

Report to: Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability
Date of meeting: 22 May 2023
Title: Post-16 Transport Policy Statement 2023-2024
By: Director of Children's Services
Purpose: To approve the proposed Post-16 Transport Policy Statement for the 2023-2024 academic year

RECOMMENDATION:

The Lead Member is recommended to approve the Post-16 Transport Policy Statement for the 2023-24 academic year as set out in Appendix 3.

1. Background

1.1 Once young people reach school leaving age, the assistance local authorities are required to provide with transport to school or college changes. There is no obligation to provide free school transport that some younger children are entitled to (as a result of, for example, age and distance to the nearest school or because of the nature of the walking route). There is a duty, however, 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 or financial support is 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+ (up to 25) 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 mainstream colleges and schools with sixth forms.

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 or carers).

2.2 Consultation took place between 3 March 2023 and 7 April 2023 and sought views on the draft transport policy statement (**Appendix 1**).

2.3 Changes in the proposed Transport Policy Statement related to dates and anticipated changes to travel costs.

2.4 There were no substantial changes to the policy around the help from the Council that is available to young people. There were, however, potential cost changes for students but, at the time of consulting, it was too early to be definite about these especially as we awaited updates on the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP). The consultation advised that there might also be a change 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.

Consultation responses

2.5 There were 12 responses, and these are set out in **Appendix 2**.

2.6 The comments included calls for fares to be reduced, for ticketing arrangements to be simplified, described operational issues experienced by some users and made suggestions for improved services. These comments have been forwarded to colleagues in Public Transport.

2.7 Some respondents felt that Post-16 transport should be free. Students facing financial hardship can apply to their course provider for a discretionary bursary. The Post 16 Transport Policy Statement signposts young people and their parents to sources of available financial help.

Updates to bus fares and charges

2.8 In October 2021, the County Council submitted its BSIP to the Department of Transport and was awarded £41.4m to deliver the council's objectives for bus growth targets in relation to passenger volumes, mileage operated, vehicle requirements, targeted fare reductions, accessibility to both high frequency services and rural transport provision and multi-modal ticketing.

2.9 From 1 April 2023, as a result of the government funding, lower fares operate on all bus services. For under 19's, the Freedom Weekly Ticket now has a new discounted price of £15 (instead of £17.50). That equates to £3 per day if used 5 days a week and £2.14 per day if used every day of the week. The Freedom Ticket allows unlimited travel on any bus with any operator for seven days in a row, at all times and days of the year.

2.10 Alternatively, under 19s can purchase a discounted £3.20 multi-operator day ticket if travelling on Stagecoach, Brighton & Hove Buses, Metrobus, Compass, Cuckmere services in East Sussex.

2.11 All BSIP fare reductions will run until 31 March 2025.

2.12 Where assistance is agreed for a learner aged 16-19 with SEND, a contribution towards to the cost of travel is required. As the contribution is linked to the cost of a Freedom Ticket, the charge in 2023/24 will be £570 (a reduction of £114 pa). Low-income families will be asked to contribute £285 per academic year i.e. a 50% discount.

2.13 The charge for a vacant seat on a school coach will rise from £170 per term to £188.70. Unfortunately, this scheme cannot benefit from the award of BSIP funds and the amount reflects the true cost of seat on a coach under contract to the council.

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 Following consultation, the proposed statement has been updated from the draft statement to reflect all the bus fare changes, the reduction to the Post 16 contribution and to the Vacant Seat rate. The Lead Member is recommended to agree the Post-16 Transport Policy Statement as outlined in **Appendix 3** to fulfil its statutory duty.

3.3 After publication, the County Council may revise a Transport Policy Statement to change the arrangements specified should it be considered necessary.

ALISON JEFFERY
Director of Children's Services

Contact Officer: Ian Crudge
Tel. No. 01273 337382
Email: ian.crudge@eastsussex.gov.uk

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None