

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Executive
Date: 22 February 2021
Report for: Decision
Report of: Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Children's Services

Report Title

All Age Travel Assistance Policy 2021/22

Summary

This report lays out the consultation approach taken and proposes that the revised All Age Travel Assistance Policy for 2021/22 is implemented.

Recommendation(s)

1. That the Executive notes the report including the methodology and approach used for the consultation process, the feedback received and the equality impact assessment.
2. That the revised policy is approved for implementation with effect from 1 June 2021 for travel in the academic year 2021/22.

Contact person for access to background papers and further information:

Name: Sarah Butters
Extension: 3233

Background Papers: None

The following documents are attached:

Annex 1 – Individual Consultation Comments and Responses

Annex 2 – Trafford Council All Age Travel Assistance Policy 2021-22

Annex 3 – Equality Impact Assessment

Relationship to Corporate Priorities	Ensuring a fair start for all children and young people Supporting our residents when they need it most.
Relationship to GM Policy or Strategy Framework	GM Children and Young People's Plan GM Transport Strategy
Financial	The Council has forecast it will spend £4.535m in 2020/21 on transport and travel assistance, increasing to £5.065m in 2021/22. It is proposed the policy change would take effect in September 2021. The projected saving from this proposal is £30k in financial year 2021/22. This will increase to the full year projected saving of £45k in financial year 2022/23.
Legal Implications	To ensure the Council adheres to its legal obligations in relation to home to school transport, disabled children, adult learners and adults with assessed care and support needs.
Equality/Diversity Implications	In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) under section 149 of the 2010 Equality Act an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been carried out and is provided as part of the background papers to this report. The development of the EIA has enabled the Council to give due regard to the impact of the proposed changes on those identified with protected characteristics under the 2010 Equality Act. Members must have regard to the EIA, the likely impact of the proposed policy on persons with protected characteristics and the mitigation proposed in relation to those impacts in reaching their decision on this matter.
Sustainability Implications	The Council will have to continue to procure transport providers and that number is likely to increase. A range of travel options are highlighted in the policy. The policy links to the Sustainable Modes of Transport Strategy.
Carbon Reduction	No direct implications
Resource Implications e.g. Staffing / ICT / Assets	The number of Passenger Assistants required is dependent upon a number of factors including needs of pupils on commissioned transport.
Risk Management Implications	These are addressed in the Policy and the EIA.
Health and Wellbeing Implications	Travel assistance enables eligible children and adults to access school, learning, training, respite care and activities which contribute to their employability, health and wellbeing. Independent Travel Training is one travel assistance solution and helps young people prepare for adulthood and independence.
Health and Safety Implications	These are addressed through the Service Standards described in the Policy.

1.0 Background

- 1.1. Since implementation of the All Age Travel Assistance Policy in 2016/17, Trafford Council has made significant changes and service improvements to the provision of travel assistance to children, young people and adults.
- 1.2. The All Age Travel Assistance Policy covers home to school transport, post 16 learners, adult learners and vulnerable adults with assessed care and support needs. It is not solely for children and adults with disabilities, but is a wider document pertinent to all relevant groups.
- 1.3. The 2020-21 policy included improvements to the layout and wording to make it more accessible. The content was coproduced by a group which included parent carer representatives, Trafford Family Information Service (FIS), Trafford Special Educational Needs Information and Advice Service (SENDIASS) and Trafford Parent Forum. Positive feedback has been received from families about this content since it went live online in June 2020.
- 1.4. The other key policy change in 2020-21 removed LA charges for the provision of transport to post 16 learners with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) linked to the Greater Manchester Our Pass pilot offering free transport for all 16 to 18 year olds.
- 1.5. Demand for travel assistance continues to rise. This mirrors the increase in the number of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) who require an Education, Health and Care Plan. As a result of increased demand the budget for travel assistance, including home to school transport, was increased from £4.325m in 2019/2020 to £4.535m in 2020/21, and again to £5.065m in 2021/22.
- 1.6. The Council has exercised its statutory duty to review the Policy for academic year 2021/22 including travel arrangements for service users, costs and charges, and eligibility to assistance.
- 1.7. The revised Policy will take effect from 1 June 2021.

2.0 Policy Change

- 2.1 There is one proposed policy change which is to remove the discretionary criterion for grammar school pupils meaning that those who travel further than the nearest qualifying school will no longer be eligible for travel assistance. This means that families who travel further than the nearest school for a grammar school place will have to pay for any travel costs themselves, unless they are a low income family.
- 2.2 The October 2020 school census indicated 8,036 children attend a Trafford Grammar School. Of these, 124 children currently receive travel assistance under the discretionary criteria.
- 2.3 Under the current arrangements, travel assistance for these children is provided in the form of a travel pass for use across the bus and tram network which costs £378 per child.

- 2.4 This proposal does not change things for low income families who meet the criteria to receive a free school meal and who choose to travel to access a grammar school place. These low income families will continue to receive travel assistance. The guidance defines a low income family as where the child is eligible for a free school meal or the parent/carer is in receipt of the maximum amount of working tax credit.
- 2.5 Other families who choose to travel further than the nearest school for a place in a particular high school do not qualify for travel assistance unless they are a low income family.

3.0 Consultation Approach and Responses

- 3.1 There were two key elements to the consultation approach. Firstly there was a section within the council’s budget proposals public consultation which ran from 4 November to 7 December 2020. Secondly there was a separate specific consultation from 16 November 2020 to 10 January 2021 which directly sought the views of those who would be impacted by the proposed change.
- 3.2 The consultation was promoted through a range of communication channels to encourage participation. This included websites, social media, press release and through the schools e-bulletin to all primary and secondary schools for promotion within their school communities.
- 3.3 Notification emails and letters regarding the changes and the methods of responding to the consultation were sent out to all families currently in receipt of travel assistance under this criteria.
- 3.4 441 responses were received through the budget proposals consultation and 36 responses were received to the specific transport consultation. The following shows a breakdown of whether respondents agreed with the proposal:

Budget proposals consultation	Specific transport consultation
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongly agree - 177 • Agree - 129 • Neither agree not disagree - 39 • Disagree - 37 • Strongly disagree - 50 • Don’t know - 9 <p>TOTAL – 441 responses</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Agree - 5 • Disagree - 30 • Don’t know - 1 <p>TOTAL – 36 responses</p>

- 3.5 311 out of 477 (65%) respondents agreed with the proposal to remove the discretionary criterion.
- 3.6 In the specific transport consultation, a supplementary question was asked about whether for grammar school places, the definition of low income families should be expanded to include more families. 53% agreed, 19% did not agree and 28% did not know.
- 3.7 Each of the key themes raised by consultees has been responded to by the local authority and can be found at Annex 1, together with the individual comments from the specific transport consultation.

3.8 Annex 1 also provides an analysis of children currently receiving the discretionary allowance which shows that the vast majority are not travelling from the less affluent areas of the Borough to attend the high performing grammar schools in more affluent areas. Rather they are travelling to take up grammar school places in areas less affluent, relevant to their own.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 Demand for travel assistance continues to rise. This is primarily linked to the increase in the number of children and young people with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) who require an Education, Health and Care Plan. As a result of increased demand the budget for travel assistance, including home to school transport, was increased from £4.325m in 2019/2020 to £4.535m in 2020/21, and again to £5.065m in 2021/22.

4.2 Travel assistance for grammar school children who meet the current discretionary criteria is provided in the form of a travel pass for use across the bus and tram network which costs the council £378 per pupil. On average, 120 travel passes are issued each school year to grammar school pupils. Therefore the projected full year saving from this proposal is £45k.

4.3 The proposed policy change would be effective from for academic year 2021/22. This means the projected saving from this proposal is £30k in financial year 2021/22, increasing to £45k in financial year 2022/23.

4.4 The cost to families for making their own travel arrangements will vary linked to individual routes from home to school. In many cases it will be less expensive than the £378 per year being paid by the council which is for a pass valid across the whole tram and bus network rather than being for a specific route.

4.5 It is proposed the 124 families that currently benefit from travel assistance will be invited to provide evidence of particular hardship for further consideration.

5.0 Other Options

5.1 Do nothing. The policy would continue to benefit one group of children above others which is not equitable. The current discretionary allowance does not offer the same financial protection for other families, in similar circumstances, where their children have not qualified to attend a grammar school. Other families who choose to travel further than the nearest school for a place in a particular high school do not qualify for travel assistance unless they are a low income family.

5.2 Phase out the discretionary criterion so that grammar school pupils currently in receipt of travel assistance continue to benefit from this until they either complete year 11 at that school or choose to move to another school. This would delay the ability to make the best of use of resources with immediate effect, stretching it instead over a 4 year period. Inviting families to provide evidence of particular hardship for further consideration will ensure specific individual circumstances are considered.

5.3 Expand the definition of low income families, specifically in relation to pupils attending grammar school, so that travel assistance is offered to families with the

40% lowest incomes rather than the current 20% lowest incomes. After careful consideration it is felt this would create further inequity within the policy as the low income definition for non-grammar school pupils would remain targeting the 20%.

6.0 Reasons for Recommendation

- 6.1 Trafford is proud of all its children, regardless of their level of ability, and strongly believes in equality and fairness in the provision of its services. The current policy benefits one group of children above others and it is not equitable. The revised policy promotes equality and fairness. It better meets the strategic objectives of supporting those most in need and providing the most cost effective travel assistance so we make best use of our resources, ensuring travel assistance is targeted at those who need it the most.

Key Decision Yes

If Key Decision, has 28-day notice been given? Yes

Finance Officer Clearance - AN

Legal Officer Clearance - PD

CORPORATE DIRECTOR'S SIGNATURE

A handwritten signature in purple ink, appearing to read 'Julie McNamee', with a horizontal line underneath.

To confirm that the Financial and Legal Implications have been considered and the Executive Member has cleared the report.