



Meeting: Overview and Scrutiny Board **Date:** 10 July 2013

Wards Affected: All

Report Title: Home to School Transport

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1. Purpose and Introduction

1.1 This report seeks a decision on proposals to phase out concessionary home to school/college transport assistance. Initial proposals to remove all concessionary transport support from September 2013 have been replaced with a proposal to phase their removal over three years. A consultation has been undertaken on these revised proposals.

2. Proposed Decision to be considered by Council

2.1 **Recommendation:** To phase out all discretionary home to school/college transport assistance over a period of three years as detailed in section 5.2 a) - f).

2.2 Reason for Decision

To reduce expenditure on home to school/college transport by removing non-statutory elements of support. The present home to school transport spend is not sustainable. The main impact of these changes will be an increase in the cost of transport for parents of some post-16 students, also for parents of a small number of pupils attending faith or selective schools.

Supporting Information

4. Position

4.1 The Council is reviewing its policy as it currently spends approximately £113k per year in providing discretionary travel support to pupils across Torbay. This funding could be saved if the Council were only to provide statutory home to school/college transport. The current policy only provides discretionary help to pupils for transport to some secondary

schools and not others so removing this discretionary transport would provide a 'level playing field' for home to school/college transport across schools.

- 4.2 Discretionary transport assistance is currently provided by the council as follows:
- a) support towards the cost of a bus pass for pupils attending St Cuthbert Mayne on grounds of faith, where they live further than 3 miles away and do not qualify for statutory assistance.
 - b) support towards the cost of a bus pass for pupils attending a selective school who live more than 3 miles away, are not entitled to statutory transport assistance and live within the designated transport area for the school.
 - c) The provision of a free bus pass to pupils from low income families to any secondary school between 2 and 6 miles away, even if it is not one of the three nearest suitable schools.
 - d) A financial contribution to the cost of a bus pass for post-16 students studying in school sixth forms, where they live further than three miles away.
 - e) A block contribution to South Devon College to fund the current scheme for subsidised travel to South Devon College.

5. Possibilities and Options

- 5.1 Members first considered changes to discretionary home to school transport assistance at the Priorities and Resources 2013/2014 Review Panel on 15 January 2013 <http://democratic-svr1:9070/documents/g4496/Public%20reports%20pack%20Tuesday%2015-Jan-2013%2009.30%20Priorities%20and%20Resources%2020132014%20Review%20Panel.pdf?T=10> Maximum savings could be made by removing all discretionary assistance from September 2013; however, feedback from Panel Members indicated that this would be too drastic a change to make at one time.
- 5.2 An alternative set of proposals has therefore been drawn up to phase out all discretionary transport assistance over a three year period. Specifically, this would involve:
- a) ceasing discretionary support towards the costs of transport for pupils attending St Cuthbert Mayne because of parental preference. The proposal is to phase this in by removing sibling subsidies for both existing and new pupils in September 2014 and ceasing all subsidies in September 2015. The subsidy for 2014-15 will continue to be at the same level as 2012/13 - £25. Estimated savings would be in the region of £4,000 per year.
 - b) ceasing discretionary support towards the costs of transport for pupils attending selective schools. The proposal is to phase this in by removing sibling subsidies for both existing and new pupils in September 2014 and ceasing all subsidies in September 2015. The subsidy for 2014-15 will continue to be at the same level as 2012/13 - £25. Estimated savings would be in the region of £2,500 per year.
 - c) from September 2014, supporting all new low income applicants to the nearest 3 suitable secondary schools between 2-6 miles. From September 2015 Torbay's policy

to come into line with the legal requirements so that all support for pupils attending a secondary school that is not one of the three nearest suitable secondary schools ceases. Estimated savings would be in the region of £15,000 per year.

d) ceasing discretionary support towards the costs of transport for post-16 students attending school sixth forms . The proposal is to phase this in by removing sibling subsidies for both existing and new pupils in September 2014 and ceasing all subsidies in September 2015. The subsidy for 2014-15 will continue to be at the same level as 2012/13 - £25. Estimated savings would be in the region of £22,000 per year.

e) increasing the contribution that parents of post-16 students from low income households pay towards a bus pass (currently £100) to £250 in September 2013, £400 in September 2014 and ceasing this subsidy in September 2015.

f) reducing the Council's contribution to the joint scheme run with South Devon College by £30,000 in September 2013 and by a further £20,000 in September 2014. The Council will cease its funding completely for this scheme in September 2015. Whilst the Council is reducing its contribution the scheme will still be available for students in the 2013/14 and 2014/15 academic years. Savings in total will be £70,000 per year.

5.3 Because the proposal is to phase in these changes, savings will not be fully realised until 2015-16 financial year. Projected savings are £26,000 for 2013-4, £44,000 for 2014-5 and £43,000 for 2015-16.

5.3 The alternative of continuing to fund discretionary transport at current levels is not sustainable, as the transport budget is insufficient to meet the current need and increasing demands are being made on it for statutory transport assistance for pupils with Special Educational Needs.

6. Fair Decision Making

6.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been undertaken and is attached as an appendix to this report. Key findings from the EIA are that a small number of families will be affected whose children attend denominational schools on faith grounds; also post-16 students including those from low income households will be affected. However, there will be an appeals process in place so that families experiencing exceptional circumstances or extreme hardship can continue to request discretionary assistance. Post-16 bursaries are available directly from schools and colleges to assist students from families on low incomes, also students in care or leaving care. Entitlement to statutory transport assistance is not affected by these proposals.

7. Public Services (Social Value) Act 2012

7.1 These proposals will not involve additional procurement or provision of services.

8. Consultation

- 8.1 A public consultation was undertaken for a period of 4 weeks in April and May. The consultation was posted on the council's web site. All schools and academies were contacted, also South Devon College, and asked to alert parents, pupils and governors to the consultation. The consultation was sent to other key stakeholders including the Dioceses of Exeter and Plymouth and a press release was issued.
- 8.2 Three drop-in sessions were held where officers were available to answer questions. These were held in Brixham, Paignton and Torquay. A total of six people attended these sessions. Seven phone enquiries were received. All those making enquiries were directed to or given a response sheet to complete; however, only one response was actually submitted. The person responding disagreed with the proposals and stated that education cuts should be 'a long way down the list of proposed cuts'. Representations had previously been made by South Devon College and Stagecoach to the Review Panel in January 2013.

9. Risks

- 9.1 If the decision is not implemented, the school transport budget will be further overspent; this will impact on other, essential services to be provided by the council. If the decision is implemented, some families and students will face increased travel costs in future years. The biggest impact will be on post-16 students. However, school students can access financial support towards travel costs by applying to the Bursary funds that are now allocated by the DfE to all secondary schools with sixth forms to help students from low income households. South Devon College students from low income households are able to apply to the South Devon College bursary fund allocated by the DfE for a contribution towards travel costs.

Appendix

Equality Impact Assessment.

Additional Information

None.