

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

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

Subject: Post 16 Transport Policy Statement 2019/20

Decision Number: 19/00017

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 Children, Young People and Education is asked to agree to the Kent Post-16 Transport Policy Statement to be published by 31 May 2019.

1. Introduction

- 1.1 The report is designed to update Members in regard to decisions taken relating to the Kent 16+ Travel Saver (previously 16+ Travel Card) 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 access 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 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 Kent 16+ Travel Saver pass. 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. 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 At the inception of the 16+ Travel Card, these were sold in bulk to learning providers who then passed them on to their students and charged them for the cards. This led to significant invoicing issues and huge liabilities for KCC as some providers issued cards and then failed to pay KCC in a timely way. 2 years ago on-line purchasing was introduced which enabled learners to buy the passes direct from KCC. This change significantly reduced the administrative burden for schools and colleges and made applying convenient for learners. The downside to this, was that it required some form of electronic payment at the time of application and some colleges have struggled to find a way to administer this for their bursary learners. It could be achieved with a commitment to invite prospective learners to apply for the pass during an induction to the college, with staff using the college card for payment. However, this proposed approach has not found favour with some of the larger institutions. Some providers have instead opted to purchase saver cards directly from operators which, whilst enabling them to access college, has sadly denied some of their students access to this countywide scheme. This year will see the introduction of payment by instalments which should make it more accessible and we will explore whether there will be the opportunity to introduce a bulk purchases option for those colleges who continue to have difficulties organising a mechanism for them to make purchases specifically for their bursary learners.
- 3.3 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.
- 3.4 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 19 February until 7 April 2019.

3.5 The policy is attached as appendix 1 and a copy of the consultation document and the equalities impact assessment can be found at 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 depending on take up levels and journeys undertaken by cardholders. We have seen an overall reduction in uptake during the course of the last year of about 1000 learners; this has had a financial implication in that income levels are reduced and those using the passes are doing so extensively, which is increasing the unit cost of the scheme. As highlighted in section (3.2) officers will explore ways in which bulk purchases for bursary learners can be achieved with the colleges. This approach will improve the financial stability of the scheme. It is therefore difficult to predict overall costs for 2019/20; however, we would expect the level of subsidy required for the KCC 16+ Travel Saver Pass to be similar to the overall cost in 2018-19 where income was in the region of £2.24m and the costs amounted to £3.5m resulting in a net subsidy of £1.26m. In addition, Post 16 SEN transport is also funded in full at a cost in the region of £1.9m.

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. 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 to its pre 16 sister scheme it reflects the additional benefits that come with 24/7 access to the public bus network.

5.2 It is important to highlight that an equal number of responses commented on how helpful the scheme was and that many students value the independence it provides them, especially for evening and weekend travel.

5.3 Rail Travel use within the scheme was another common request and has been historically 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. There appears to be little appetite for this from government nor from rail operators in the South East.

- 5.4 An area of increased 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.
- 5.3 Further responses relate to a poor level of service from public bus networks. Officers continue to work with providers in an attempt to ensure sufficient provision is in place.
- 5.4 A growing percentage of respondents have highlighted a desire to pay for the service in instalments. Work has been ongoing on this throughout the previous academic year and this feature will be made available to learners for 2019/20.
- 5.5 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 unlikely to be viable to develop a cheaper version with such restrictions. If the 16+ Travel saver is not something some learners believe they would get value from then, more bespoke weekly and monthly discounted tickets can be purchased direct from operators that will offer more restricted travel that may be better suited to their requirements.

6. Recommendation(s)

6.1 . The Cabinet Member for Children, Young People and Education is asked to agree to the Kent Post-16 Transport Policy Statement to be published by 31 May 2019.

7. Background Documents

- Post 16 Transport Policy – Appendix 1
- Consultation Summary – Appendix 2
- Consultation and Equality Impact Assessment
www.kent.gov.uk/post16transport

8. Contact details

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