

Decision Report – Lead Member Decision

Forward Plan Reference: N/A

Decision Date – 16th May 2023

Key Decision –no



2023/24 Post 16 Local Transport Policy Statement

Executive Member(s):

Cllr Tessa Munt – Lead Member for Children, Families and Education

Cllr Mike Rigby – Lead Member for Transport and Digital

Local Member(s) and Division: All

Lead Officer: David Carter – Service Director for Infrastructure and Transport

Phil Curd - Head of Education Places

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Summary / Background

1. Somerset Council has a statutory duty to review its Post 16 Local Transport Policy Statement annually to ensure that it fully reflects current transport options for learners attending Post 16 provision. This Policy should be published on the Somerset Council website along with any other information to assist learners in accessing their chosen education provision by the end of May each year.
2. The Policy has been reviewed again this year, with no significant changes. The key points to note are:
 - The County Ticket will not be reinstated for the 2023/24 academic year – this product has not been available since 2020/21 and is no longer a cost-effective option for students.
 - The increased travel assistance contribution for eligible Further Education Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (FE SEND) students; and
 - The transport options for Post 16 students attending a sixth form school and the associated charge for transport.

Recommendations

3. The Lead Member for Children, Families and Education and the Lead Member for Transport and Digital:
 - a. Approve the 2023/24 Post 16 Local Transport Policy statement (as set out in **Appendix A**), which also confirms the contribution amounts for eligible FE SEND students and Post 16 students paying for a seat on a contracted bus.
 - b. Agree the increased annual cost of £925 for Post 16 pay seats on contracted school buses and the FE SEND contribution.
 - c. Agree to the publication of the approved Policy on the Somerset Council website to meet the statutory requirements as stipulated by the Department for Education (DfE).

Reasons for recommendations

4. Somerset Council has a statutory duty to update the Post 16 Transport Policy statement on an annual basis to assist students, their parents and carers to make an informed decision regarding their transport options for accessing Further Education.
5. The contributions for FE SEND students and 6th form students travelling on a contracted bus are reviewed each year and increased in-line with CPI, to respond to the current inflation levels.

Other options considered

6. A bid was submitted to the Department for Transport (DfT) as part of the Bus Service Improve Plan (BSIP) work, for funding to introduce a youth ticket for young people. Unfortunately, the bid for this particular initiative was not successful and therefore, it was not possible to take this proposal forward.

We will continue to look for funding opportunities to potentially deliver a concessionary fare scheme for young people in the future.

Links to Council Plan and Medium-Term Financial Plan

7. The Policy links to the Somerset Council Plan as follows:

- A Greener, More Sustainable Somerset – the Policy promotes the use of Public Transport, reducing the number of journeys made via the private car.
- A Fairer, Ambitious Somerset – the Policy sets out options for accessing Further Education and bursaries available for those students who require financial assistance.
- A Flourishing and Resilient Somerset – through encouraging access to Further Education and promoting access opportunities, this helps to support the education sector.

Financial and Risk Implications

8. As part of the Local Authority's statutory duty to provide access to Further Education, Somerset Council provides a network of subsidised college day only routes, to fill in the gaps in the commercial network. As the County Ticket scheme was suspended from the 2020/21 academic year, the revenue budget for these routes has been aligned in MTFP to ensure there is sufficient funding to deliver the contracted routes. As such there is no additional financial impact associated with implementing the 2023/24 Post 16 Travel Policy.
9. There is a risk in terms of if the LA does not publish an updated Policy, it would not be compliant with its duty to publish an annual Post 16 Travel Policy Statement.

Legal Implications

10. Section 509AA of the Education Act 1996 requires the Council to prepare and publish a transport policy statement annually specifying the arrangements for the provision of transport or other arrangements that the Authority considers necessary to facilitate the attendance of learners of sixth form age receiving education. It is also good practice for local authorities to include information about what transport arrangements are available and whether they are adequate to enable young people with special educational needs and disabilities up to the age of 25 to participate in education and training.

As the decision to implement the transport policy statement is an exercise of the authority's functions, the authority must, when taking the decision, comply with the public sector equality duty in s149 of the Equality Act 2010, in particular by having due regard to the equality matters listed in that section,

including the need to advance equality of opportunity between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not.

In January 2019, the Department of Education published the updated statutory guidance for local authorities regarding post 16 transport for education and guidance. At that time, the Local Authorities legal team were requested to review the guidance in relation to adult learners aged 19-25, as a result of changes to sections 508F and 508G of the Education Act 1996 and following advice from legal the Policy Statement was updated accordingly in May 2019. These updates remain in the updated Policy for 2023/24.

HR Implications

11. There are no HR implications associated with this decision.

Other Implications:

Equalities Implications

12. Eligible students whose special education needs may prevent them from accessing special school or college transport will have bespoke arrangements put in place for them.

The cost of the sixth form pay seat and the FE SEND contribution has increased in-line with the standard pay seat rate on the contracted school bus. These costs could impact on students' ability to access further education but there are 16-19 bursary schemes which all FE students, including those with SEND, can apply for through their FE colleges or sixth form schools. Information on how the bursaries are applied, was not currently available from the main FE Colleges for inclusion in the Policy, so students have been sign posted to the FE Colleges direct.

Eligible SEND students who continue in further education beyond the age of 19 are classed as adult learners and in line with the DfE guidance there is no charge to them for their transport.

Operators offer a variety of ticket options which provide flexibility dependent on attendance requirements at College. Students will be able to choose the most cost-effective option for their needs. Information relating to these ticket

options has also been included in the Policy Statement as well as contact details for the main public/college bus operators.

The Public Health Promotion Manager – Equalities, has been consulted with regard to the equalities implications, associated with this decision.

Community Safety Implications

13. There are no Community Safety Implications associated with publishing the Policy

Climate Change and Sustainability Implications

14. There are no Climate Change and Sustainability Implications associated with publishing the Policy, although the Policy promotes the use of public transport options for students. Accessing public transport can help reduce congestion on Somerset's roads and, in turn, improve local air quality.

Health and Safety Implications

15. There are no Health and Safety Implications associated with publishing the Policy

Health and Wellbeing Implications

16. Transport provision promotes young people's participation in education and training. Young people with a history of NEET (Not in Education, Employment or Training) can experience a detrimental effect on their physical and mental health along with an increased likelihood of unemployment, low wages or low quality of work in adult life.

Social Value

17. The Policy provides students with information to assist with accessing Further Education and sign-posts students to financial support options available. This helps to promote and encourage attendance at College, enabling students to develop key skills and knowledge for the future which should improve employment opportunities. Access to Further Education facilitates the upskilling of young people and has a positive impact on social mobility longer-term.

Scrutiny comments / recommendations:

18. The Policy has not been considered by a Scrutiny Committee as there have been no significant changes. The Chair of Children and Families Scrutiny has seen the Policy. The Chairs for both Climate and Place, and Policies and Communities were also consulted.

Background

19. Somerset Council, in consultation with stakeholders work together to ensure that the individual needs of young people are paramount whilst balancing equality of access to education and training opportunities with value for money by:-
- Developing a collective strategy relating to post 16 school/college transport within the context of Government, EFA (Education Funding Agency) and Somerset Council transport strategies.
 - Identifying gaps in transport provision and filling those gaps to improve accessibility to education and to maximise choice of learning venue.
 - Improving transport information for all young people and adult learners.
 - Discussing priorities with local education and training providers.
 - Focusing on improving transport for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities, by providing subsidised specialised individual transport where eligible or through the Somerset Independent Travel Training Scheme, in order to increase the independence for this group of learners.
 - Improving transport links in deeply rural areas by maintaining the provision of demand responsive transport schemes and by supporting other transport initiatives for young people to increase affordable access to learning for young people, improving their employment opportunities and reducing social exclusion.
 - Enabling transport provision to remove barriers to learning and training for those from vulnerable groups and/or those most likely not to be in education, employment or training.

20. The Policy provides students with details of the current public bus operators in the County and their contact details.

Somerset Council provides specialised, subsidised transport for those eligible students who have a special educational need or disability which prevents them accessing public transport.

Support, including Bursary schemes, is provided by FE colleges and 6th form schools in Somerset.

Background Papers

21. None

Appendices

- **Appendix A - 2023/24 Post 16 Local Transport Policy statement**

Report Sign-Off

	Officer Name	Date Completed
Legal & Governance Implications	David Clark	04/05/23
Communications	Chris Palmer	09/05/23
Finance & Procurement	Jason Vaughan	03/05/23
Workforce	Chris Squire	04/05/23
Asset Management	Oliver Woodhams	21/04/23
Executive Director / Senior Manager	David Carter Amelia Walker	24/04/23 10/05/23
Strategy & Performance	Alyn Jones	25/04/23
Executive Lead Member	Cllr Mike Rigby Cllr Tessa Munt	21/04/23 20/04/23
Consulted:		
Local Division Members	All	On publication of the decision
Opposition Spokesperson	Cllr Diogo Rodrigues Cllr Frances Nicholson	09/05/23 09/05/23

Scrutiny Chair	Cllr Gwil Wren	05/05/23
	Cllr Leigh Redman	09/05/23
	Cllr Martin Dimery	16/05/23