

CHILDREN, FAMILIES, LIFELONG LEARNING AND CULTURE SELECT COMMITTEE

Item under consideration: HOME TO SCHOOL TRAVEL ASSISTANCE POLICY

Date considered: 7 APRIL 2022

1. On 7 April 2022, the Committee reviewed analysis of consultation responses and took evidence regarding proposed changes to Surrey County Council's home to school travel assistance policy.
2. The Committee heard that the council was facing significant challenges in securing provision for service users and delivering value for money under the current policy due labour market challenges and rising costs; and that the proposed changes were designed to support those most in need, provide independence in preparation for adulthood, further inclusion and sustainability, manage increasing cost and demand and deliver increased value for money.
3. The Committee's approach was informed by Members' work in their divisions and experience of appeals and the responses to the council's consultation, where a majority of respondents supported the changes with the exception of the introduction of collection points, the reduction of the notice period for the removal of travel assistance and the increasing of the minimum journey time for primary-aged children; respondents were split in respect of annually updated post-16 statements, with 39% supportive, 39% opposed and 22% neutral. The Committee thanks those who took the time to respond to the Council's consultation.
4. Questioning focused on:
 - drivers and management of demand and costs;
 - the financial impact and risks of the proposed changes;
 - the process by which needs are evaluated and provision allocated and reviewed;
 - the potential impact of changes in provision for children and families; and
 - proposed change to the composition of the stage two appeals panel.

Recommendations

The Select Committee agreed the following recommendations:

1. *The Cabinet Member for Education and Learning ensure the Home to School Travel Assistance Policy reflects the following recommendations before it is referred to Cabinet for agreement:*
 - a) *The 45-minute maximum intended journey time for primary-aged pupils contained in statutory guidance be maintained and only exceeded in exceptional circumstances, such as journeys which enable a child to attend the setting which best meets their needs or where it would be*

impractical or disproportionately expensive for a journey to be shorter than 45-minutes – journeys should always enable children to arrive at school ready for a day of study and be suitable, safe and reasonably stress free.

- b) Collection points be situated in locations which protect the safety and wellbeing of children.*
- c) In the case of an appeal against a withdrawal of travel assistance, assistance not be withdrawn until the appeal is complete.*
- d) There be no change to the appeals panel membership; and that steps be taken promote member attendance at appeals panel meetings.*

2. *That Cabinet agree the reported changes to the Home to School Travel Assistance Policy subject to the changes recommended in recommendation 1.*

Reasons for recommended changes to the proposals

- 1 (a) The Committee heard that the council was to prepare supplementary guidance regarding journey times in response to consultation findings.

The Committee appreciates the benefits of shared and independent travel and supports flexibility for the intended duration of a primary-aged child's journey to the setting which best meets their needs to be more than 45 minutes where it would be impractical or an inefficient use of resource (relative to the alternative journey length) for the intended journey time to be 45 minutes or less; and was unanimous that the 45-minute time limit set out in statutory guidance should otherwise be adhered to in order to minimise the impact of journeys on children's ability to participate fully in education.

- 1 (b) The Committee supports the introduction of collection points where it is appropriate for service users, which it heard will reduce journey times, improve efficiency and promote independence, but wishes to ensure that those benefits not be at the expense of children's safety and wellbeing.

- 1 (c) The Committee supports the proposed reduction in the notice period for the withdrawal of travel assistance, which it heard the council was to give further consideration to in relation to changes to low-income status, but wishes to ensure provision continues while any appeal is undertaken in order to minimise the scope for undue disruption to children and families.

- 1 (d) The Committee supports families' right to have their children's home to school travel assistance reviewed in a timely and equitable manner and accepts that stage two appeals panels have struggled to attract sufficient Member participation to consider appeals promptly. A majority of Committee members agreed that maintaining a stage two panel comprised of Councillors will ensure impartiality.

Chris Townsend, Vice-Chairman of the Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee (on the behalf of the Chairman of the Committee)

Background papers

[Item 6, Children, Families, Lifelong Learning and Culture Select Committee, 7 April 2022](#) and [supplement providing overview of consultation responses](#)

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