

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 3 February 2022

Report of the Head of Service - Education Improvement

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
(All Divisions);

Corporate Priorities:
Delivering better services;

Determination of Home to School Transport Policy - Academic Year 2023/2024

(Appendix 'A' refers)

Contact for further information:

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Brief Summary

Lancashire County Council reviews the Home to School Transport policy on an annual basis. There are no changes to the determined policy for the academic year 2023/2024.

This is deemed to be a Key Decision and the provisions of Standing Order C19 have been complied with.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to approve the Home to School Transport Policy for the academic year 2023/2024 as set out at Appendix 'A'.

Detail

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 receipt of the 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. For low income families 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.

Recent 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, as set out below:

- In September 2015, the county council removed discretionary elements of the policy. All new pupils starting at secondary schools – or over the age of eight - 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 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.

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 are encouraged 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.

Consultations

It has not been necessary to consult on the Home to School Transport Policy 2023/2024 as there have been no 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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None		
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Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A