

## Budget Proposals 2017/18: Home to School Transport for Young People aged over 16 with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND)

### Consultation Summary Report

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#### Why we consulted

Over the last five years, we've had to find savings of £41m. Since 2012/13, the government has given us less money by reducing the Revenue Support Grant by £30m, whilst over the same period we've seen increased demand for our services.

For 2017/18, we estimate that our budget will be £117m. To achieve a balanced budget we'll have to identify £8m of savings or increases in our income.

In order to inform this process, we published a list of those proposals which would likely have a direct impact on service users, and sought the views from those affected and interested:

- to understand the likely impact
- to identify any measures to reduce their impact
- to explore any possible alternatives for both savings and income generation

#### Approach

We published all the proposals on our website on 31 October 2016 with feedback requested by midnight on 11 December 2016.

Respondents were directed to a [central index page](#), which outlined the overall background to the exercise, and provided links to each of the individual proposals on our [Consultation Portal](#).

Each individual page included further details on the specifics of what the proposal contained and what we thought the impact might be, along with any other elements we'd taken into account. Feedback was then invited through an online form and through a dedicated email address. Hard copies of the proposal documents and surveys were also made available on request. A letter was also sent out to the families of all students currently accessing Post 16 SEND transport to explain the proposal and invite feedback

As well as publishing the consultations on our website, we also emailed members of the West Berkshire Community Panel (around 800 people), local stakeholder charities, representative groups and partner organisations notifying them of the exercise and inviting their contributions. Heads of Service also made direct contact with those organisations directly affected prior to them being made publicly available.

Finally, we issued a press release on the 31 October 2016, and further publicised our consultations through our Facebook and Twitter accounts. We also placed posters in our main offices and libraries, and made them available to WBC Councillors and Parish and Town Councils to put up in the wards/parishes.

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#### Proposal Background

We currently provide free transport to young people over 16 with SEND if they have a Statement of Special Educational Needs or Education, Health and Care (EHC) Plan and their nearest suitable school or college is more than three miles from their home address. This may take the form of a bus or train pass, taxi or minibus depending on the young person's needs.

There are currently 67 post 16 students with SEND who are receiving free transport, at a cost to us of £301,733 per annum.

#### Proposal Details

To charge parents of post 16 pupils with SEND £703 per annum as a contribution towards transport costs. Based on the current post 16 SEND student cohort, and if all families decided to pay the contribution rather than making their own transport arrangements, we would save £47,101 per annum.

It should be noted that £703 is only a contribution to the cost of transport; the actual cost is significantly greater in most cases. The average cost is currently £4,503 per student.

#### Legislation Requirements

We are required under the Education Act 1996 to provide assistance with transport for young people over 16 with a Statement or EHC Plan, whose nearest suitable school or college is more than three miles from the family home, if this is necessary for the young person to access education.

However, there is no requirement to provide transport free of charge. Parents of young people over the age of 16 who do not have SEND are expected to make a contribution to the cost of their child's transport. This charge will be £703 per pupil per annum from April 2017. There is no reason, legally, why a similar charge cannot be made in respect of young people over 16 with SEND and many councils levy such a charge. We have traditionally not asked families of young people over 16 with SEND to contribute to transport costs, but we can no longer afford to provide this service free of charge.

Our Home to School Transport Policy states that a charge may be made in respect of pupils over 16 with SEND, so charging would be compliant with this policy.

#### Consultation Response

##### Number of Responses

In total, 43 responses were received.

##### Summary of Main Points

The majority of responses received from respondents were against the proposal, feeling that the council are targeting a vulnerable and already impoverished section of the community.

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Families with children who have Special Educational Needs and Disabilities are often under financial strain, this may be due to not being able to work full time as they act as carers for their children, or the special needs of their child require expensive alterations to the home or special equipment.

However the proposal has been made to allow the council to bring the charge for Post 16 SEND student's home to school transport in line with that already in place for Mainstream Post 16 travel.

Many respondents felt that the charge should be means tested, or only made on those not receiving income related benefits or were high income families. Also it was felt that the proposal would be harder hitting on those in rural areas. Respondents felt that the families would benefit from time to pay in instalments, or a staged increase.

It was believed that the contribution charge would also affect the amount of Post 16 pupils who would no longer have the benefit and access to further education as they would not be able to attend college. This may in the long term impact on social care as the children would be less prepared and unable to pursue the opportunities they have now.

#### Summary of Responses by Question

##### 1. Are you...?

	Number	%
Or anyone you care for, a user of this service	14	32.6%
A resident of West Berkshire	26	60.5%
Employed by West Berkshire Council	6	14.0%
A Parish/Town Councillor	5	11.6%
A District Councillor	0	.0%
A Service Provider	1	2.3%
A Partner Organisation	1	2.3%
Other	9	20.9%

##### 2. How far do you agree with the proposal to charge parents of pupils aged over 16 who have SEND, £703 per annum towards Home to School Transport, with effect from April 2017?

	Number	%
Agree	6	14.0%
Neither agree nor disagree	3	7.0%
Disagree	29	67.4%
Don't know	0	.0%
Not answered	5	11.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100%</b>

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#### 3. What do you think we should be aware of in terms of how this proposal might impact people? For example, do you think it will affect particular individuals more than others?

There were a large proportion of respondents who identified that low income families would be hardest hit by the proposal:

- “Many parents are carers and on low incomes”
- “These families are already on a less than ideal amount”
- “Not able to work full-time due to caring demands”
- “Some students may not be able to afford the costs”
- “Every family having a child with special needs is already impacted by higher costs than those without”

Students in rural areas were also identified as being impacted:

- “Additional hardship placed on families who have to travel to Newbury or further”
- “families with no transport available to them who live in rural communities”
- “Over 16’s in rural areas will be hit more”

Other individuals/groups that were identified as being impacted were:

- “those with more children to support (especially if more than one of them has SEND)”
- “will unfairly disadvantage young people who are unable to walk/cycle etc to college”
- “The Equality Impact Assessment mentions that it is more likely that SEN students will drop out of post 16 education if they cannot access the correct courses”
- “Many families will be faced with only one option of removing their child/children from the specialist school and being forced to use mainstream schools. This will cause mainstream schools extra costs for special training”
- “middle incomes likely to be most affected”

One respondent felt that:

- “They chose to have children. We should not subsidise them for it.”

#### 4. If the decision is taken to proceed with this proposal, do you have any suggestions for how we can reduce the impact on those affected? If so, please provide details.

Suggestions made from respondents focussed on:

- staggering the amount paid
- making the increase gradual and phased
- an additional bursary scheme
- allowance for low income families
- provide education in more places to avoid the need to travel
- exempt those on income related benefits
- inform families that ESA can be claimed from age 16
- provide more respite so parents can work full time to pay for transport
- means test

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- reduce the cost
- vary the contribution depending on need and distance travelled
- cut down on other council services
- continue transport for those who have difficulty making the contribution
- make parents aware of the cost to transport their child to school

#### 5. Do you have any other suggestions as to how these savings (approximately £47,000) might be delivered within this service? If so, please provide details.

Other suggestions made to make the saving included:

- better savings made in other areas
- charge more to those with a higher income
- reinstate travel training or support schools to develop their own schemes, introduce the LIFT programme
- make personal transport budgets available to all pupils at out of county schools
- look at overheads
- consider how many PRU students there are in the district and invest in long term projects, e.g. more SEN schools, or more outreach services
- increase council tax
- reduce bureaucracy, e.g. email letters
- means tested
- more in-house transport, as taxis more expensive and over charge
- cut down on fraudulent claims
- reduce the hours on street lighting
- young offenders carry out basic street care and other supervised tasks
- provide more low value activities for young people, so that expensive provisions are less attractive and accessible, publicise shared lives more
- don't waste money buying buildings then sell at a loss
- cut councillors wages
- stop wasting money on silly schemes, like the permits for the tip

Some respondents felt that:

- it should not be up to them to make suggestions
- £47,000 not a huge saving in comparison to the amount of disruption likely to be caused by charging

#### 6. Do you have any suggestions on how we might increase income, either in this service, or elsewhere in the council?

There were few suggestions made but those put forward were:

- raise council tax
- better access to a booking system for services and facilities provided by the council, an online booking system
- reduce printing costs involved with planning applications
- charge more for higher income families
- charge those not on income related benefits
- means test everything
- charge for use of libraries
- take away free bus travel for well off OAPs
- look at internal staffing costs

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- a rubbish charge
- a friend scheme for countryside areas to do physical care, e.g. litter picking, brush clearing, etc., this could also be carried out by offenders groups
- adoption of parcels of land by residents
- get advice on how to manage the council's money better
- cut councillors wages

It was also asked how this question was relevant to the ordinary parents and pupils.

#### 7. Is there any way that you, or your organisation, can contribute in helping to alleviate the impact of this proposal? If so, please provide details of how you can help.

Respondents identified possible ways that help could be given, these were:

- Voluntary services, such as Handibus assist with transport requirements.
- Council provide a bus and parents/volunteers drive on a rota basis.
- Will volunteer when retire and have the time.

#### 8. Any further comments?

Responses were:

- Do not do this
- A shame that those on the lower rungs of the ladder are continually expected to make up the shortfall
- Do not invest on things that are not needed, e.g. Victoria Park Water Park.
- Pay £200 per pupil
- Expect a better service if they do have to pay, current taxi is unreliable and driver and Passenger Assistant always changing
- Don't punish the most vulnerable
- How much is this consultation process costing?

Officer conclusion and recommendation can be found in the associated Overview of Responses and Recommendations document.

Tina Bushell  
SEN Transport Officer  
Transport Services Team  
22 December 2016

**Please note:** *In order to allow everyone who wished the opportunity to contribute, feedback was not sampled. Therefore this wasn't a quantitative, statistically valid exercise. It was neither the premise, purpose, nor within the capability of the exercise, to determine the overall community's level of support, or views on the proposals, with any degree of confidence.*

*The feedback captured therefore should be seen in the context of 'those who responded', rather than reflective of the wider community.*

*All the responses have been provided verbatim as an appendix to this report. Whilst this summary seeks to distil the key, substantive points made, it should also be read in*

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*conjunction with the more detailed verbatim comments to ensure a full, rounded perspective of the views and comments are considered.*