Information

Sheet Number:

For Com Gov to fill in

2017-21/21

 PROVIDING SUPPORT FOR COUNTY COUNCILLORS

For County Councillors

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| From: | Debbie Reed – Commissioning Officer for School Transport |

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| Date:  | 10 October 2017 |

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| To:  | All County Councillors |

**Consultation on the ‘Education Travel Policy’**

**Summary**

Somerset County Council currently has a comprehensive School Travel Policy which is reviewed every 2 years to ensure compliance with legislation and DfE guidance.

During this revision exercise we will be aiming to reduce the size of the document and ensure the policy is clearer and streamlined.

In light of the financial pressures facing the authority, we will also be proposing to remove the final few discretionary elements from the policy.

Currently, we transport approximately 9500 pupils to schools at a cost of £11.5 million pounds per annum. The savings that may be made as part of the proposals are hard to quantify at this stage as we will have protection arrangements in place for up to 5 years for students who may be affected should the proposals be implemented..

On grounds of ‘Legitimate Expectation’, policy changes will only affect new pupils starting school for the first time and those children who are changing schools, for example, moving from a primary school to a secondary school.

The Local Authority must consult on changes to its Education Travel Policy and a consultation is planned for 6 weeks in the Autumn term. The planned dates for the consultation are 16th October – 15th December 2017 inclusive. The consultation will be on-line and in a paper format.

A further formal decision will be required at that stage in order to approve a revised policy having considered the outcomes of the consultation process with a view to any changes taking effect from September 2018.

A summary of the proposed changes that we are consulting on is as follows:

**Provision of Passenger Assistants**

Currently within Transporting Somerset, Passenger Assistants are allocated following a robust Risk Assessment Process. To underline this process we will be making this clearer within the Policy.

**Split Families**

From September 2018 we propose to remove transport entitlement from split-residence families (where a child’s parents live separately).

In future, travel assistance would only be assessed and awarded from the address which is registered with the school as the home address or, prior to admission, the address used on the relevant school admission application form.

**Travel Assistance on Grounds of Religion or Belief**

We propose that from September 2018 travel assistance will be removed for those attending faith schools unless that school is the child’s nearest or catchment school and is over minimum statutory walking distance.

The authority will continue to meet its duty to provide free home to school transport to faith schools for pupils who have extended rights by virtue of being from low income families.

**Withdrawal of School Transport – Behaviour**

The content relating to the suspension and removal of travel assistance due to behavioural reasons will be amended to provide clear thresholds for imposing sanctions.

This will remove any ambiguity and grounds for challenge. This means that the Transport Officers will have authority to implement sanctions within the policy.

**Low Income**

The content relating to Low Income will be revised to reflect new guidance and ensure policy aligns with the implementation of Universal Credit. This means that the Local Authority will be accepting Universal Credit to evidence low income.

**Waiting Time on School Premises**

Currently we state that waiting time on school premises is a maximum guideline of 15 minutes for pupils. From September 2018 we propose that this will only apply to primary/middle school pupils.

This will allow Transporting Somerset to have more flexibility to manage the network fleet more effectively.

**Late applications for School Admissions**

The policy will be amended to raise awareness of the impact to the school transport budget due to late applicants.  We propose that if a late application has resulted in the child being placed in a school which is neither their nearest or catchment school and if travel assistance is agreed it may take half a term before it is in place.

**Temporary Medical Need**

Currently as part of our discretionary policy we will consider limited travel assistance for a child suffering from a temporary medical condition, illness or injury to any school even if this is not the nearest school to the home address or the designated transport area school. From September 2018 we propose only to consider travel assistance to a child’s nearest or designated transport area school.

For more information please contact:

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