

## Survey on changes to discretionary post-16 transport

### The Proposals

1. Our proposals regarding provision for 16-19 year old students from low income families are that:
  - We withdraw the current offer of free or subsidised travel (travel passes, travel grants, free places on school coaches) for 16-19 year old sixth form or college students from low income families for new starters from September 2016
  - We retain 25% of the budget to provide a hardship fund, for access by the most disadvantaged young people, in order to ensure that they can still get some support to help them get to sixth form or college

*Further info: The proposal is to withdraw the current offer of free or subsidised travel to sixth form or college, for 16-19 year old students from low income families who live more than 3 miles from their nearest suitable college or sixth form. This change would be for new starters from September 2016. The Council would delegate 25% of the budget to provide a hardship fund, for access by the most disadvantaged young people, in order to assist them in getting to sixth form or college.*

*The average cost to the Council per 16-19 year old student with eligibility due to low family income and distance from college is currently £510 per academic year. Around 470 young people receive this financial help, with the type depending on their circumstances. Support ranges from travel grants of £300, £450 or £600, to a free bus pass at £608 (Freedom Pass) or £290 (Brighton Bus ID card), to a free seat on a school coach (normal vacant seat price £744).*

2. Our proposal regarding provision for a small number of 16-19 year old students who live in rural locations and who receive free 'link transport' to the nearest suitable bus stop or train station is:
  - We cease this provision for new starters from September 2016 (this provision is currently for three young people and will result in a saving of approximately £4-5k per year)

*Further info: 'FE Link' or link transport is offered to 16-19 year olds who live in remote rural areas in the county which have no public transport, and takes the form of a free taxi service to the start of the nearest suitable public transport journey to college. The Council has made this provision to compensate for the lack of good public transport in a very small number of remote residences in the county. Students receiving link transport have to pay for their ongoing journey.*

*As of April 2015, there are only 3 travellers using 2 taxis with an actual annual cost to the HTST budget of £4.4k, each being transported between 3 and 5 miles from their homes to either a train station or a bus stop. The offer is outlined in the 2015/16 post-16 Transport Statement as: 'Link transport: Some students (those living in the most rural locations) may be assisted to get to their nearest bus pick up point or railway station provided they attend the nearest appropriate provision. Contact the Admissions and Transport Team within the Children's Services Department at County Hall for more details.'*

*These college students cannot share minibuses with younger school age students as they have to leave earlier, return later and are usually travelling in a different direction to the local secondary school – therefore per head this provision is relatively costly. It is recognised that a very small number of future potential recipients may also be impacted by a reduction in their post-16 transport support.*

## HEADLINES

*There were 26 responses to the online survey relating to the removal of travel support for post-16 students from low income families and for FE link transport. Of these, one respondent was in support of the changes.*

*The most predominant concern (81% of respondents) was that young people may not continue in post-16 education, especially regarding vocational courses. There was also concern about unemployment and reduced social mobility, as well as the fact that those living in rural areas were being penalised. There was less interest shown in the proposal to cease FE Link provision, with the majority of respondents assuming that recipients are also low income (whereas there is no means-test).*

### Response to the survey

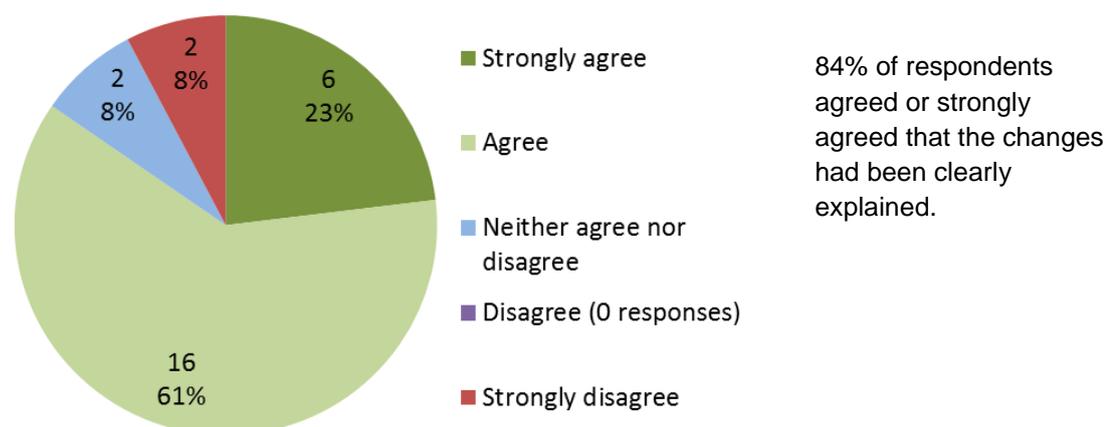
The survey was introduced with a summary of the proposed changes, with the full Lead Member report available to respondents as one of the supporting documents.

Respondents were provided with a list of anticipated Frequently Asked Questions to help them to further understand the proposals (included at the end of this appendix).

Respondents were asked whether they understood the proposal, and a question about potential impact was then asked, with an opportunity to respond with any further comments. A number of key themes emerged, and the themes and corresponding numbers for each have been summarised. Some respondents made more than one point in their response; others made no response to some questions.

#### 1. Withdrawal of travel support for 16-19 year old students from low income families

##### A. Do you understand this proposal? - The changes that are proposed have been clearly explained



##### B. In your opinion, how might the withdrawal of travel support for 16-19 year old students from low income families impact on your own family / other families with low incomes?

Comment or concern	Number	%
Young people may not continue post-16, especially if vocational	21	81
May increase unemployment / decrease social mobility	9	35
Unfair to low income families living in rural areas	5	19
Hardship fund will not cover all those in need /may be complex to access	5	19
It will not impact on my own family	4	15
Concern regarding risks of young people walking or cycling to college	2	8
Concern that low income families already hit by other cuts	1	4

### Examples of statements

- 1) Young people may not continue post-16, especially if vocational

*'My son wants to be an electrician and the closest place is Eastbourne so he would simply not be able to do this anywhere nearer and would end up taking an academic course that would be of no use to him and therefore a waste of taxpayers' money'*

*'The savings are tiny yet will have a disproportionate effect on those affected, who are also those with the least political voice and influence (the age group mostly comprises those without a vote)'*

*'The cutting of this service - in my opinion - conflicts with the government's intention to keep all students in education until the end of the 16-19 age bracket'*

- 2) May increase unemployment / decrease social mobility

*'reduce likelihood of attendance and impact on social mobility due to poor educational attainment'*

*'The knock on effects will cost more in the future'*

- 3) Unfair to low income families living in rural areas

*'It helps to create "no go areas" in rural communities for families on a low wage'*

- 4) Hardship fund will not cover all those in need /may be complex to access

*'There are likely to be families that would struggle to pay for transport to colleges, but might not be the most extreme cases and so wouldn't qualify for the hardship fund - borderline cases that would suddenly find themselves struggling'*

*'Make sure you promote the hardship fund & have easy access to the fund'*

- 5) It will not impact on my own family

*'They will have to find the money same as us'*

*'It won't impact my family as it's not low income, however other families may struggle to be able to send their children to school'*

- 6) Concern regarding risks of young people walking or cycling to college

*'Young people from low income families, especially in rural areas may not be able to continue in FE or may be put seriously at risk by being forced to walk or cycle on dark unsafe roads'*

7) Concern that low income families already hit by other cuts

*'Families on low incomes are already struggling because of cuts imposed by central government. Many will simply not be able to find the money (around £500/year for each child) for bus fare'*

*'The withdrawal of travel support will disproportionately impact on young people and families who are already severely disadvantaged, placing further barriers to that young person's ability to achieve their potential'*

*'The current urge to penalise those people least able to afford the cost is dangerous'*

There was one response on behalf of a parish council:

*'Bodiam Parish Council are concerned that this would pose a financial burden on low income families. Students have to attend between the ages of 16 and 18 and parents may find the situation difficult to finance. Children in Bodiam have to travel to Hastings/Bexhill/Tonbridge for 6th form education. There is no choice within walking distance. Public transport costs at least £20 per week for 16-19 year olds. In the Defra paper published August 15. The Government argues for a highly skilled rural workforce. Therefore access to Education and training is essential.'*

It should be noted however, that in the 2014/15 cohort, there was only 1 student (of the 470) residing in Bodiam who received a medium size travel grant.

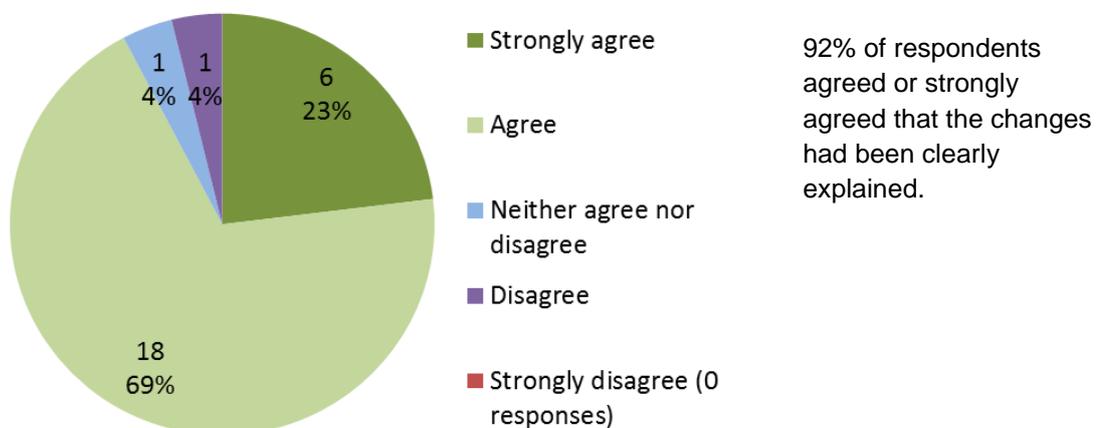
**Solutions offered**

*'If the means test for free travel under the age of 16 encompasses a wide range of students, would it make more sense to cut this slightly to provide more for 18-19 year olds?'*

ESCC Response: the means test for pre-16 children is set at the level of eligibility for Free School Meals and cannot be lowered.

**2. Withdrawal of FE link transport for 16-19 year old students**

**A. Do you understand this proposal? - The changes that are proposed have been clearly explained**



**Q2 In your opinion, how might the ceasing of FE link transport for 16-19 year old students impact on your own family / other families?**

Comment or concern	Number	%
Young people may not continue in education post-16	8	 31
Penalises those who live in a rural area	5	 19
It will not impact on my own family	5	 19
Is there a more cost-effective solution for these few YP?	2	 8
Agree that post-16s could travel to nearest bus stop	1	 4

**Examples of statements**

- 1) Young people may not continue in education post-16

*'They may well be forced to drop out of FE'*

- 2) Penalises those who live in a rural area

*'once again you are hitting poor families in very rural areas. You are making the assumption that just because we live in a nice area, we all have loads of money. This is far from the case'*

*'After the bus routes in rural areas were taken away the council promised community transport for vulnerable people. I don't think you can cut both'*

- 3) It will not impact on my own family

*'This would not affect me and whilst a can see that it would have an impact on families in rural areas, when you choose to live in a rural area you must presumably take this into consideration? Is there a more cost-effective solution for these few YP?'*

- 4) Agree that post-16s could travel to nearest bus stop

*'I think that most 16+ years old could safely make their own way to the nearest bus stop from home and agree that this is where the savings could be made. I think that they should still be offered free travel from the bus stop to the college'*

**Solutions offered**

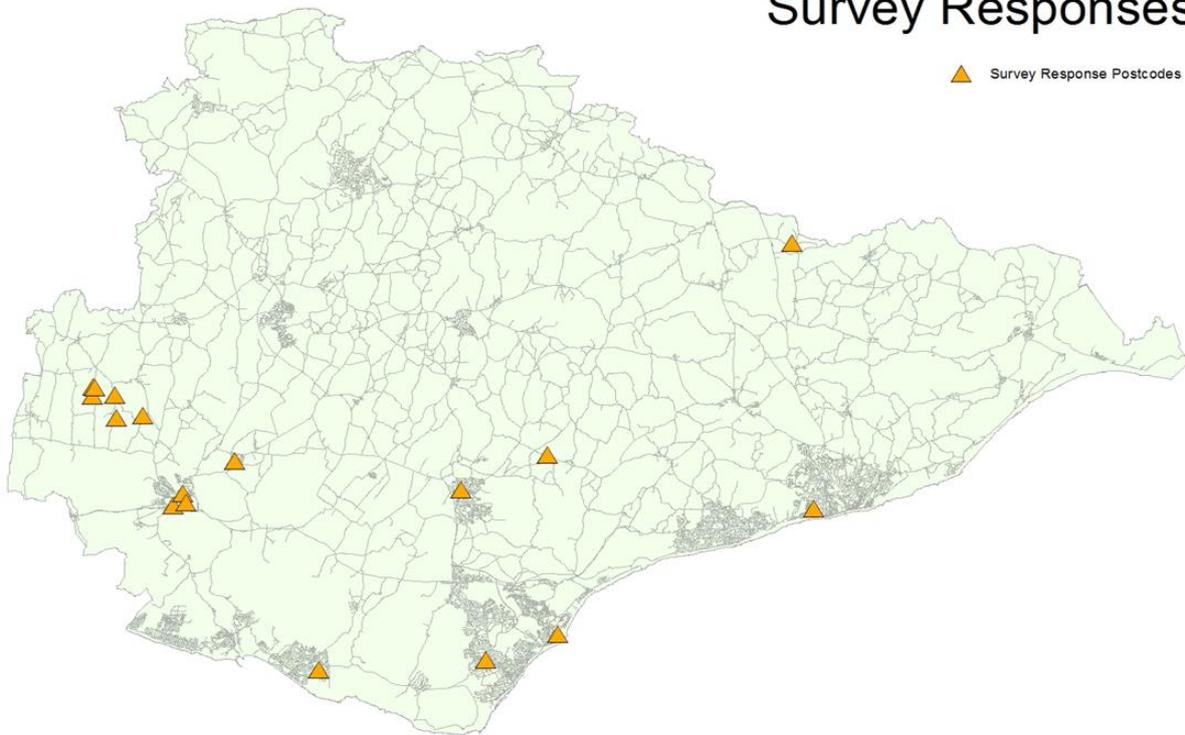
*'I wonder if Senior Citizens like me could be persuaded to make a modest financial contribution towards their currently free bus pass, (off the top of my head, say 50p per journey)?'*

ESCC Response: this would not be possible due to the administration required versus the benefits.

**2. Respondent equalities information**

- 27% (7) stated that they were the parent, carer or family member of a child or young person who may be impacted by these changes
- 15% (4) stated that their family would qualify as low income, i.e. would meet the free school meals criteria
- 20% (6) identified themselves as a child or young person who may be impacted by these changes – all of these were also Youth Cabinet responses
- 12% (3) were practitioners who work with families which may be impacted by the changes
- 46% female, 35% male, 19% preferred not to say
- Ages ranged from 13 to 84, with 23% not providing their age
- 85% white British, with the remainder not answering or preferring not to say
- Only 4% (1 person) identified as disabled as set out in the Equality Act 2010
- Responses matched the areas of high population in the south of the county, with fewer than expected responses from the mid-county and the north of East Sussex. Some of the cluster in Lewes is likely to be attributable to the Youth Cabinet responses.

## Survey Responses



The following FAQs were provided to respondents as part of the information with the consultation:

## **Consultation on Discretionary Transport Consultation Frequently Asked Questions**

Q. Why is the Council proposing these cuts, which may cause some young people to struggle to get to sixth form or college?

A. The Council is facing continuing reductions in budgets from central government, and all services which are not statutory are now being reluctantly considered for reductions in provision.

Q. Is school attendance now compulsory until a child / young person reaches 18 years (with Raising of the Participation Age or **RPA**)? If that's the case shouldn't help with transport between 16 and 18 years a statutory requirement for the Council?

A. There has been no change to the statutory school age, so although there is an expectation that young people will remain in education or training after the age of 16, there is no legislation requiring them to do so.

Q. How is '**Low Income Family**' defined?

A. We use the same criteria as for free school meals for younger students – currently this receipt by the parent/ carer or young person of any of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The Guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit only, provided your annual household income (as assessed by HM Revenue & Customs) does not exceed £16,190.
- During the initial roll out of the benefit, Universal Credit

Q. My child currently receives a free travel pass (or grant) to get to college. Will this continue next year?

A. The changes to support for students from low income families will be for new starters only from September 2016. If your child is eligible for travel help for the 2015/16 academic year, you may still apply in the usual way.

Q. What other support is available to families on low income or vulnerable post-16 students?

A. The Council will continue to fund subsidies for transport (including a subsidy to Southern Rail so that they can offer a discount to post-16 learners) and the most vulnerable can also access the Education Funding Agency (EFA) [16-19 bursaries](#). These national bursaries are managed by sixth forms and colleges, and are intended to provide the necessary financial support to those students from the lowest income households. Where transport costs have been identified as a specific barrier to participation, the bursary can be used to help meet these costs. The 16 to 19 Bursary fund, has two parts, a discretionary bursary and a vulnerable bursary.

In order to be eligible for the vulnerable element of the 16 to 19 Bursary Fund, the student would have to fall into one of the defined categories, which are:

- in or recently left local authority care
- getting Income Support or Universal Credit in their own name
- disabled and getting both Employment and Support Allowance (ESA), and either Disability Living Allowance (DLA) or Personal Independence Payment (PIP) in their own name

If they do not fall into one of the above categories they could apply for a discretionary bursary. Institutions set their own criteria for discretionary bursaries. Student services can tell potential students about their criteria and any evidence needed.

Q. A 'hardship fund' held by the colleges is mentioned, to help the most needy students and families. How would we gain access to this?

A. As part of the consultation, the Council is in discussion with the colleges and sixth forms, particularly those with the greatest numbers of young people who will be impacted by the changes. It is likely that these post-16 providers will add the management of this fund to the other range of support available to 16-19 year olds, for example the EFA 16-19 Discretionary and Vulnerable Student bursaries. This is likely to be accessible via their Student Services department.