

## **SLOUGH BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**REPORT TO:** Cabinet

**DATE:** 18 July 2016

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**WARD(S):** All wards

**PORTFOLIO:** Councillor Hussain, Commissioner for Education & Children's Services

### **PART I** **KEY DECISION**

#### **PROPOSED AMENDMENTS TO THE HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY**

1. **Purpose of Report**

The purpose of this report is to set out the revised proposals for the Council's home to school transport policy and to seek cabinet's approval to the proposed changes. The Council's Home to School Transport Policy has not been reviewed for some time and therefore a review has recently been undertaken. The main strands within the review are;

- To promote independent travel,
- To review transport arrangements for children on an annual basis,
- To increase the mileage allowance for parents and carers,
- To clarify the provision of transport for young people between the ages of 16 – 25
- To remove the discretionary element for transport in future cases,

2. **Recommendation(s)/Proposed Action**

The Cabinet is requested to resolve:

- a) That the mileage allowance be increased from 15p per mile to 45p per mile payable to parents who are able to transport their children to school when their child meets the eligibility criteria for home to school transport. This would bring the mileage allowance into line with the local authority rate and be reviewed annually. This would be introduced with effect from 1 September 2016.
- b) That the discretionary element of the home to school transport policy be removed, which provides transport for children under statutory school age who are in receipt of a statement for Special Educational Needs or an Education, Health and Care Plan or undergoing an assessment of their educational needs where they meet the criteria for transport. Given the notice period required to publicise this change the implementation date for this change would be 1 September 2017.

- c) That the emphasis to promote independent travel for children and young people wherever possible be endorsed.

### 3. **The Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy, the JSNA and the Five Year Plan**

#### 3a. **Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy Priorities**

The revised Home to School transport policy will continue to support children and young people to access education and thereby help to meet the key educational priorities for Slough children and young people, with a focus on raising aspirations, protecting vulnerable groups, and promoting the employability and skills agenda. The key areas of inequality for children and young people with special educational needs are health and employment. Therefore there is a need to develop a home to school transport policy that will help to:

- Promote social inclusion, supports involvement in school and community activities and improves access to universal services
- Develop independent living skills and job related skills creating locally based work experience and job opportunities
- Improves health and life expectancy and addresses health inequalities
- Safeguards children and young people - raising awareness about keeping safe whilst promoting positive risk taking and encouraging involvement in school and community activities.
- It will directly link to the following priorities and cross-cutting themes in the Slough Joint Wellbeing Strategy (SJWS) as set out below:

#### **Health and well-being**

By promoting independent travel, wherever it is appropriate to do so, it is helping to raise self esteem and well being in children and young people. In helping children to be self confident about their travel arrangements it will also help them to feel more confident about learning and improve their life chances. Research indicates a strong inter-relationship between educational achievement and children's well-being.

#### **Economy and Skills**

The achievements of children and young people have a direct bearing on their adult lives and prospects in the workplace. The success of Slough pupils also has a significant bearing upon the success and prosperity of the community in which they live.

#### **Civic responsibility**

Successful young people will be in a stronger position to contribute to and gain from the community in which they live. Promoting success and leadership in young people can lead to residents who can play a dynamic role in implementing the Strategy and being champions in improving Slough for themselves and for the benefit of everyone.

### **3b Five Year Plan Outcomes**

The proposals in this report relating to the provision of home to school transport will help to support Outcome 5 of the Council's Five Year Plan: 'children and young people in Slough will be healthy, resilient and have positive life chances'. Re-contracting some services will also support the wider objective of using resources wisely (Outcome 7), by contributing future savings from commissioning and contract management.

## **4. Other Implications**

### **(a) Financial**

The local authority currently provides transport for pupils below statutory school age if they have a statement of special needs and they are attending the nearest suitable school, providing this is a special school or a resource base and it is more than two miles from their home. Some children without statements below statutory school age also receive transport to Chalvey Assessment Centre.

In total there are usually 25-30 pupils below statutory school age at the beginning of each academic year who receive transport. The local authority is not required to provide transport for pupils below statutory school age and it is proposed that this should no longer be offered from 1 September 2017. Children who are currently in receipt of such transport will retain it until their assessment is completed or they start school when their needs will be reviewed against a different section of the home to school transport policy. The money saved from withdrawing this discretionary area will help to offset the rising costs of home to school transport for children of statutory school age. Based on the expenditure incurred in the current school year ((September 2015 – August 2016) the anticipated savings would be £55,959 per annum based on current costs.

To increase the current mileage allowances from 15 pence per mile to 45 pence per mile if parents of children who meet the criteria for home to school transport are able to transport their own children to and from school. This will bring the mileage allowance into line with the Council's mileage allowance and will be reviewed annually. The current annual costs for mileage at 15p per mile are £1253. The new annual costs for mileage at 45p per mile would be £3759 with no increase in parental uptake. However, if the parental uptake were to increase by 50% this would take the costs to £5638 per annum and if they were to increase by 100% this would take the costs to £7518 per annum.

The savings will depend on whether any contractor's routes can be terminated as a result of a parent taking the mileage option and the type of route. For example if a taxi carrying one pupil was no longer required the annual cost saving would be around £9500.

It is hoped that this increase will encourage more parents to transport their children to and from school and reduce their child's journey time. It is proposed that this new mileage allowance will come into effect from September 2016.

## (b) Risk Management

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Risk/Threat/Opportunity</i>	<i>Mitigation(s)</i>
Agree to the removal of the discretionary element of the home to school transport policy, which provides transport for children under statutory school age who are in receipt of a statement for Special Educational Needs or an Education, Health and Care Plan or undergoing an assessment of their educational needs where they meet the criteria for transport	This will provide an opportunity to offset some of the rising costs of home to school transport for statutory age children.	Parents who are currently in receipt of this transport would continue to receive transport until their child's assessment has been completed or until they reach statutory school age when they are assessed under a different section of the home to school transport policy.
Agree to the increase in the mileage allowance from 15p per mile to 45p per mile payable to parents who are able to transport their children to school when their child meets the eligibility criteria for home to school transport. This would bring the mileage allowance into line with the local authority rate and be reviewed annually	This will provide an opportunity to offset some of the rising costs of home to school transport and would be introduced with effect from 1 September 2016	Given the notice period required to publish this change the removal of this discretionary area of home to school transport would not take effect until 1 September 2017 Should the take up off the increased mileage allowance be low the transport costs for these children will not increase as they are already in receipt of transport.

## (c) Human Rights Act and Other Legal Implications

It is not envisaged that the recommendations of this report will infringe either Article 3 or Article 8 of the Human Rights Act.

## (d) Equalities Impact Assessment

The intention of the review of home to school transport is to promote independent travel and offer an increased mile age rate to encourage parents to take their children to school where they meet the criteria for home to school transport. The change in emphasis in the home to school transport policy will still meet the needs of children who are of statutory school age whilst supporting children to reach their

full potential as individuals. There may be a short term impact on service users if a review of a child's transport arrangements determines that their transport arrangements could be reduced or changed. In order to reduce the impact of any change six weeks notice will be given to children and their families.

## 5. **Supporting Information**

### 5.1 Promoting independent travel

5.1.1 By promoting independent travel, wherever it is appropriate to do so, it is helping to raise self esteem and well being in children and young people. In helping children to be self confident about their travel arrangements it will also help them to feel more confident about learning and improve their life chances. Research indicates a strong inter-relationship between educational achievement and children's well-being.

5.1.2 Where it is deemed appropriate for children to travel to school independently a programme for independent travel training will be provided for these children and they will not be allowed to travel independently until they are assessed as being confident and safe to do so.

5.1.3 This proposal will bring the council's home to school transport policy into line with all other local authorities' home to school transport policies.

### 5.2 Reviewing transport arrangements on an annual basis

5.2.1 Children with special educational needs have their educational needs reviewed on an annual basis in order to assess their progress and review how their needs may have changed and make adjustments to their education, health and care plan. Given children's needs change it is therefore important to review their transport arrangements on an annual basis after the annual review of their education, health and care plan.

5.2.2 If following the review of a child's transport arrangements it is felt they need to be amended parents/carers would be given six weeks notice before any adjustments are made.

### 5.3 Increasing the mileage allowance for parents and carers

5.3.1 The current mileage allowance, 15p per mile, is not very conducive to parents transporting their children to school when they meet the criteria for home to school transport. By increasing the mileage to 45p per mile it is hoped that this will encourage parents to transport their children to school. 5.3.2 In doing so this will reduce a child's journey time to and from school and any stress that may be caused for a child in having a long journey to school in a minibus with other children.

5.3.3. It is proposed to review this allowance annually and to introduce the increase with effect from 1 September 2016

### 5.4 Clarifying the provision of transport for young people between the ages of 16 – 25

5.4.1 Most young people in this age group will be expected to travel independently using public transport in view of the benefit in developing their life skills.

However, where this is not possible the home to school transport policy now sets out clearly the criteria and circumstances in which transport will be provided.

5.4.2 All applicants for travel assistance in the 16 - 25 age group will be assessed on their own merits.

#### 5.5 Removing the discretionary element for transport on future cases

5.5.1 As a result of the growing school population within Slough and the increasing number of children with special educational needs there has been an increase on the pressure on the home to school transport budget.

5.5.2 In order to address the pressure on the budget a review of Slough's home to school transport policy was undertaken to see if there were any areas within the policy that could be amended or withdrawn.

5.5.3 The local authority currently provides transport for pupils below statutory school age if they have a statement of special needs and they are attending the nearest suitable school, providing this is a special school or a resource base and it is more than two miles from their home. Some children without statements below statutory school age also receive transport to Chalvey Assessment Centre.

5.5.4 In total there are usually 25-30 pupils below statutory school age at the beginning of each academic year who receive transport. The local authority is not required to provide transport for pupils below statutory school age and it is proposed that this should no longer be offered from 1 September 2017.

5.5.5 The Council cannot introduce this change any earlier because it is required to publish any changes to the home to school transport policy in their admissions booklet in the October of the year before any change is introduced for the start of the next school year. (The change, if agreed, will need to be published in the local authority's Admissions booklet in October 2016 to be implemented in September 2017)

5.5.6 Under Department of Education's guidance on home to school transport the local authority is required to consult widely on any proposed changes to the local authority's transport policy. In order to meet this requirement the local authority wrote to all schools, early years providers and children centres in Slough to seek their comments. It also wrote to the parents and carers of children who are currently in receipt of this discretionary element of home to school transport to seek their views and to give them the opportunity to participate in an electronic survey.

5.5.7 In response to the consultation process three responses were received. All three were from headteachers. One response supported the proposal, the second response had misunderstood the proposal believing it to affect children of statutory school age and the third response did not support the proposal believing it to be disadvantageous to parents who had more than one child to get to school. There were no responses from parents currently in receipt of this transport provision.

5.5.8 Children who are currently in receipt of such transport will retain it until their assessment is completed or they start school when their needs will be reviewed against a different section of the home to school transport policy.

- 5.5.9 The money saved from withdrawing this discretionary area will help to off set the rising costs of home to school transport for children of statutory school age.

5.6 Exploring alternative travel arrangements

- 5.6.1 The Council is also proposing to explore other alternatives for home to school transport for example an offer could include a personalised mobility budget for a pupil in order to purchase some mobility equipment. This would be in the form of a capital allocation for equipment. Alternatively a personalised mobility budget for a parent and pupil (allocation for vehicle purchase) If this were to be the case then parents would not be eligible for mileage rate. A further report will be brought back to cabinet once these options have been explored further.

6. **Conclusion**

This paper proposes to remove the remaining discretionary element of the home to school transport policy. The local authority currently provides transport for pupils below statutory school age if they have a statement of special needs and they are attending the nearest suitable school, providing this is a special school or a resource base and it is more than two miles from their home. Some children without statements below statutory school age also receive transport to Chalvey Assessment Centre.

In total there are usually 25-30 pupils below statutory school age at the beginning of each academic year who receive transport. The local authority is not required to provide transport for pupils below statutory school age and it is proposed that this should no longer be offered from 1 September 2017.

The report is also proposing to increase the mileage allowance currently 15p per mile to 45p per mile for parents who are able to transport their children to school when their child meets the eligibility criteria for home to school transport. It is hoped that this increase will encourage more parents to transport their children to and from school and reduce their child's journey time. It is proposed that this new mileage allowance will come into effect from September 2016.

7. **Appendices Attached**

Slough Borough Council's home to school transport policy

8. **Background Papers**

None