

Committee:	<b>Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability</b>
Date:	<b>21 May 2020</b>
Title of Report:	<b>Post-16 Transport Policy Statement 2020-2021</b>
By:	<b>Director of Children's Services</b>
Purpose of Report:	<b>To approve the proposed Post-16 Transport Policy Statement for the 2020-2021 academic year</b>

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## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**The Lead Member is recommended to:**

- 1) approve the Post-16 Transport Policy Statement for the 2020-21 academic year as set out in Appendix 5; and**
  - 2) approve the cessation of Sussex Student Card rail subsidy as set out in Appendix 2.**
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### **1. Background**

1.1 Once young people reach school leaving age, the assistance councils have to give them with transport to school or college changes. They do not automatically get free school transport that younger children are entitled to, but there is a duty on the local authority to provide travel assistance to learners of sixth form age and adult learners if it is considered necessary.

1.2 The County Council exercises its discretion to determine what transport and financial support are necessary to facilitate young people's attendance. To inform young people and their parents what arrangements are available locally, we must publish the Post-16 Transport Policy Statement each year. The statement aims to be a single point of reference that outlines the help that might be available through the County Council, schools, colleges and transport operators to help all young people of sixth form age and young adult learners aged 19+ who have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) to get to school and college. It includes information about:

- fares and concessions;
- the Council's home to school/college transport policy for learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND); and
- contact details for schools and colleges.

1.3 The County Council is required to consult on the Post-16 transport policy statement each year before it is published on or before 31 May.

### **2. Supporting information**

2.1. The consultation asked for comments from secondary schools, colleges and special schools on the proposals. Additionally, they were asked to bring it to the attention of current Year 11 students as well as current sixth formers (and their parents).

2.2. Consultation took place between 30 March and 1 May 2020. This sought views on the transport policy statement (**Appendix 1**) and on the proposal to cease the Sussex Student Card rail concession (**Appendix 2**).

2.3. Transport Policy Statement - Apart from the rail section, changes in the proposed Transport Policy Statement relate to dates and anticipated changes to travel costs. There are no substantial changes to the policy around the help from the Council that is available to young people. The weekly Freedom Ticket is expected to rise in August from £17.50 to £18. This cost is set by the Council in consultation with the bus operators. In turn, the contribution from families in cases where support is given will rise by the same amount, as the contribution is based on the cost of a Freedom Ticket. There

is no increase to the charge to buy a vacant seat on a contracted coach. The charge is representative of the average cost of a seat across all school coaches.

2.4. The Sussex Student Card rail subsidy – is a 34% rail discount that East Sussex County Council runs in partnership with West Sussex County Council and Brighton & Hove City Council.

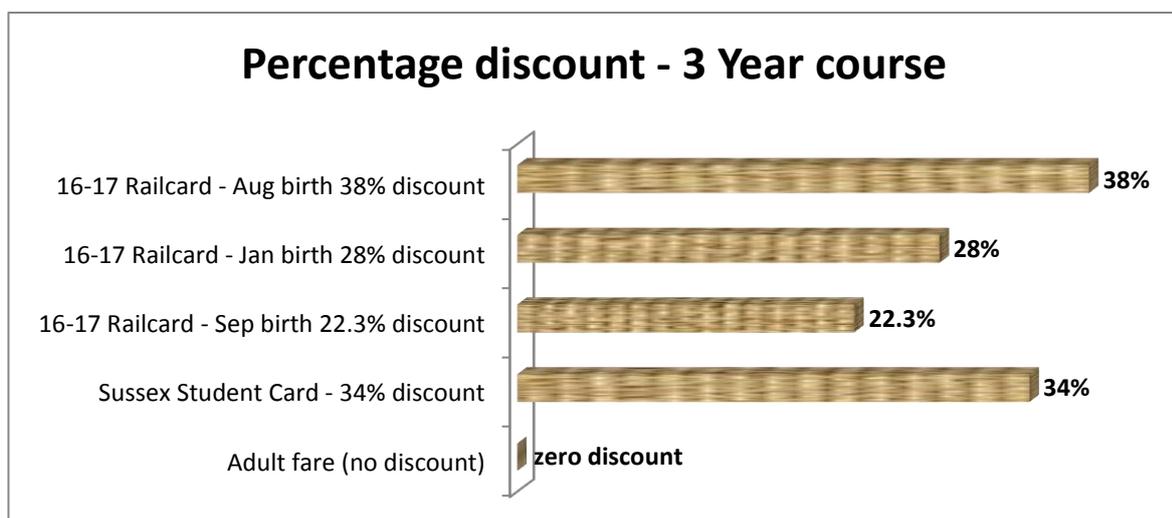
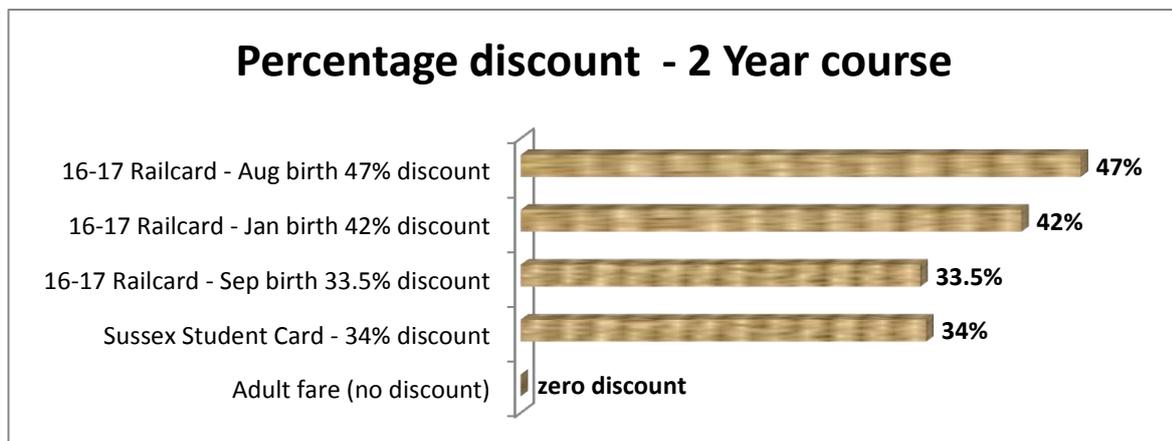
2.5. In August 2019, the Department for Transport announced a new national rail scheme for 16-17 year olds which gives a 50% saving on a standard adult fare. The new railcard runs until the 18th birthday. However, season tickets bought before the expiry date can continue to be used for up to four months after the expiry date.

2.6. Despite first being mooted in December 2017, the announcement of the new national scheme took place on 14 August 2019 leaving little time for students to react. The councils and Southern Rail therefore agreed to continue the Sussex Student Card for those who already had one. Card holder received a letter advising them they should investigate the level of savings they could achieve if they switched to the 16-17 Railcard.

2.7. In addition, it was also agreed to allow Sussex Student Cards to be issued to new applicants aged 18 years or over, whilst the Council considered the impact of the new scheme and allowed sufficient time to consider the future of the Sussex Student Card. Unsurprisingly, new applications for the Sussex Student Card fell by 94% (July – December 2019).

2.8. Numerical analysis suggests that the vast majority of students are actually better off with the new national 16-17 Railcard. Some young people will receive a similar discount and some studying for three years may get a reduced discount overall. This is because the national rail discount is linked to the user's date of birth. For instance, August born learners will receive their discount for longer than those born earlier in the academic year.

2.9. The following graphs show the level of discount students might achieve with the national railcard compared to the Sussex Student Card.



2.10. Although the second graph shows some students will receive smaller discount, this doesn't take account of the various other rail concessions available for young people (set out in appendix 2). Students with genuine financial hardship can approach their learning provider to see if there's any direct financial support available either through Bursary funds or through the East Sussex hardship fund given to the larger colleges where rail usage is more likely.

2.11. The Lead Member is required to have 'due regard' to the duties set out in Section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 ('the PSED') in considering the proposal to cease the Sussex Student Card rail subsidy. An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was carried out and is provided at Appendix 3 of this report.

### **Consultation responses**

2.12. There were 17 responses and these are set out in **Appendix 4**. Whilst this seems relatively low, it surpasses the total number of responses received in 17/18, 18/19 and 19/20 put together.

2.13. There were very few comments regarding the Transport Policy Statement. The ones that were made seemed to agree the policy statement is complete, clear and accurate.

2.14. There was one comment about the price of the Freedom Ticket which is due to rise by 50 pence per week in August 2020. The rise is anticipated in August. Additionally, the Freedom Ticket still works out good value as it can be used at evenings and weekends.

2.15. There were concerns raised about students dropping out of education, falling skill levels and the potential for increased traffic congestion.

2.16. The majority of responses related to the Sussex Student Card consultation. Some recognised the national railcard scheme was a better option. It was, however, evident that several consultees were unclear about the purpose of the Sussex Student Card as they mentioned university or being mature students. The Sussex Student Card is solely for further education students aged 16-19. It has never been extended to those on higher education courses, those over 19 nor to London termini. National products such as the 16-25 railcard or the 26-30 railcard are not affected by the recent East Sussex consultation.

2.17. This confusion perhaps reinforces the authority's view that the abundance of schemes already available is unhelpful and that by removing the Sussex Student Card will make travel choices easier for young people.

2.18. Some suggested the national scheme should be extended to the end of the academic year in which a young person turns 18. Another suggested that Southern Railway's Unizone area could be extended. Another felt an integrated smartcard to use across bus and train operating companies would be beneficial. These suggestions will be passed on to the relevant organisation for them to consider.

### **3. Conclusion and reason for recommendation**

3.1. The County Council has carried out its legal duty to consult on the annual Post-16 Transport Policy statement.

3.2. The proposed statement differs slightly from the draft statement as Heathfield Community College has updated their entry. In addition, the criteria for Post 16 and Post 19 learners with SEND have been amended to mirror the criteria agreed by Lead Member on 30 April.

3.3. The [papers relating to the 30 April meeting](#) can be found on the Council's website.

3.4. The Lead Member is therefore recommended to agree the Post-16 Transport Policy Statement as outlined in **Appendix 5** to fulfil its statutory duty.

3.5. After publication, ESCC may revise a statement to change the arrangements specified should it be considered necessary.

3.6. The Lead Member is also recommended to end the Sussex Student Card subsidy in July 2020. It is accepted that a small number of students will receive a reduced discount compared to previous years but there are clear mitigations. The Sussex Student Card has become largely redundant and fewer discount schemes will make the position clearer for students.

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Local Members: All

Background Documents:

None

Appendices:

Appendix 1 – Draft Post-16 Transport Policy Statement for consultation

Appendix 2 – Consultation document re removal of the Sussex Student Card rail subsidy

Appendix 3 – Sussex Student Card Equality Impact Assessment

Appendix 4 – Comments made during the consultation period

Appendix 5 – Proposed Post-16 Transport Policy Statement for 2020-21