

EDUCATION TRANSPORT FOR CHILDREN IN CARE AND CARE LEAVERS

To: Corporate Parenting Sub-Committee

Meeting Date: 20 November 2019

From: Clare Buckingham: Strategic Education Place Planning Manager (Cambridgeshire and Peterborough)

Electoral division(s): All

Purpose: To advise Members on the arrangements for the provision of transport assistance for children in care and care leavers.

Recommendation: For Members to note:

- a) the arrangements for the provision of transport assistance for children in care and care leavers;**
- b) that the Council does not currently collect comprehensive data on children/ students who have previously been in care and, therefore, it is not possible to quantify the indicative cost if the transport assistance currently available to post-16 students who are in care/ care leavers, was to be extended to those who have previously been children in care.**

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Summary:

The Council's policy regarding transport arrangements for children and young people in care is the same as for children who are not in care during their pre-16 education and free of charge for those in post-16 education.

The Sub-Committee asked whether it would be possible to support post-16 students who have previously been in care with the cost of transport to attend their post-16 courses.

1. Background

At the Sub-Committee's meeting on 17 July 2019 Members asked for a report on the current position regarding education transport issues for children in care and care leavers and the implications of this on their access to further education, apprenticeships and employment opportunities. Members had also expressed interest in understanding the potential for students, previously in care, being offered the same status in the Council's transport policy as those currently in care.

2. Transport policy

- 2.1 The Council's transport assistance policy for children in care dates from March 2016 and is the same as for those for whom the Council is not the corporate parent. That is, children are entitled to free home to school transport to their catchment or nearest school where that is more than 2 miles away for primary aged children and more than 3 miles away for secondary aged pupils. If there is not an available walking route, in line with the legal definition¹, within those maximum walking distances the Council has a duty to provide transport assistance.
- 2.2 If a child/ young person has a special educational need or disability (SEND), as detailed in their Education, Health & Care (EHC) Plan, which ordinarily prevents them from walking the statutory walking distance to and from school, they will be eligible for free transport.
- 2.3 In circumstances where a child/ young person's foster placement is changed, the Council is sympathetic to the disruption this can cause and mindful of the fact that school placement may be the one point of continuity for them. Decisions regarding requests for free transport in such cases are based on the individual circumstances of the child in care, and take into account their year group, the journey length and time as well as the cost.
- 2.4 If a post-16 student is in care they will be eligible for free transport to their

¹ Rogers V Essex County Council 1986 "A route along which a child, accompanied as necessary, can walk with reasonable safety. A route does not fail to qualify as "available" because of dangers that would arise if the child remained unaccompanied".

nearest appropriate sixth form centre. Proof of their care status is required at the point of application to determine eligibility. There is no provision within the existing policy to provide assistance with transport costs for students who were previously in care.

- 2.5 Care leaver students continue to receive the same transport entitlement whilst they are on a continuing course. Their young person in care status will only cease, for transport policy purposes, if they start a new course of study after their 18th birthday.

3. Transport Data

3.1 Numbers of children receiving transport

Currently, based on information accurate as of September 2019, the Social Education Transport Team (SETT) records show that there are 320 children/ young people in care who are in receipt of free transport.

3.2 Transport costs

The following chart shows the costs for the past three financial years of home to school and contact journeys for children in care.

Year	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19
Spend	£1,159,725	£1,303,072	£1,423,495

3.3 Post-16 Education Transport for Children in Care and Care Leavers

In preparation for this report officers analysed a sample, namely records of 263 of the 344 students in care who attended post-16 provision for the past three years. Of those 263, 55 had received post-16 travel assistance:

- 16 were entitled to free post-16 travel under the Council's policy
- 9 were not entitled under the Policy, but were able to purchase a spare seat on a vehicle contracted by the Council
- 20 were not entitled under the Council's policy, but assistance was requested and funded by Social Care
- 10 received assistance through the Council's post-16 SEND policy

Of the 208 students who were in care who did not receive any form of assistance through the Council, 65 were living within the Peterborough area and may, therefore, have received assistance through Peterborough City Council. The other 143 students may have received assistance directly from their college via its own travel network, such as Cambridgeshire Regional College and Peterborough Regional College offer. This data is not held by the Council.

- 3.4 Over the past three years nearly half of the children/ young people in care in post-16 education had their transport funded by their Social Care team (either within Cambridgeshire or from another Local Authority (LA) in those cases where they have not met the Council's criteria for free travel assistance.

- 3.5 Post-16 students who are in care are also eligible to receive a 16-19 bursary of £1200 per annum via their post-16 centre. This bursary is designed to support students' access to post-16 education and can be used to cover any costs incurred by the student, including travel.
- 3.6 Officers have also sought the views of local authorities in the region with regard to their policy and practice. Responses were received from Hertfordshire, Lincolnshire, Central Bedfordshire, Bedford Borough and Milton Keynes. None of these currently have any provision in their post-16 transport policies for care leavers or those who have been previously in care. In Luton, social care services pay for 50% of transport costs for children/students in care.

4. Identifying children who have been previously in care

- 4.1 During the admissions process families can indicate if their child is in care or was previously. This gives the child/ student priority in the school application process.
- 4.2 Officers have considered the possibility of using this data collected by admissions, as a means of identifying the possible future cost of extending the Council's current post-16 transport policy to this group of students. Unfortunately, at the point of school admissions applications, a single category is recorded whereby children who are currently in care and those who were previously, are not differentiated. The Virtual School has also confirmed that they do not record data relating to children/ young people who were previously in care.

5. Conclusion

- 5.1 It is not possible, on the data sets currently available within the Council, to quantify the impact of extending the Council's current policy to include assistance with post-16 transport costs for those students who have previously been in care.

6. ALIGNMENT WITH CORPORATE PRIORITIES

6.1 A good quality of life for everyone

Access to local and high quality education should enhance the life opportunities for students and enhance the skills of the local workforce.

6.2 Thriving places for people to live

Schools and colleges and the services associated with them are providers of local employment.

6.3 **The best start for Cambridgeshire's children**
N/A

7. **SIGNIFICANT IMPLICATIONS**

7.1 **Resource Implications**
See section 5.1 above

7.2 **Procurement/Contractual/Council Contract Procedure Rules Implications**
N/A

7.3 **Statutory, Legal and Risk Implications**
N/A

7.4 **Equality and Diversity Implications**
Unlike in legislation relating to school admissions, transport legislation does not require local authorities to prioritise for transport assistance children/students who have been previously in care.

7.5 **Engagement and Communications Implications**
N/A

7.6 **Localism and Local Member Involvement**
N/A

7.7 **Public Health Implications**
N/A

Source Documents	Location
Cambridgeshire County Council's guide to post-16 transport assistance:	http://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/post16edtransport
Cambridgeshire County Council's Home to School Travel Assistance Policy	https://ccc-live.storage.googleapis.com/upload/www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/residents/children-and-families/Home%20to%20school%20travel%20assistance%20policy.pdf?inline=true