

TRAFFORD COUNCIL

Report to: Executive
Date: 16 March 2020
Report for: Decision
Report of: Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Children's Social Care

Report Title

All Age Travel Assistance Policy 2020/21

Summary

This report lays out the consultation approach taken and proposes that the revised All Age Travel Assistance Policy for 2020/21 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 2020.

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 2020-2021
- 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 £4.421m in 2020/21 on transport and travel assistance. There is a projected loss of £20k income through removal of charges for students of 6 th form age. Mitigation includes increasing take up of the independent travel training offer. There are no changes proposed to the level of charges for nursery age children.
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.
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. 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, has been increased from £4.220m in 2019/2020 to £4.421m in 2020/21.
- 1.3. The All Age Travel Assistance Policy applies to children of compulsory school age, pre-school children, children starting reception class, pupils attending grammar school or faith schools, young people of 6th form age, adult learners and adults with assessed care and support needs. The Policy is therefore not solely addressed to children and adults with disabilities, but is a wider document pertinent to all relevant groups.
- 1.4. The Council has exercised its statutory duty to review the Policy for academic year 2020/21 including travel arrangements for service users, costs and charges, and eligibility to assistance.
- 1.5. Prior to the review, feedback was received from service users and their families that they found the structure and wording of the Policy confusing, that it can be difficult to navigate and it is not always clear which section of the policy applies. A key consideration during the review was the statutory duty described in the SEND Code of Practice which requires local authorities to respond to all comments received about the SEND Local Offer, describing the action it intends to take.
- 1.6. The revised Policy ensures that the Council’s obligation to review the Policy is met; that the Policy is easier to navigate and understand; and that there is a fair offer for young people of 6th form age through removal of charges and an improved appeal process.
- 1.7. The public consultation was undertaken from 1 February to 28 February 2020 and details of the consultation approach and methods used are noted in Section 3.
- 1.8. The revised Policy will take effect from 1 June 2020.

2.0 Policy Changes

2.1 There are three main changes to the revised Policy:

Proposal 1 – Improved Wording and Layout

The revised policy wording was co-produced by the SEND Communication and Engagement Group which includes parent/carer representation. The new layout means there are three clear sections depending on the age of the person who requires transport assistance:

1. Children	Home to school transport for pre-school and school age children 2 to 16 years.
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2. Young people	Travel assistance to education or training for young people 16 to 19 years (or up to 25 with an education, health and care plan) who started their course before their 19 th birthday.
3. Adults	Travel assistance for vulnerable adults 18 years and over. This includes adults with assessed care and support needs and also adult learners who started a course after their 19 th birthday.

Proposal 2 – To remove charges for students of 6th form age

This applies to young people age 16-19 years old (or up to age 25 with an education, health and care plan) who are assessed as eligible for council provided transport to education or training. The pilot Greater Manchester scheme called Our Pass provides free bus travel to all young people age 16 to 18 years and so this change is to achieve equity within our offer of transport for eligible young people.

Proposal 3 – To improve the appeal process for students of 6th form age

The appeal process for students of 6th form age will change from a one stage process to a two stage process. This brings it in line with the two stage process which applies to school age children, providing an opportunity to appeal to a panel who are independent of the original decision-making process.

3.0 Communications and Publicity

- 3.1 The consultation was promoted through a range of communications channels in order to promote the changes and encourage participation and feedback by all interested parties, individual users and groups. This was co-ordinated by the SEND Communication and Engagement Group which includes multiagency professionals and parent/carer representatives.
- 3.2 The consultation was promoted on the front page of the Council's SEND Local Offer website to deliver maximum exposure to passing traffic, as well as providing an immediate landing spot and link to the dedicated webpage and online survey within the Council's Consultation Hub. Respondents could also send comments to a dedicated email account for review and inclusion.
- 3.3 Notification emails and letters regarding the changes and the methods of responding to the consultation were sent out to all service users.
- 3.4 The consultation was promoted widely on social media and through other Council communication channels including a press release which resulted in positive coverage in local press The Messenger. Information about the consultation was also provided on request to the BBC who were researching a news item about charges for transport for SEND students age 16 to 18 years old.
- 3.5 Trafford Parent Forum was a key partner in promoting the consultation. Members of Trafford Travel Co-ordination Unit and Trafford Family Information Service attended four of Trafford Parent Forum's regular surgery style drop in sessions during February 2020 to promote the consultation and provided opportunities for feedback and questions.

- 3.6 The Family Information Service placed information on their dedicated website, attracting 150 page views, and promoted the consultation via social media, posting news and information to their followers. Young people, parents and carers were targeted; 1964 Facebook users were reached and there were 2510 Twitter engagements.
- 3.7 The Special Educational Needs and Disabilities Information, Advice and Support Service (SENDIASS) placed information on their dedicated website and promoted the consultation via social media.
- 3.8 Information regarding the consultation was promoted in the schools e-bulletin which is sent to all primary and secondary schools in Trafford and also the early years e-bulletin which is sent to around 340 early years settings including private, voluntary and independent childcare providers and childminders.
- 3.9 Over 700 letters were sent to parent/carers, plus emails/texts to passenger assistants contractors, schools and other interested parties inviting feedback to the consultation.
- 3.10 Children and Adults Social Care Services and Trafford Clinical Commissioning Group were asked for feedback on the proposed changes.

4.0 Consultation Response

- 4.1 A total of 10 responses were received online, 9 from parent/carers and 1 from another stakeholder.
- 4.2 Trafford Travel Co-ordination Unit Manager attended meetings at Trafford Parents Forum to answer questions on the proposed changes.
- 4.3 For proposal 1, out of the 10 respondents via the online consultation 5 gave positive feedback, 4 did not give specific feedback in relation to this proposal, 1 stated that the navigation relies too much on the left hand vertical menu.
- 4.4 For proposal 2, out of the 10 respondents via the online consultation, 8 responded with positive feedback agreeing to this proposal, 2 did not give specific feedback in relation to this proposal.
- 4.5 For proposal 3, out of the 10 respondents via the online consultation, 4 gave positive feedback, 1 stated that the current system should remain and 5 respondents did not give any specific feedback in relation to this proposal.
- 4.6 Overall the majority of responses are positive, particularly for proposal 2.
- 4.7 Individual comments and responses can be found in Annex 1.

5.0 Financial Implications

- 5.1 As a result of increased demand the budget for travel assistance, including home to school transport, has been increased from £4.220m in 2019/2020 to £4.421m in 2020/21.

- 5.2 There is no proposal to increase the level of fees for nursery age children so they will remain unchanged for the academic year 2020/21. The charge will be £170 per term, reduced to £85 per term for low income families who meet the criteria for free school meals. The numbers of nursery aged children being transported has increased linked to nursery provision now being made available at The Orchards Special School, in addition to the existing specialist nursery provision at Delamere School and Pictor Academy.
- 5.3 The proposal to remove the charges for students of 6th form age assessed as eligible for travel assistance will result in a loss of income of £20k. Mitigation is planned through a range of measures, primarily focusing on the promotion and increase in take up of the independent travel training offer. A promotional video has been developed for the service provided by Trafford's Independent Travel Trainer which includes feedback from young people and parents about the benefits of the service. This service reduces the demand for group transport, often negating the need to acquire larger vehicles which incur additional costs. A recent case study identified that independent travel training for one pupil resulted in a cashable saving of £17k.

6.0 Other Options

- 6.1 Do nothing. The Council would not meet its statutory duty to review travel arrangements for service users, costs and charges, and eligibility to assistance. The policy would remain difficult to navigate and understand. This may adversely affect our most vulnerable children and families.
- 6.2 Maintain existing charging arrangements for travel assistance for 6th form age students. This would create inequity for young people with disabilities as their non-disabled peers currently benefit from free bus travel through the Greater Manchester pilot scheme.
- 6.3 Maintain existing single stage appeal process for travel assistance for 6th form age students. This would mean there would be no opportunity to appeal a decision to a panel who are independent of the original decision-making process, going against the best practice advice in the Post-16 transport and travel support to education and training statutory guidance.

7.0 Reasons for Recommendation

- 7.1 The revised Policy makes it clearer for children, young people, adults and their families, about eligibility for travel assistance and the range of transport options available in the local area. Travel assistance for 6th form age students with disabilities is offered free of charge in line with the Greater Manchester pilot scheme offering free bus travel to all young people age 16 to 18 and with a best practice appeals process.

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



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