

**Education and Children's Services
Scrutiny Committee
15 December 2014**

**Covering Report:
School Transport and Catchment Areas**

Summary and Objectives

1. The purpose of this scrutiny is to provide an update to the committee on the implementation of the school travel policies, and any issues arising, including those identified at Cabinet in June 2014.

Scrutiny Focus

2. Key focus areas for this scrutiny include the following:
 - i) What feedback or issues have arisen that could impact on the successful implementation of the new 2015/16 school travel policies and discretionary charges, and the introduction of 'Transport Priority Areas'? What measures are used to assess success?
 - Travel arrangements for 5 – 16 year olds
 - Travel arrangements for Post-16 Students
 - ii) What has been done with regard to the various comments made at 10 June 2014 Cabinet, regarding:
 - Clarity of communication of the policy to parents?
 - uptake of the Endeavour Card?
 - Successful school transport appeal cases?
 - Any reports of overcrowding on school buses?
 - Numbers of pupils travelling to Norfolk and Colchester?
 - iii) What has been done regarding clarity of communication with schools and with SCC transport staff? *(There are some accounts of parents being given conflicting advice)*
 - iv) What information is available on the issue of transport of children attending schools in Norfolk? *(It is not just when children choose to take courses not available in Suffolk but some evidence that when parents in the north of the county have applied for transport to the new Ixworth Free School they have been advised it is not available and they should consider Norfolk schools instead)*

- v) What further changes are planned or likely, regarding the ‘Transport Priority Areas’ or school Catchment Areas (eg. arising from the Schools Organisation Review)?

How this relates to County Council priorities

3. This scrutiny is linked to the County Council’s corporate priorities as indicated below:

The County Council’s Corporate Priorities	Link to this scrutiny
Raising educational attainment and skill levels	✓
Supporting the LEPs to increase economic growth	
Maintaining roads and developing Suffolk’s infrastructure	✓
Supporting those most vulnerable in our communities	✓
Empowering local communities	

4. Having considered the evidence, the Committee may wish to:

- i) make recommendations to the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and/or the Corporate Director for Children and Young People’s Services;
- ii) agree topics which could benefit from more detailed scrutiny at a future meeting, seek to influence partner organisations, or request further information.

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Background

5. At its meeting on 4 December 2013, the Committee agreed it would wish to consider an item on school catchment areas and the implications for the provision of school transport arrangements.
6. A report on ‘Home to School Travel Policies 2015/16 and Discretionary charges from 2014/15’ was considered by Cabinet on 10 June 2014. The Cabinet considered the results of public consultation on proposed changes to the Home to School Travel policy and:
 - agreed an increase to the discretionary charge from £510 to £540 per year (£170 to £180 per term) in 2014/2015. This would apply to all children who travel on Suffolk County Council contracted vehicles when they are not entitled to free travel.
 - agreed that the cost of a discretionary seat may increase by up to £30 each year (£10 per school term).
 - agreed that the discretionary charge should apply to all students, where applicable.
 - agreed the proposed Home to School Travel policy for 2015/16 (as attached to the report of 10 June 2014).

- agreed the proposed Post-16 Discretionary Travel policy for 2015/16 (as attached to the report of 10 June 2014).
7. The Minutes of the Cabinet meeting on 10 June 2014 noted that, “*Councillors stressed the importance of communication and urged that the policy be well disseminated amongst families in order to avoid them being given incorrect information and being misguided when making choices. The Cabinet Member for Children’s Services assured Councillors that he would make sure there was clarity in the communication to parents. The Cabinet Member for Roads, Transport and Planning stated that the Council needed to be mindful of the locations of centres of education and that if families had two or more children the cost of getting them to school would not be an inconsiderable amount of money. He noted the introduction of the Endeavour Card, the use of which may be preferable particularly in urban areas. In response, a Councillor noted the disappointing uptake of the Endeavour Card. A Councillor queried how many school transport appeal cases had been successful on road safety grounds due to road side verges not being cut. In response the Cabinet Member for Roads, Transport and Planning advised that the cutting of overgrowth had been reduced due to budget restraints and most had been reduced to one cut per year. The Cabinet Member for Children’s Services advised that public buses were used for school runs and there was no evidence of overcrowding. He suggested that, if Councillors were aware of any overcrowding, they should bring it to his attention. A Councillor asked how many of the 399 sixth form pupils travelling to Norfolk and 258 travelling to Colchester to study were considered an exceptional circumstance. When advised that it was considered exceptional if the course they wished to do was only available at those establishments, the Councillor pointed out that a course may well be available in Suffolk but pupils also chose these sixth form establishments due to the combination of courses on offer. Officers confirmed that free transport for all children exempt from the discretionary charges would remain whilst they were at their current school.*”

Main Body of Evidence

Evidence Set 1 (attached) - a report from Children and Young People’s Services department.

Supporting Information and References (available online)

- (i) Cabinet meeting on 10 June 2014:
[http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/meeting.aspx?d=10/jun/2014&c=The Cabinet](http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/meeting.aspx?d=10/jun/2014&c=TheCabinet)
- [Confirmed Minutes of the meeting held on 10 June 2014](#)
 - [Agenda Item 09 - Home to School Travel Policies 2015-16 and Discretionary Charges from 2014-15](#)
 - [Agenda Item 09 - Appendix A](#)
 - [Agenda Item 09 - Appendix B](#)
 - [Agenda Item 09 - Appendix C](#)
 - [Agenda Item 09 - Appendix D](#)
 - [Agenda Item 09 - Appendix E](#)
 - [Agenda Item 09 - Appendix F](#)
 - [Agenda Item 09 - Appendix G](#)
 - [Agenda Item 09 - Appendix H](#)

[Agenda Item 09 - Appendix I](#)

[Agenda Item 09 - Appendix J](#)

- (ii) Entitlement to free home to school transport <http://www.suffolkonboard.com/home-to-school-transport/entitlement-to-free-home-to-school-transport>
- (iii) LGiU, Home to school travel and transport – DfE guidance update, 5 Sep 2014: <http://www.lgiu.org.uk/briefing/home-to-school-travel-and-transport-dfe-guidance-update/>
- (iv) Home-to-school travel and transport - Statutory guidance, 18 Jul 2014: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/home-to-school-travel-and-transport-guidance>