority of respondents 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 – 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. At its discretion, KCC subsidises Post 16 Transport by £2.37m each year ensuring learners can access their schools and colleges, however, this does result in a higher cost for the 16+ Travel Card which also reflects the greater benefits than the pre-16 scheme.

5.2 Rail Travel use within the scheme was another common request and has been explored with rail operators but proved cost prohibitive. Instead KCC has previously written to the Transport Minister seeking the introduction of reduced fares at peak times for this age group of learners as a formulated National scheme.

5.3 Further responses relate to a poor level of service from public bus networks. Officers continue to work with providers to ensure sufficient provision is in place. A growing percentage of respondents have highlighted a desire to pay for the service in instalments. Work will be undertaken to ascertain the possibility of implementing these suggestions.

5.4 Just over two thirds of respondents were in support of the proposed reduction in VSPS costs, with the vast majority of remaining responses selecting “don’t know”. Only 3% of respondents were opposed to the reduction in VSPS cost, but none expressed a rationale for their answer, so their motivations are unclear.

6. Recommendation(s)

6.1 The Children’s, Young People and Education Cabinet Committee 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 2018.

7. Background Documents

- Post 16 Transport Policy – appendix 1
- Consultation and Equality Impact Assessment
www.kent.gov.uk/post16transport

8. Contact details

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