

Committee:	Lead Member for Education and Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability
Date:	9 May 2024
Title of Report:	Post-16 Transport Policy Statement 2024-2025
By:	Director of Children’s Services
Purpose of Report:	To approve the proposed Post-16 Transport Policy Statement for the 2024-2025 academic year

RECOMMENDATION:

The Lead Member is recommended to approve the Post-16 Transport Policy Statement (“the Statement”) for the 2024-25 academic year as set out in Appendix 3 of this report.

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 the free home to school transport that some younger children are entitled to (as a result of, for example, age and distance to the nearest school or because the walking route is not available). 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 at educational settings. To inform young people and their parents what arrangements are available locally, the Statement must be published 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 adult learners aged 19+ (up to 25) who have an Education, Health and Care plan (“EHC plan”) to get to school and college. It includes information about:

- fares and concessions;
- sources of financial help; and
- the Council’s travel assistance policies for learners with an EHC plan.

1.3 The County Council is required to consult on the Statement annually 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 29 February 2024 and 28 March 2024 and sought views on the draft transport policy statement (**Appendix 1**).

2.3 Changes in the draft Transport Policy Statement related to dates and contact details. Any updates to travel costs for the 2024/25 academic year will be amended as and when changes are confirmed. This could either be prior to publication or after.

2.4 There were no substantial policy changes to the help from the County Council that is available to young people.

Consultation responses

2.5 There were 13 responses, and these are set out in **Appendix 2**.

2.6 The comments included calls for ticket prices to be reduced and some users raised concerns about gaps in the transport network. 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 Statement signposts young people and their parents to sources of available financial help.

Updates to coach prices, bus fares and contributions (where required)

2.8 The charge for a vacant seat on a school coach is currently £188.70 per term. The cost from September 2024 is not yet finalised. The amount reflects the true cost of seat on a coach under contract to the council and there may be an inflationary rise.

2.9 Since 1 April 2023, lower fares have operated on all bus services. This is due to Government funding in response to the County Council's Bus Service Improvement Plan ("BSIP"). This includes subsidised bus tickets for young people. The funding runs until the end of March 2025, so prices for bus tickets could increase if no additional Government funding is made available to the County Council after this date. The ticket prices affected, if funding ends, would be the under 19s multi operator day ticket, the 19 to 29 multi operator day ticket, the Freedom weekly ticket and the under 19s unaccompanied ticket.

2.10 Where assistance is agreed for a learner aged 16-19 with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities ("SEND"), a contribution towards the cost of travel is required. As the contribution is linked to the cost of a Freedom Ticket, the charge in 2024/25 will remain at £570 even if the Freedom Ticket cost increases in April 2025. Low-income families are required to contribute £285 per academic year i.e. a 50% discount.

3. Conclusion and reason for recommendation

3.1 The County Council has carried out its legal duty to consult on the Statement.

3.2 Following consultation, the proposed statement has been updated slightly from the draft statement to reflect further updates to contact details and to make clear that the bus fare concessions, as a result of BSIP funds, may change from April 2025. The Lead Member is recommended to agree the Statement as outlined in **Appendix 3**.

3.3 After publication, the County Council may update the Statement to update prices or other information as considered necessary.

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LOCAL MEMBERS

All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None