



Education and Skills Board
Tuesday 19 April 2016

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Transport Consultation

Purpose of the report: To update the Education and Skills Board on the outcome of the consultation in regard to Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND) transport policies and provide recommendations.

Introduction

1. This report updates the Education and Skills Board in regard to the outcomes of the Pre and Post 16 SEND travel policy consultation and seeks the Board's endorsement to the proposed next steps following the closure of consultation.
2. The local authority consulted on two key changes to existing policy:
 - 2.1 A change to equalise the post 16 policy through introduction of a contribution payment from families for young people with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP) or statement who attend school 6th forms.
 - 2.2 A proposal to amend the way we currently pay parents who take their children to school and claim reimbursement.

Vision

3. The SEND Partnership Board has committed to the vision below in line with the Children Schools and Families improvement programme:

"Children and young people will be happy, healthy, safe and confident in their future".

Context

4. There are currently two policies in place for SEND transport, a pre 16 and post 16 policy.

5. There is a statutory requirement to have a post 16 policy in place for SEND transport by 31 May 2016 which provides equity for all young people.
6. The current policy does not support this fully; there are different charging arrangements for young people requiring transport who have a Learning Development Plan and are at college and those who have a statement or who are transferring to Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCP) in school.
7. The proposal made is that all young people and their families are treated equally in this policy and that all post 16 will be asked to contribute to transport costs. The contribution would be capped to ensure sustainability for families.
8. The local authority spends over £25 million annually on providing transport to children and young people who require transport as a provision for their individual needs. The demand is growing year on year and represents an unsustainable position.
9. The local authority is looking to explore alternative ways to support families to get their children and young people to school, creating supported environments for children and young people, and flexibility for families whilst ensuring value for money for the local authority. One of the current options is to offer parents mileage payments to take their children to school.
10. It was proposed through the SEND travel group, (made up of local authority officers and in consultation with members of Family Voice, the official family parent carer forum for Surrey), that in order to change the culture of the way transport is currently delivered and to encourage more take up of the scheme rather than use taxis, that the parental mileage scheme be reviewed.
11. The current payment method is for families to claim after they have made the journey, similar to the way in which expenses would be claimed in an organisation. The proposal made is to pay families a monthly amount based on mileage from their homes to the school and an 80% attendance rate. This would also have the benefit internally of being a more efficient system as it would be a set amount each month and would therefore not need re entering each month.
12. It was also proposed to rebrand the scheme as a “travel allowance system”.
13. Both the proposed change to the policy and the change to the reimbursement of parental mileage were consulted on in January to March.

SEND Transport Consultation

14. A full overview analysis of the consultation is attached in Annex A.

15. The consultation ran from 04 January 2016 until 28 March 2016 through Surrey County Council's online consultation portal "Surrey Says". The consultation page was amended on the 24 February 2016 following feedback through the consultation, there were no changes to existing questions but further questions were added to provide further clarification.
16. The consultation was communicated to parents, carers, schools and charities through various schools and charity networks, family forums and using various media; including newsletters and social media (full details are available in Annex A.)
17. Whilst the distribution channels reach was wide there were a limited number of responses, 44, to the consultation and a further consultation meeting with members of the Deaf Society and member of Family Voice Surrey at a conference on 20 January 2016. Whilst these numbers would not be classed as statistically significant they have provided themes for the local authority to consider.
18. The Education and Skills Board provided scrutiny of the consultation on the 24 March 2016 and made recommendations to how the consultation response could be increase. The scrutiny occurred the week before Easter and consultation closed on the 28 March so unfortunately there was not enough time to implement these recommendations.
19. It has been identified through the consultation that families did not like / understand the travel allowance/ parental mileage scheme. The scrutiny process identified that the parental mileage section of the policy was not in keeping with the remainder of the policy. They commented that this section would be suited to further work and separate recommendations on service provision.
20. The questions asked regarding contributions to travel for post 16 were:
 - 20.1 "The proposed change would remove the inequity of the current arrangements, where learners who attend colleges are required to pay and learners who attend schools are not. Do you agree?"

60% of respondents agreed that the proposed change removes the inequity of the current arrangements
40% disagreed that the proposed change removes the inequity of the current arrangements
 - 20.2 "Surrey County Council is proposing to continue using a daily charge, currently fixed at £3.66 / day of travel. Is the current system a fair way of charging?"

40% of respondents said that this was a fair way of charging
60% said that this was not a fair way of charging
 - 20.3 The consultation has not provided enough responses to be statistically robust.

Summary

21. The local authority has a statutory obligation to publish a Post 16 SEND transport policy by 31 May 2016 and that this is subject to an Equality Impact Assessment.
22. By amending the Post 16 so that contributions toward travel are made by families who have young people with an EHCP or statement and are at school will provide equality in the system and mean the Local authority meets its statutory obligation.
23. There was a consistent theme in the responses that policies need to be clear and written in plain English.
24. The local authority must consider using different methods of engagement for future consultation.
25. The parental mileage scheme should be looked at but the consultation framework used was not the best means to do this through.

Recommendations:

1. It is recommended that the Education and Skills Board support the change to the post 16 policy to ensure equity in the policy.
2. It is recommended that further work is done with families about the way the local authority delivers provision through workshops and engagement events. This work should be targeted at co-designing sustainable, transformational solutions in keeping with the principles of public value.

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