

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 10 May 2018

Report of the Head of Schools Improvement

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Determination of Home to School Transport Policy - Academic Year 2019/2020 (Appendix 'A' refers)

Contact for further information:

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Executive Summary

Lancashire County Council reviews the Home to School Transport policy on an annual basis. As there have been significant changes to the Home to School Transport Policy in recent years, the amendments to the policy for the academic year 2019/20 are minimal. There are no changes in respect of parents' entitlement to receive home to school transport assistance. Some minor changes have been made to the wording of the policy to provide clarification for parents.

This is deemed to be a Key Decision and the provisions of Standing Order 25 have been complied with.

Recommendation

The Cabinet is recommended to approve the Home to School Transport Policy for the academic year 2019/2020 as set out at Appendix 'A'.

Background and Advice

In accordance with the Education School Information Regulations 2008 (Regulation 8.), the county council has a duty to publish all relevant information that may inform parental decision making when applying for a secondary school, no later than six weeks before the closing date for secondary school applications which is 31 October each year.

Additionally, the county council is required to publish general arrangements and policies in respect of home to school travel for children of compulsory school age. The county council informs parents of entitlement to receive transport assistance by

publishing a Home to School Transport Policy on the Lancashire County Council website and it is reviewed annually.

Statutory Entitlement

The Department for Education issued statutory guidance in July 2014 that reaffirmed that Local Authorities had a duty to provide free transport for all pupils of compulsory school age (5-16) if their nearest suitable school is:

- beyond 2 miles (if below the age of 8); or
- beyond 3 miles (if aged between 8 and 16)

Pupils attending secondary schools whose parents are on the qualifying benefits for free school meals, or in the receipt of maximum amount of Working Tax Credit, also receive assistance with travel costs if they attend one of their three nearest schools, provided the distance to school is between 2 and 6 miles. There is also denominational transport assistance if a pupil is attending a particular school on the grounds of faith and the school is between 2 and 15 miles from home.

Changes in the county council's Home to School Transport Policy

In light of the current financial climate, there has been careful examination and review of all areas of expenditure, including home to school transport.

It is parental preferences for schools and academies and the application of admission arrangements linked to these which informs and drives the subsequent application of the Local Authority's home to school transport policy. The council has no statutory duty to provide transport assistance in circumstances where pupils do not attend their nearest school or academy. In the past, Lancashire was able to exercise discretion to provide transport assistance over and above that which the authority was legally obliged to offer.

To make budget savings there have been three consultations, followed by significant changes to the home to school transport policy in recent years:

- In September 2011, the county council introduced a parental contribution towards the costs of providing transport assistance for any new pupils attending denominational schools, where the school was not the nearest geographically to the home address. To qualify for the denominational subsidy pupils have to meet the faith criteria for admission and live over the statutory walking distances. The parental contribution is not required from low income families. The contribution in 2011 was set at £380.00 and each year this has been increased by 5% + RPI. From September 2018, the contribution is £615.00.
- In September 2015, the county council removed further discretionary elements of the policy. All new pupils starting at school are only given paid transport assistance if they attend their nearest school and live more than three miles away. When undertaking assessments, there is no longer any consideration of which Geographical Priority Area a pupil lives within and schools in neighbouring districts and local authorities are also considered.

- From September 2018, the county council has removed subsidised discretionary denominational transport assistance for pupils attending faith schools.

Department for Education guidance suggests that any changes to policies should be phased-in, so that children who start under one set of transport arrangements continue to benefit from them until they conclude their education at that school or move to another school. In light of the policy changes, there are now some families where older children are receiving free travel, but younger siblings do not qualify. Similarly, situations arise where older pupils travelling from a bus stop have a bus pass to school whilst younger pupils boarding at the stop do not qualify. This has caused some confusion for parents.

Information about the availability of transport assistance

The admission information which is available for all parents from each September (online and paper where requested) provides a summary transport policy. Parents are advised to check the policy carefully if getting their child from home to school and back is a consideration. Parents are directed to a full copy of the Home to School Transport Policy on the Lancashire County Council website and to seek advice from the area education office if they have any queries. The county council also has officers in attendance at most secondary school open evenings to give advice on transport eligibility and admission queries.

It is hoped that minimal changes to the Home to School Transport Policy for the academic year 2019/20 will assist parents understanding of transport entitlement.

Consultations

It has not been necessary to consult on the Home to School Transport Policy 2019/2020 as there have been no significant changes.

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

There are no suggested changes to parental entitlement to receive transport assistance.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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N/A

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A