

Committee: **Lead Member for Learning and School Effectiveness**
 Date: **18 June 2013**
 Title of Report: **Post 16 Student Grants**
 By: **Interim Director of Children’s Services**
 Purpose of Report: **To seek approval to consult on the proposed policy for reduced Post-16 Transport grants for mainstream students from low income families from September 2014.**

Recommendation:

The Lead Member is recommended to approve consultation on the proposed policy for payment of reduced grants to post-16 mainstream students from low income families from September 2014.

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 East Sussex County Council provides support with transport for mainstream students aged 16 to 19 from low income families. This support is given in the form of Freedom Tickets for use on several public bus networks or a free seat on a hired vehicle (financed through the Home to School Transport Budget) or payment of a grant where public transport is not available. This report refers to both grant payments and Freedom Tickets.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 The budget for grants in 2013/14 was £216k and there was a small underspend of £13.6k by the end of the last financial year (2012/13). However, the Lead Member is advised this budget could come under pressure in the future through raising the participation age.

2.2 The Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) requires a total saving of 15% on all services over three financial years. The Home to School Transport Budget in 2012/13 was £9m and under the agreed MTFP total savings of 15% for Admissions and Transport have to be made over the financial period from 2013 to 2016. These savings are ambitious and challenging given that there are relatively few discretionary areas. As a result where opportunities exist it is necessary to consider them carefully.

2.3 The total saving to be made from this specific budget is £33k.

2.4 The budget for 2013/14 has been reduced by £9k which is in keeping with the savings target for the year. The policy has not been changed for the 2013/14 year, and if the number of students is similar to last year, the budget should meet demand. However, it is not possible to say with any certainty how many qualifying students will move on to Further Education in September 2013 as, at the time of writing, applications for assistance had not been made.

3. Financial Information

3.1 The number of termly payments (based on a three-term year) and the annual cost over the last three years is shown below:

Financial year	Number of payments made	Annual cost
2010/11	1,221	£168,913
2011/12	1,291	£180,583
2012/13	1307	£203,170

3.2 Support for FE students is also provided from the Home to School Transport Budget in the form of Freedom Tickets used on public transport or a free seat on a hired vehicle as appropriate. The Home to School Transport Budget is also subject to a reduction of 15% which is being calculated separately and does not form part of this report.

3.3 The savings will be made across three years as per the table below:

Financial year	Percentage of savings and amount	Total budget
2013/14	4% (£9k)	£207.8k
2014/15	8% (£17k)	£190.8k
2015/16	3% (£7k)	£183.8k
Total savings	15% (£33k)	

These savings drive the proposed policy for 2014/15 which is shown as Appendix 1. The Lead Member is advised that the grant amounts would be reduced from the 2013/14 levels (shown in Appendix 2) to meet the required savings, and the calculations are based on the 2012/13 student numbers. The changed levels of grant would affect all post-16 students, but the reductions are very small and no more than £24 per student per year. The policies for the 2014/15 and the 2015/16 academic years will be proposed and consulted on in 2014 and 2015 respectively with support levels adjusted to meet the savings as agreed on the MTFP for these years.

4. Eligibility Criteria.

4.1 It is proposed that the eligibility criteria remain the same as in previous years as shown in Appendix 1. Families who meet these criteria are designated as 'low income' by DfE, as they meet the qualification for free school meals. The Authority is required to publish a policy statement on its website by 31 May each year.

5. Paying due regard to the Equality Duty

5.1 The proposed eligibility criteria mean that only families assessed as being 'low income' would qualify for support, thereby ensuring the most vulnerable families receive financial support in order to maximise their opportunities to attend further education placements. It is proposed that a full equality impact assessment is carried out as part of the consultation process.

6. Consultation

6.1 The Authority is obliged to undertake consultation with stakeholders each year on the proposed policy. The consultation exercise will last at least four weeks, and will include all schools, FE providers and parents of students (through providers) in East Sussex. It is proposed that any comments received will be reported to the Lead Member at the meeting on 9 December 2013.

7. Conclusion and Recommendations

7.1 The Lead Member is advised that funding for student grants for young people from low income families is an important part of supporting their participation in Further Education. The Lead Member is recommended to approve consultation on the proposed policy for payment of grants to post-16 mainstream students from low income families from September 2014. The results of this consultation will be reported to the Lead Member early in the New Year for decision.

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Local Members: All

Appendix 1 - Proposed policy for post-16 student grants for the 2014/15 academic year.

Appendix 2 - Current policy for post-16 student grants for the 2013/14 academic year

Appendix 1.

Proposed policy for post-16 student grants for the 2014/15 academic year

Students whose families are in receipt of one of the following:

- Income Support
- Income-based Job Seekers Allowance
- Child Tax Credit based on income of up to £16,190* (*may change in line with criteria for receiving free school meals)
- Employment and Support Allowance (income related)
- Guarantee element of State Pension Credit

can receive help with transport from the County Council, if the distance between home and the nearest appropriate provision is over three miles. Help is provided in one of the following ways:

- an annual grant payable in three instalments. There are three levels of grant which are based on the distance from home to college measured by the shortest walking distance.
 - Level 1 (distance between 3 - 7 miles) £300 per year (£100 per term)
 - Level 2 (distance between 7 - 10 miles) £450 per year (£150 per term)
 - Level 3 (distance over 10 miles) £600 per year (£200 per term)
- a free seat on a vehicle hired by the County Council
(*available only to students attending sixth forms at East Sussex maintained secondary schools*)
- a season ticket on supported bus services

In addition, the course normally needs to run for a minimum of one academic year and needs to be on a full time basis.

Students not meeting the criteria for travel support but who still have genuine money difficulties, may be able to get a bursary from their school or college. The school or college will decide on the amount, and how the bursaries are paid. Ask your tutor or at your student support office for more details.

Please note that students doing **Apprenticeships** should have reasonable expenses met in full by their learning provider. Students enrolled on a short course, for example, a 16 week programme, should seek help from the course provider should the cost of travel be a barrier to attending.

Appendix 2

Current policy for post-16 student grants for the 2013/14 academic year

Students from families in receipt of:

- Income Support
- Income-based Job Seekers Allowance
- Child Tax Credit based on income of up to £16,190
- Employment and Support Allowance
- Guarantee element of State Pension Credit

are entitled to help with transport from the County Council, if the distance between home and the nearest appropriate provision is over three miles. Help is provided in one of the following ways:

- a free seat on a vehicle hired by the County Council
(available only to students attending sixth forms at East Sussex maintained secondary schools)
- a season ticket on certain public bus services
- an annual grant payable in three instalments. There are three levels of grant which are based on the distance from home to college measured by the shortest walking distance.

<u>Level 1</u> (distance between 3 - 7 miles)	£312 per year (£104 per term)
<u>Level 2</u> (distance between 7 - 10 miles)	£468 per year (£156 per term)
<u>Level 3</u> (distance over 10 miles)	£624 per year (£208 per term)

In addition, the course normally needs to run for a minimum of one academic year and needs to be on a full time basis.

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Please note that students doing **Apprenticeships** should have reasonable expenses met in full by their learning provider. Students enrolled on a short course, for example, a 16 week programme, should seek help from the course provider should the cost of travel be a barrier to attending.

