

10 July 2013		ITEM: 18 01104230
Cabinet		
Post 16 Education Transport		
Report of: Cllr Kent : Leader of the Council and portfolio holder for Education		
Wards and communities affected: All		Key Decision: Key
Accountable Director: Roger Harris, Acting Director of Adults, Health and Commissioning		
This report is public		
Purpose of Report: To provide feedback on the consultation on the review of Post 16 education transport and consider the recommendations going to Cabinet on 10 July regarding the future of Post 16 Transport based upon the results of the consultation.		

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Cabinet agreed in March to review post 16 education transport. A consultation process was run over April, May and June closing on 19 June and considered 2 options; increase the charges or decommission and encourage students to use the discounted bus pass scheme. (NB the review of denominational school transport is the subject of a separate consultation exercise and will be reported back to Cabinet in September)

The Medium Term Financial Strategy identified £200k of savings to be delivered through a review of Post 16 transport.

There was a fairly even response to the two options put out for consultation and this was heavily influenced by whether you attended an in-borough or an out of borough college.

The take up of the offer of a discounted bus pass by Post 16 students within Thurrock has been very popular – it provides better value and greater access to transport across the borough and throughout the day including weekends as opposed to the current offer of a single journey to and from a post 16 institution.

In 2011, over 1000 students accessed post 16 commissioned transport. Today only 165 students use the service as the majority of students have opted onto the discounted bus pass scheme. The figures highlight the popularity of the scheme as a result of the value for money it provides.

However, for those students who access colleges outside of Thurrock – principally the Southend Campus this option is not so attractive, therefore a separate recommendation is made for students who travel out of Thurrock.

1. RECOMMENDATIONS :

- 1.1 To decommission Post 16 transport at the start of the 2013 / 2014 academic year to in-borough colleges and encourage students to take up the offer of a discounted bus pass.**
- 1.2 For those students in rural areas and not near a bus route we will consider individual cases against an agreed eligibility criteria, where the lack of a commissioned service may prevent students from accessing college courses.**
- 1.3 For students who attend out of Borough colleges and travel by train the Council will continue to negotiate with the train companies for the discounted ticket offer but students will be expected to pay the full banded cost.**
- 1.4 For students who use other commissioned transport to out of Borough colleges, that will continue but again they will be charged the full banded cost.**
- 1.5 In all of the above the Council will continue to provide support to families/students on income support.**

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Council has an obligation to provide free education transport for eligible children resident in the borough of Thurrock as defined by Section 508B of the Education Act. However, as regards post 16 provision the only requirement for local authorities is the publication of a Post 16 Transport Plan outlining the transport strategy supporting access to education. See **Appendix 1** for the relevant legislation.**
- 2.2 During the 2012/13 academic year, Thurrock Council offered post 16 Transport at a net cost of approximately £ 200k pa. Assistance is given to students who meet the Council's Education Transport criteria. Students then pay a contribution towards the costs.**
- 2.3 In March 2013, Cabinet agreed to consult on a proposal to review Post 16 Transport. Two options were considered as part of the consultation – increasing the charges to full cost recovery or decommission fully and encourage students to take up the offer of the discounted bus pass. This report sets out the feedback from the consultation and background analysis**

available to date and makes recommendations for the future of Post 16 Education Transport in Thurrock.

- 2.4 The consultation ran for six weeks and has provided a range of opportunities for parents, schools / colleges, professionals and the public to comment on the proposed changes. Opportunities were provided across the borough and information was provided to key groups to share with interested parties to encourage a wide response. A summary of the consultation and those with whom the Council consulted is included in **Appendix 2**.
- 2.5 In addition to the consultation, a data analysis has also been completed considering data on age, gender, ethnicity and disability and a full Equality Impact Analysis has been undertaken.

3. ISSUES AND / OR OPTIONS

- 3.1 A total of 88 consultation responses were received. This is a reasonable response rate and compares favourably to consultations in other local authority areas. The majority of respondents were parents.
- 3.2 Officers were proactive in ensuring that a range of opportunities were provided across the borough and through local organisations. Many partners also supported the consultation by promoting it with their users and in some cases supporting respondents to complete the consultation. A full breakdown of the consultation responses is available on request.
- 3.3 The response to proposals to decommission Post 16 Transport showed that of the 88 individuals who responded there was equal support for both proposals.

Analysis of the options :

Option 1:

To continue to offer Post 16 transport, but increase the amount charged in order to cover the actual cost.

- 3.4 The amount we currently charge pupils for transport to post 16 colleges each year is heavily subsidised and does not cover the actual cost. This option would involve the continuation of the post 16 transport offer to all pupils including those who attend schools located in other boroughs and those living in rural areas. The Council would, however, charge the actual cost of providing that transport including the handling and administration costs. It is difficult to put a final cost on this as it would depend on the number of students who took up this offer and the likely amount charged by the bus company.
- 3.5 If Option 1 were selected a revised method for full cost recovery will need to be considered. The current banding system (shown below) is based upon a policy of subsidised transport.

Band - pa	Cost
A - £330.00	Within Thurrock Council boundaries

B - £760.00	Basildon and Southend Colleges
C - £1,270.00	Outside Thurrock Council boundaries

- 3.6 The revised method would need to take into account the actual cost of out of borough transport (which in most cases exceeds the amount charged under the highest band) as well as all administration and handling costs.
- 3.7 The Council would continue to support students from families in receipt of income support by offering free or subsidised transport, but is not legally required to offer such financial support.

Respondent's comments:

- 3.8 The respondents in favour of option 1 had various reasons for choosing the option. However, a common theme was found regarding the disadvantage posed to those living in rural areas as they may have to pay more due to distance and were not necessarily living on a direct bus route.

Option 2:

To withdraw Post 16 transport at the start of the 2013/2014 academic year and encourage students to take up the offer of a discounted bus pass.

- 3.9 Under this option current users would be encouraged to take up the offer of a local bus student discount scheme to be used for unlimited access to public transport including evenings and weekends in and around the borough of Thurrock and as far as Basildon Town centre.
- 3.10 Students have been informed of the likelihood that Post 16 transport may be decommissioned when enquiring about the application process for a seat or the renewal of an existing place. They have been asked to check the Thurrock Council website in August. However, the majority of students received information via their peers. This is substantiated by the fact that since September 2011 over a thousand students have opted for the discounted bus scheme.
- 3.11 The current cost for these tickets are £36 every four weeks. As of September 2013 the tickets will cost £38 every four weeks. Any student currently on a Council contracted vehicle may take up the student discount scheme at any time.
- 3.12 The Council would continue to support students from families in receipt of income support by purchasing bus passes on their behalf.
- 3.13 Transport Providers have also been given notice of the proposals. The link to the consultation was forwarded to all providers to enable them have their say on the issue. There are seven council commissioned contracts for the provision of post 16 transport. One contract expires in June 2013 and the other six expire between 2014 and 2015. A 56 day notice period is required.

Respondent's comments:**3.14 Advantages:**

- The discounted bus pass will provide students with unlimited access to public transport including evenings and weekends in and around the borough of Thurrock and as far as Basildon Town as opposed to the journey to and from school.
- Students are able to participate in a wider range of extra-curricular activities within the post 16 institution as well as activities within the wider community including leisure centres, libraries, health facilities and retail outlets.

3.15 Disadvantages:

- Council contracted vehicles were direct to student's destination. Once post 16 transport is decommissioned students may have to access several buses thus increasing the journey time to and from their destination. This will pose the largest challenge to students in rural areas.
- Around 70 students attend post 16 education using transport which could not be replaced by the local discounted bus pass. Around half of these are in receipt of income support, so would continue to be supported by the Council.
- The vast majority of these travel by train to Southend College. The Council currently receive a 55% discount on some of these tickets. An annual ticket from Grays to Southend costs around £2,000 (full cost from provider C2C). Those students are currently charged £760 per annum by the Council, against a cost of around £1,000 after deduction of the bulk discount the Council receives.

4. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATION:

- 4.1 Consultation on proposals agreed by Cabinet in March 2013 has taken place with a good response.
- 4.2 There was a fairly even response to the two options put out for consultation and this was heavily influenced by whether you attended an in-borough or an out of borough college.
- 4.3 In light of the comments made about travel distances from rural areas and concerns raised by students who do not live on bus routes, officers will continue to consider cases where exceptional hardship exists and students may be prevented from attending college courses as a result.
- 4.4 The proposed changes to Post 16 Transport will facilitate the effective, efficient and sustainable delivery of Education Transport in line with the Council's statutory obligations. In addition, the take up of the offer of a discounted bus pass by Post 16 students will provide better value and greater access to transport across the borough and throughout the day including

weekends as opposed to the current offer of a single journey to and from a post 16 institution.

- 4.5 However, for those students attending courses outside of Thurrock the discounted bus-pass was not an attractive option. Students attend out of borough for a variety of reasons – often because the courses they have chosen are not available at a college within Thurrock. We don't want this policy to dis-advantage Thurrock young people from accessing courses outside of Thurrock, therefore, the proposal is that we would continue to facilitate the negotiation of the discounted rail ticket or discounted college travel but students would be expected to pay the full cost of those tickets.

5. CONSULTATION (including Overview and Scrutiny, if applicable)

- 5.1 There has been wide consultation as detailed in **Appendix 2**. In addition, this report will be discussed at Overview and Scrutiny during the July meeting.

6. IMPACT ON CORPORATE POLICIES, PRIORITIES, PERFORMANCE AND COMMUNITY IMPACT

- 6.1 These changes will improve the local authority's ability to meet the following priorities:
- Improve the education and skills of local people as students will be able to access transport throughout the week within Thurrock.
 - It will encourage greater use of public transport

7. IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Financial

Implications verified by: **Micheal Jones**
 Telephone and email: **01375 652772**
mxjones@thurrock.gov.uk

As part of the 2013/14 base budget setting process that has been undertaken, a savings target of £0.200m has been identified, and is included within the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy.

The report is part of the process to implement changes to the service provision, from which the savings will be realised

7.2 Legal

Implications verified by: **Richard Bean**
 Telephone and email: **Mobile: 07411 714359**
Richard.bean@BDTLegal.org.uk

I confirm that as the Cabinet Report on Post 16 Education Transport is being amended as discussed and in accordance with the issues raised via Roger Harris, the legal implications have been considered and I can confirm that the legal issues are accurate and included in the paper.

7.3 Diversity and Equality

Implications verified by: **Samson DeAlyn**
Telephone and email: **01375 652472**
sdealyn@thurrock.gov.uk

A full Equality Impact Analysis has been conducted with the support of the Corporate Diversity Team and is available on the Council's website.

BACKGROUND PAPERS USED IN PREPARING THIS REPORT:

- 2010 Post 16 Transport Guidance
- Thurrock Post 16 Transport Assistance - Notes of Guidance

APPENDICES TO THIS REPORT:

- Appendix one - 2010 Post 16 Education Transport guidance
- Appendix two - Consultation Summary

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Appendix 1

2010 Post 16 Guidance - Provision of transport for persons of sixth-form age Section 509AA:

- (1) A Local Education Authority shall prepare for each academic year a Transport Policy Statement complying with the requirements of this section.
- (2) The statement shall specify the arrangements for the provision of transport or otherwise that the Authority consider it necessary to make for facilitating the attendance of persons of sixth form age receiving education or training -
 - (a) at schools;
 - (b) at any institution maintained or assisted by the Authority which provides further education or higher education (or both);
 - (c) at any institution within the further education sector; or
 - (d) at any establishment (not falling within paragraph (b) or (c)) at which the authority secures the provision of education or training under section 15ZA(1) or the National Council for Education and Training for Wales

Appendix 2

Consultation Summary

A. Data analysis:

Number of Responses	88
Option 1 – full cost recovery	40
Option 2 – decommission, move to discounted scheme	43
No option selected	5
Total	88

B. List of Consultees:

Community Organisations

Catholic Diocese
 Anglican Diocese
 CVS
 TRUST – BME umbrella organisation
 Thurrock Youth Cabinet
 Providers of Education Transport

Publications

The Thurrock Gazette
 The Family Information Service website (FIS)
 Insight - Thurrock Council Staff Communication
 The Member's newsletter
 Headteacher's Bulletin

School Leadership

Primary Head Teacher's Association
 Secondary Head Teacher's Association
 Chairs of School Governing Bodies

Schools / Colleges

Primary Schools
 Secondary Schools
 Post 16 institutions
 Out of Borough schools with Thurrock students in attendance
 Denominational Schools

Community Centres

Children's Centres
 Youth Centres