

**Meeting:** Family Friendly Sub-Committee

**Date:** 11 January 2024

**Title:** Consultation on Home to School Transport

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**Service:** Commissioning, Partnerships and Transformation

**Wards affected:** All

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## **1.0 Purpose of Report:**

- 1.1 New statutory guidance for local authorities was published by the Department for Education in June 2023 concerning the travel to school of children of compulsory school age. It was therefore necessary to review the Authority's Transport Policy to ensure that it is compliant with new statutory guidance, to make any necessary amendments and to clarify the offer to parents and carers.
- 1.2 This report provides an overview on proposed changes to the Home to School Transport Policy and the Annual Post 16 Transport Statement with a view to ensuring all statutory responsibilities are met within the current budget. Currently the Authority provides transport provision over and above the statutory requirements placed on it – this is no longer financially sustainable.
- 1.3 It is proposed that the Draft Home to School Transport Policy and the Annual Post 16 Transport Statement would take effect from September 2025.
- 1.4 Cabinet on 27<sup>th</sup> November 2023 approved that the Authority commences a consultation on this Draft Home to School Transport Policy and Annual Post 16 Transport Statement.

## **2.0 Recommendations**

- 2.1 It is recommended that Family Friendly Sub-Cabinet:

- (1) Note the Draft Revised Home to School Transport Policy at Appendix 1 of this report and the Draft Revised Annual Post 16 Transport Statement at Appendix 2 of this report;
- (2) Agrees to receive a further report on the outcome of the public consultation and to receive the final Home to School Transport Policy and Annual Post 16 Transport Statement when presented to Cabinet.

### **3.0 Background Information**

- 3.1 The Authority has a statutory duty to provide home to school transport to children and young people who meet the criteria prescribed in legislation.
- 3.2 Currently just over 1000 children of a statutory school age are supported by home to school transport arrangements. This represents an increase of nearly 40% in the number of children who receive such support when compared with 2019.
- 3.3 This increase has placed significant pressure on the current home to school transport budget. In the current financial year, the forecasted pressure is £2.9 million. This is not a sustainable position; therefore, it is proposed to commence consultation on proposed changes to the current home to school transport policy.

### **4.0 Draft Home to School Transport Policy and Post 16 Statement**

- 4.1 Travel assistance is currently provided by the Authority over and above the statutory requirements placed on it. The key proposed changes set out in the draft policy and statement are as follows:

#### **4.2 Proposal one**

- 4.2.1 We currently provide travel assistance free of charge for pupils attending special schools or ARPS (Additional Resourced Provision) who have an EHCP (Education, Health, and Care Plan) and live over one mile from a suitable special school or ARP.
- 4.2.2 The statutory requirement is for free travel assistance to be provided for pupils:
  - 1) who are up to 8 years old and living more than 2 miles from a suitable special school/ARP
  - 2) who are over 8 and living more than 3 miles from a suitable special school/ARP.
- 4.2.3 The Authority is proposing to update our policy to move away from our one mile threshold, bringing us into line with statutory requirements. We will continue to make transport arrangements for pupils who cannot reasonably be expected to walk to

school because of their mobility or due to health and safety issues. The impact of changes will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Students already receiving travel assistance will continue to receive it until they leave their current phase of education e.g., end of year 6 or end of year 11.

#### **4.3 Proposal two**

4.3.1 Currently transport provision for pupils attending Alternative Provision accommodates individual part-time timetables. We now propose to provide transport for eligible pupils at the start and end of the school day.

#### **4.4 Proposal three**

4.4.1 We currently provide travel assistance to faith schools on the grounds of religion. This will be phased out from September 2025, unless the pupil is eligible under low-income criteria (free school meals or higher-level working tax credit) or there are exceptional circumstances. Pupils who receive travel assistance prior to September 2025 will continue to receive it until the end of Year 11. This will mainly affect students travelling to St Thomas More Catholic High School (North Shields) and St Mary's Secondary School (Newcastle).

#### **4.5 Proposal four**

4.5.1 We currently provide travel assistance to all eligible students over the age of 16 (eligibility is as set out in the Transport Policy Statement). We propose to re-assess our provision and, in line with other North East authorities, introduce a standard charge of £672 per academic year (equivalent to 50% of the cost of an annual Nexus Network 1 Anytime Ticket) towards the cost of post-16 travel assistance. There will be exemptions to making the £672 contribution. For those eligible to contribute, payment options will be made available.

#### **4.6 Proposal five**

4.6.1 We currently re-imburse 50% of transport costs for all eligible post 16 students attending mainstream education. We are proposing to no longer reimburse 50% of travel costs as students may be able to claim this back from their college or be eligible for a bursary (as explained in the Transport Policy Statement).

#### **5.0 Decision options:**

5.1 The following decision options were presented to Cabinet for consideration:

#### **5.2 Option 1**

5.2.1 Give consent to the proposed consultation on changes to the current Home to School Transport Policy and Annual Post 16 Transport Policy Statement.

### 5.3 **Option 2**

5.3.1 Do not give consent and make no changes to the current Policy and Statement.

### 5.4 **Decision**

5.4.1 Cabinet approved that the Authority moves forward with Option 1.

### 6.0 **Reasons for recommended option:**

6.1 Option 1 was recommended for the following reasons:

6.2 It is not possible to address all of the current pressure on the home to school transport budget without making appropriate changes to the current Transport Policy and Annual Post 16 Transport Statement and those potential changes require consultation. These changes will not affect our ability to meet statutory obligations in relation to home to school transport.

### 7.0 **Appendices**

Appendix 1: Draft Revised Home to School Transport Policy

Appendix 2: Draft Revised Annual Post 16 Transport Statement

### 8.0 **Contact officers**

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