

Report to: **Lead Member for Learning and School Effectiveness**

Date: **12 November 2015**

By: **Director of Children's Services**

Title of report: **Proposed changes to discretionary SEND transport provision from the 2016/17 academic year**

Purpose of report: **To ask the Lead Member to make a decision on whether to approve the proposed reductions in support for students with Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND)**

RECOMMENDATION:

Lead Member is asked to approve the implementation of the proposals set out in 1.2 of this report in order to reduce spend on the discretionary home to school transport (HTST) budget from the start of the 2016/17 academic year

1 Background

1.1 It is anticipated that East Sussex County Council (ESCC) will need to reduce expenditure by £70-90 million between 2016/17 and 2018/19 and all areas will need to be considered. The cost of providing discretionary transport in the 2014/15 academic year was £1.46m for 206 students with SEND, and approximately £40k for 10 nursery-aged children. It is clear that the level of support currently being provided for both nursery and post-16 learners cannot be sustained given the savings required across East Sussex County Council (ESCC). It is recommended therefore that the HTST policy is amended in order to make significant reductions in our discretionary HTST spend.

1.2 The proposed changes, which will apply from September 2016, are to:

- i. offer support to those demonstrating the 'highest level of need' only by introducing tighter 'exceptions' criteria for post-16 SEND students and offering the most cost-effective support, as set out in a post-16 SEND transport policy. This would apply only to new applicants from September 2016;
- ii. increase the current post-16 transport contribution from £370 to £608 (the 2015 cost of a bus Freedom ticket).
- iii. introduce a 50% rate of contribution for low income families, at £304.
- iv. introduce an annual contribution for pre-school SEND travel assistance at the same rates as post-16 travel (£608 / £304).

All SEND students would be subject to the increase in the contribution if implemented from September 2016 (points ii to iv).

1.3 Potential savings and numbers of students impacted are summarised in **Appendix 1**. It is estimated that additional year on year savings against the 2014/15 forecast, if all elements were to be approved and maximised are potentially: £118k in 2016/17, £291k in 2017/18, and £351k in 2018/19. These totals accumulate to reach £759k of total savings over 2016/17 - 2018/19.

2 Supporting information

2.1 The public consultation on the changes was open from 10 June until 18 September 2015 following the Lead Member decision to consult on 8 June 2015.

2.2 Parents / carers of 510 Year 9 to Year 14 children with SEND transport in 2014/15 received letters inviting them to take part in the online consultation. Paper forms were available. Early Years providers also received the information. A press release on 11 June 2015 resulted in wide coverage of the story (**Appendix 11**).

2.3 There were 35 responses to the SEND survey. A summary is shown in **Appendix 2**. Key concerns included the ability of many families of children with SEND to cope with additional costs for transport, and that a young person may not be able to attend their post-16 or pre-school placement.

2.4 A parent consultation event with ESCC took place on 10 September, organised and promoted by the East Sussex Parent and Carers' Council (ESPACC), which is outlined in **Appendix 3**. The key issue identified by the Forum was that parents and carers of a child or young person with SEND often have numerous additional costs but are not necessarily low income.

2.5 Meetings with school sixth forms and colleges occurred on 19 May and 8 July following communications about the proposed changes, to raise awareness and discuss potential impact and mitigation. Post-16 providers gave little comment on proposals relating to SEND students.

2.6 A draft post-16 SEND travel assistance policy was circulated as part of the consultation. All changes to the original draft policy are shown in red in **Appendix 4**, and include revised wording regarding Motability vehicles.

2.7 **Appendix 5** sets out the comments of the Scrutiny Review Board which met on 15 October 2015, with a response from the Children's Services Department.

2.8 The Review Board asked that we recalculate the savings to increase the contribution of families not on low incomes to £750 per annum, and to model what impact this would have on reducing the contribution being asked of LIF families. This additional information is now included in Section 6 of **Appendix 1**.

2.9 The Review Board also requested we list available sources of funding and give a breakdown of post-16 providers attended by 16-19 year old students which demonstrates the proportion of providers with access to additional support via the EFA bursary scheme. This is summarised in **Appendix 6**.

2.9 The Campaign for Better Transport (CBT) responded specifically to the SEND consultation, full copy in **Appendix 7**, with a response from the County Council.

2.10 **Appendix 8** summarises what other county councils are charging families as a contribution towards SEND travel support in 2015/16. In line with other local authorities, the ESCC position will be reviewed annually as with other 'fees and charges'.

3 Key risks and mitigation

3.1 Reducing discretionary transport support carries a number of risks, which are outlined in **Appendix 9** with details of the potential impact and mitigation.

3.2 A full Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken which summarises potential impact and mitigation; this is included as **Appendix 10**.

3.3 The key mitigations should the proposed changes be implemented are summarised on page 18 and 19 of the EIA. They include the continuation of the Independent Travel Training service and this carries huge additional benefits to young people in their transition to adulthood.

4 Conclusion and reasons for recommendations

4.1 As part of the Children's Services Department's response to the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan the recommendation is that the Lead Member agrees to all the changes listed in item 1.2. Potential impact will be mitigated as detailed in the EIA (**Appendix 10**).

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- Appendix 1 Summary of cohort numbers and savings
- Appendix 2 Response to the online survey
- Appendix 3 Consultation with ESPACC
- Appendix 4 Draft Post-16 SEND travel assistance policy
- Appendix 5 Scrutiny Board minutes and response
- Appendix 6 EFA bursaries and other support
- Appendix 7 Response from CBT
- Appendix 8 Comparison with other local authorities
- Appendix 9 Risks
- Appendix 10 Equality Impact Assessment
- Appendix 11 Press releases