



Environment & Transport Select Committee
18 May 2011

**Home to School/College Transport Policies including
provision of Transport to Denominational Schools**

Purpose of the report: Policy Development and Review

To consider the recommendations to Cabinet on the proposed changes to the eligibility criteria and entitlement of the Home to School/College Transport Policies

1. Introduction:

1.1 The attached report on changes to the Home to School and Post-16 transport policies will be considered by Cabinet on 24 May 2011 (**annex A**).

1.2 The report makes the following recommendations to Cabinet:

- That it agrees to the withdrawal of free home to school denominational transport for new pupils from September 2012 but that it support schools which wish to introduce their own arrangements at full cost recovery.
- That it increases the fare for a concessionary seat to £2.10 in 2011/12 and £2.50 in 2012/13 and thereafter to increase in line with inflation (the lower of CPI and RPI).
- That it removes the discounts for siblings and younger children in the concessionary fare
- That it agrees to change policy so that concessionary seats are sold on a half-termly basis.
- That it agrees to change the eligibility criteria for Post 16 School/College travel, as set out in **Annex 5 of Annex A**.

1.3 Select Committee is asked to consider these recommendations within the context of the report to Cabinet and to indicate whether or not it wishes to support them.

2. Financial and value for money implications

- 2.1 The net cost of providing discretionary home to school transport on denominational grounds is approximately £1.9m. The proposal to withdraw this discretionary benefit is expected to realise a gradual saving from September 2012 onwards.
- 2.2 The changes to the concessionary seat scheme will increase the income generated from the scheme whilst ensuring equity between the different bus and coach provision. The sale of seats on a half-term basis will also offer better value for money.
- 2.3 The proposed change to the criteria for post-16 transport support is anticipated to be cost neutral, as it is expected to provide support to those students who would have otherwise qualified as a maximum EMA recipient.

3. Equalities Implications

- 3.1 An Equality Impact Assessment has been completed and is at **Annex 6 of Annex A**.
- 3.2 The proposal to withdraw free denominational transport will disproportionately impact Catholic families and a lesser extent CofE families. However it should also be noted that the current discretionary transport policy favours these families as it provides families from a faith background with a financial benefit that is not available to other groups. As such this proposal addresses the inequity within the current policy.
- 3.3 The proposal to change the fare for concessionary seats will, as far as possible, create equity between bus and coach transport and thus remove any disadvantage felt by parents who cannot get a concessionary seat for their child.
- 3.4 The proposed Post-16 transport policy attempts to ensure that finance is not a barrier to students who wish to participate in post-16 education at school or college.
- 3.5 In making a decision on these proposals, Members will need to take account of the public equality duties under s149 Equality Act 2010, which came into force on 6 April 2011. These state that the Council should have due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment and victimisation, and foster good relationships between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.
- 3.6 The Equalities Impact Assessment which is attached to this report identifies religion and belief as the protected characteristic most likely to be impacted, potentially both positively and negatively.

3.7 In reaching any decision on the proposals, Members will need to take account of the recommendations of the EIA and the negative effects identified.

4. Risk Management Implications

4.1 The proposals, if adopted as recommended, seek to increase equity in the provision of free school transport and thus help reduce the risk of challenge.

4.2 If all children who would currently receive free denominational transport were to change their preferences in future, there would be potential for some faith schools to be undersubscribed. However the low percentage of Free School Meal eligibility might mean that families might be better placed to afford the transport costs if free transport was withdrawn and therefore be less likely to change their preferences. If preference patterns did change it would be likely that, in time, other local parents would change their preferences in favour of these schools.

4.3 The County Council will be able to offer support to any school which wishes to facilitate their own transport, so that they might reduce any impact on admissions.

5 Implications for the Council's Priorities or Community Strategy/Local Area Agreement Targets

5.1 The provision of transport support for post-16 students helps young people stay on in education and to obtain a qualification thus contributing to National Indicators 79 and 117 and Surrey's Local Area Agreement targets.

Recommendations:

That Select Committee decide whether it wishes to support the recommendation to Cabinet to:

- (a) Withdraw free transport to denominational schools.
- (b) Increase the fare for a concessionary seat to £2.10 in 2011/12 and £2.50 in 2012/13 and thereafter to increase in line with inflation (the lower of CPI and RPI).
- (c) Remove the discounts for siblings and younger children in the concessionary fare.

- (d) Change policy so that concessionary seats are sold on a half-termly basis.
- (e) Change the eligibility criteria for Post 16 School/College travel, as set out in **Annex 5 of Annex A**.

Next steps:

The recommendations of Select Committee will be considered by Cabinet at its meeting on 24 May 2011.

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Sources/background papers:

Home to School Travel and Transport Guidance (2007)
2010 Post 16 Transport Guidance (March 2010)
Cabinet report, 24 May 2011 (attached as Annex A)
