

Evidence Set 1

Education and Children's Services Scrutiny Committee

School Transport and Catchment Areas

Information in this Appendix was submitted by	
Director, Assistant Director or Head of Organisation:	<i>Sue Cook, Director, Children and Young People's Services</i>
Contact:	<i>Richard Selwyn, Assistant Director Strategic Commissioning</i> Richard.selwyn@suffolk.gov.uk 01473 264732 <i>Jan Scott, Senior Infrastructure Officer (Admissions & Transport)</i> Jan.scott@suffolk.gov.uk 01473 264657
Title:	<i>Home to School Transport and Catchment Areas</i>
Date Submitted:	<i>24 November 2014</i>

Introduction	
1.	The county council has a duty to provide free transport for children of compulsory school age (5 to 16 year olds) who are under 8 years of age and live two miles or more from their nearest school; or are 8 years of age and over and live three miles or more from their nearest school. Free travel is also provided to catchment area schools when this distance criteria is met.
2.	Free transport must be provided for students at special schools and for other students who have a learning disability, where it is accepted that transport is necessary to enable access to the education they require. Such transport may be provided irrespective of the minimum distance and other criteria set in the policy.
3.	Free transport must also be provided for children from low income families who are aged between 8 and 11 years and live more than 2 but under 3 miles from their catchment or nearest school; or are aged 11 to 16 and live more than 2 miles but less than 6 miles from their three nearest schools.
4.	Where parents on low income have expressed a preference for a school based on religion or belief, free home-to-school transport may also be provided to children aged 11-16 who live more than 2 miles but no more than 15 miles from their school.
5.	Post 16 travel assistance enables learners to access training and education, with consideration of resources available. This would also apply to students with a learning disability (over the age of 16) and, when set out in their statement, may be provided to students who begin a course after they reach the age of 19 years until they are 21 years of age. The provision of Post 16 travel assistance is discretionary and does not have to be free.
Main body of evidence	
Feedback or issues that have arisen that could impact on the successful implementation of the new school travel policies and discretionary charges for the 2015/2016 school year	
6.	The policy changes will apply to travel arrangements from September 2015. We have agreed the following to support these changes:
(a)	Discretionary charges – these will apply to all children who are not entitled to free travel and

		who have been offered a spare seat on a contracted service. The Cabinet agreed that exemptions should not apply in the future because there is legislation, set out in paragraphs 3 and 4 above, in place to support low income families. Where a child already has a discretionary seat and payment is exempt due to low income, we will continue to waive this cost whilst the child remains at their current school.
	(b)	<p>Post 16 Travel – the new policy applies for entry to school sixth forms or Post 16 institutions (colleges) in September 2015. Any travel arrangements that are in place for the current Year 12 students will continue to ensure they are able to complete their courses in Year 13.</p> <p>Call centre staff will be briefed in January 2015 to ensure they are able to deal effectively with enquiries.</p> <p>We are aware of a campaign to seek free travel for all Post 16 students in light of the Raising the Participation Age agenda. There is a Post 16 Travel petition with more than 800 signatures, However, the county council does not have a duty to provide free travel. All Post 16 travel is discretionary and therefore the discretionary cost is payable. Low income families are able to apply for a 16-19 Bursary of up to £1200 to support their learning and travel arrangements.</p>
	(c)	<p>There are currently 809 Post 16 students travelling to Norfolk and Colchester, as follows:</p> <p>Colchester Sixth Form College = 176 Colchester Institute = 32 Cambridge Regional College = 9 College of West Anglia = 12 East Norfolk Sixth Form College = 372 Easton College = 19 Norwich City College = 23 Colchester Royal Grammar School = 18 Great Yarmouth College = 23 Notre Dame High School = 38 Hills Road Sixth Form College = 21 Long Road Sixth Form College = 66</p> <p>We will review the pattern of Post 16 travel when the new policy is implemented.</p>
Responses to comments made at the Cabinet meeting on 10 June 2014		
7.		Councillors stressed the importance of communicating with parents so that they are able to make informed choices.
	(a)	We have made information available for parents in the Schools in Suffolk booklet. This explains that an exemption to the discretionary charge will no longer be available for any new travel arrangements, or for children who currently receive an exemption when they change schools. We have recently written to individual families who will be affected to let them know they should take the cost of travel into account when applying for a new school place.
	(b)	Students will be making applications for school sixth forms or Post 16 institutions (colleges) in February 2015. All parents of the current Year 11 students will receive a letter and updated leaflet by the end of the autumn term 2014 to make it clear how the new policy will work and to help them understand when we would provide a discretionary seat, where available. Those eligible for Post 16 discretionary travel will live 3 miles or more from their nearest school sixth form or Post 16 institution. Where travel support is important to a family they will still have a choice of provision. We are currently creating two generic maps; one to show the nearest school sixth form and the other to show the nearest Post 16 institution. These will be published on the website www.suffolkonboard.com .
	(c)	The term Transport Priority Area is used to describe transport entitlement to aid both parents and schools. Maps have been added to the Suffolkonboard website. However, in some cases it will still be necessary to measure distances to confirm eligibility to free travel.
	(d)	We have worked with the digital transformation team to improve our website and to improve processes so that parents are able to apply directly for services. For example, the transport application forms have been simplified; short links have been created to make an application, send a photograph for a bus pass and to pay for transport.

	(e)	We have monitored the impact of these improvements by comparing the number of front office calls during the summer peak period in 2013 and 2014. We received 6,171 enquiries in 2013 and 4,509 in 2014. This is a reduction of 18% with over 1600 fewer calls made this year. However, we continue to consider what other improvements could be made.
8.		The Endeavour Card was introduced in October 2013. This card provides 16-19 year olds with a 25% discount on public services where the operator has signed up to the scheme. By the end of October 2014, 2,012 young people had taken advantage of this scheme and are using the Endeavour Card. We have recently introduced cashless payments for Endeavour Card holders with four new operators: Galloway, Simonds, Suffolk Norse and Stephenson's. This makes it even easier for young people to travel. The Endeavour Card has been promoted by operators displaying posters on buses. News stories are also available on Twitter and on our website: http://suffolkonboard.com/news/endeavour-card-new-operators-accepting-cashless-payments/ .
9.		There were 31 transport appeals held during the 2013/14 school year. Nine appeals were upheld; five on grounds of safety of the route and 4 for medical or exceptional circumstances. This is out of a total number of 15,735 children and young people being transported.
10.		There are no current reports of overcrowding on closed contract school buses. Any reports of overcrowding at the start of term on contracted school transport have been investigated and resolved. Occasionally, overcrowding may be due to vehicle breakdowns where an alternative vehicle is used that has a slightly lower capacity. Sometimes students place bags on seats so other students are not able to sit down and these issues would be resolved through working with the school.
Update on clarity of communications with schools and the county council's transport staff		
11.		The Passenger Transport Unit has developed three new transport guides for parents to explain the home to school transport process. These are for primary schools, upper and high schools and Post 16 students and will be issued with admission offer letters. In addition, we are developing a guide to home to school transport that will be made available for schools and parents to provide consistent information that is easily accessible. Leaflets will be sent to schools and copies will also be published on the Suffolkonboard website.
Details of information that is available for parents of children who attend Norfolk schools or who live in an area where there are free schools near to the county's border		
12.		Information is available on both the Suffolk County Council's website and Suffolkonboard to explain Transport Priority Areas. Maps have been published to highlight the locations that need further investigation before determining eligibility for free travel. Queries relating to transport to Norfolk schools are referred to the Passenger Transport Unit and dealt with accordingly. We do not publish specific information regarding Norfolk schools.
13.		There have been a small number of enquiries relating to Transport Priority Areas (TPAs) in free school areas. It has been evident that some parents and schools have been unclear about their particular TPA and when transport would be provided. There has also been some misunderstanding between Children and Young People's Services and the Passenger Transport Unit, which have been resolved. Examples include:
	(a)	Families who live near to the county border in the Thurston area where the nearest school is in another county. Families living in Barnham and Euston are entitled to free travel to Thurston Community College because it is the catchment school. However, they were not entitled to free travel to the nearer Ixworth Free School because their nearest school is in Norfolk. It has been clarified that the TPAs for Thurston and Ixworth were based on the Thurston catchment area as a whole and, on this basis, families living in Barnham and Euston were entitled to free travel to either of these schools. We have advised both schools and changed the details on the website for parents.
	(b)	Families living in Elvedon are in the TPA for Mildenhall College Academy. However, their nearest school is Thetford Academy in Norfolk, which is in special measures. We received a complaint about this issue because transport was not available to IES Breckland, the nearest Suffolk school. The TPAs cover the Mildenhall, Lakenheath and Brandon areas. Therefore, using the principles outlined in paragraph 13(a) above, we have agreed to provide free travel to IES Breckland for students who live in this area when it is their nearest Suffolk school.
	(c)	Customer Services have been fully briefed on TPAs and know to refer queries to the entitlement team for further investigation.

	(d)	If another free school were to open close to the county border the TPA would be developed using the principles set out in the Cabinet report Home to School Transport Arrangements in Areas where Free Schools are Established, which were agreed on 10 July 2012.
Details of further changes that are planned or likely regarding transport priority areas and school catchment areas arising from school organisation review		
14.		We are currently reviewing catchment areas in Bury St Edmunds and will be consulting on these within the consultation for Admissions Arrangements in 2016/17 in January and February 2015. Any proposals will seek to provide a 2-tier pathway for pupils living in the County Upper Academy Trust area and who are attending their catchment area 2-tier primary school. Transport is more complex given that King Edward VI CEVC Upper School and County Upper Schools are in such close proximity. We are developing a bespoke solution for this area to support the county council's priority of Raising the Bar.
15.		Home to school travel falls within the county council's Transport Transformation Programme. We are currently developing pilot schemes with Westbridge Pupil Referral Unit, Priory School and Stradbroke High School to assess how the localism agenda might support home to school travel to give schools more flexibility and, at the same time, reduce travel costs.
16.		In terms of the statutory requirement to provide transport to the nearest school for eligible students, we have met with a colleague from Hertfordshire County Council who no longer provide free transport to catchment area schools. They have changed their transport offer to meet statutory requirements only. This has been successfully implemented because they worked closely with public sector transport companies to improve the transport network links and supported parents over three years to prepare them for the change. We are considering whether this might be an option for Suffolk.
Information about how transport arrangements are linked to the county council's corporate priorities		
17.		Raise educational attainment and skill levels: Transport Priority Areas for Bury St Edmunds are being developed to support the changing pattern of schools in Suffolk whilst retaining the current TPA for County Upper School.
18.		Maintain roads and develop Suffolk's infrastructure: In addition to improving road networks through the county to improve accessibility to services, the county council's contributions to the recent Beccles Loop rail project has increased the service to hourly on the East Suffolk line. This provides further opportunity and travel assistance to promote choice to learning establishments.
19.		Support those most vulnerable in our communities: Our arrangements comply with the Transport legislation which means that we support low income families and children with learning disabilities as set out in paragraphs 2 to 5 above.
20.		Empower local communities: Paragraph 15 above sets our current work to support local solutions for home to school travel.
Glossary		
21.		Transport Priority Area (TPA) Every school has a TPA that is used to decide if a child is entitled to free travel. The TPA may be the same as the catchment area or, if there is a free school in the area, the TPA may be different.
Supporting Information		
22.	(a)	The Cabinet Report, Appendices A-J and the Minute of the meeting held on 10 June 2014 http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/searchResult.aspx?qry=c_committee~~The Cabinet
	(b)	The Cabinet Report and Appendices 1 - 6 on Home to School Transport Arrangements in Areas where Free Schools are Established, which were agreed on 10 July 2012. http://committeeminutes.suffolkcc.gov.uk/searchResult.aspx?qry=c_committee~~The Cabinet