

REPORT TO THE CABINET
16 February, 2016

Cabinet Member: Cllr Gareth Thomas

Topic: Post-16 Transport Policy

Contact officer: Owen Owens

Decision Sought

- 1.1 The Cabinet is requested to approve the new Post-16 Transport Policy (Appendix 1) for implementation from September 2016.
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Local Member's Views

- 2.1 Not a local matter.
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Introduction

- 3.1 It is noted that there is no statutory obligation on the Council to provide transport for learners over 16.
- 3.2 The current Post-16 Transport Policy was introduced for implementation in September 2011, when it was foreseen that the Council would be subsidising about 80% of the real cost of post-16 transport whilst raising 20% of the cost of the transport through income from the 16+ Travel Ticket.
- 3.3 By 2015/16 transport of post-16 students/pupils costs the Council £968,000 and income from tickets amounts to £154,000, which means there is an 84% subsidy by the Council.
- 3.4 On average, it costs the Council £945 to transport each post-16 student/pupil, changing the policy in line with the decision sought would mean that students/pupils would contribute £300 a year to that cost – less than $\frac{1}{3}$ of the actual cost.
- 3.5 It had been originally intended to submit a proposal to amend the Post-16 Transport Policy as a contribution towards the Education Department's efficiency savings, but it was decided to defer introducing any changes until after a Scrutiny Investigation set up by the Communities Scrutiny Committee had completed its work.

- 3.6 The current Post-16 Transport Policy and its implementation has been subject to a Scrutiny Investigation by the Communities Scrutiny Committee. The Scrutiny Investigation Report was published on 21 November 2014. The report contained several specific recommendations, and this new policy addresses several of those recommendations where the policy needs to be amended in order to implement them.

Reasons for recommending the decision

- 4.1 The new policy addresses the following recommendations in the scrutiny enquiry report:
- The catchment areas should be reviewed to reduce the travelling times and distances for learners/students in accordance with the Learner Travel Statutory Guidance.
 - Based on the evidence found during the scrutiny investigation, the same price should be fixed for everybody.
 - Consistency is needed in the provision and the arrangements across Gwynedd, in order to give everyone an equal and fair opportunity
 - It should be ensured that the service offers an equal opportunity for college students and learners in secondary schools.
- 4.2 Under the new policy, everybody pays the same price and the concept of a catchment-area (that forms part of the current policy) is eliminated.
- 4.3 This will ensure a consistency of provision and arrangements available to everybody, whether school pupils or college students, and wherever they reside.

Relevant Considerations

- 5.1 Eliminating the catchment-area concept from the policy, will mean that students/pupils can select the best courses for them with regard to course and travel time, without having to take the difference in the price of the 16+ Travel Ticket into consideration when making their choice. Under the current policy, some students from the Llŷn Peninsula wished to pursue a specific course that was provided at Coleg Meirion/Dwyfor Dolgellau and at Coleg Menai Bangor. Under the current policy, a 16+ Travel Ticket to Dolgellau would have cost them £60, and a 16+ Travel Ticket to Bangor would have cost £100 (despite Bangor being closer and involving less travel time). This often caused ill-feeling.
- 5.2 Under the new policy, everybody is charged £100 a term. (This is the price for students/pupils who currently opt to attend a college/school outside their catchment-area). It should be noted that students/pupils from low income homes are eligible to receive the Education Maintenance

- Allowance (EMA) that is £30 a week. One of the EMA's purposes is to contribute towards students/pupils' travel costs. Further, the Education Department will introduce a scheme under which the 16+Travel Ticket can be paid for through a monthly Direct Debit (£25 a month). This will make it easier to pay for a ticket. Before the introduction of the Direct Debit payment scheme, the full price of the ticket had to be paid before it was received.
- 5.3 The concept of different catchment-areas and different prices made the former policy complex and difficult to understand. The new policy is much simpler.
- 5.4 It had been originally intended to submit a proposal to amend the Post-16 Transport Policy as a contribution towards the Education Department's efficiency savings, but it was decided to defer introducing any changes until after the Scrutiny Investigation had completed its work. It is envisaged that the change in policy could contribute up to £50,000 towards the Education Department's efficiency savings, whilst at the same time address several of the Scrutiny Enquiry's recommendations..
- 5.5 Wide-ranging consultations were held when conducting the scrutiny enquiry that led to the above-mentioned recommendations being drawn up. The following were consulted:
- Cabinet Members,
 - The Council's relevant officers
 - Secondary School Headteachers
 - Coleg Menai Bangor Student Services Managers
 - Careers Wales Area Manager
 - Three Focus Groups with learners/students - Coleg Menai Bangor site, Coleg Meirion Dwyfor Pwllheli site and Coleg Meirion Dwyfor Dolgellau site
 - Unemployed young people using a questionnaire and support from Porthmadog Careers Office
 - The views of young people, parents and their families were gathered with support from Clywed
 - On-line questionnaires - for students (21 on-line questionnaires were completed) and another for families of students (32 on-line questionnaires completed)
- 5.6 In addition, records of complaints/comments received by Galw Gwynedd on behalf of the service were considered and analysed.

- 5.7 The main issues arising from the responses to the consultation can be summarised as follows:
- The need to consider the definition of catchment-areas and travel times (long days)
 - The need to acknowledge the ability to pay (especially at the beginning of term)
 - The need for more flexible travel times
- 5.8 The first of the above matters receives attention through this policy change. The second matter receives attention through the introduction of being able to pay for a ticket in parts (Direct Debit). The last matter is currently under consideration. The arrangements with commercial public transport providers will need to be re-examined.
- 5.9 In accordance with the duty under the Equality Act 2010 an equality impact assessment has been held (see Appendix 2).
- 5.10 It is concluded that this change in policy would mean a greater cost for the majority of students/pupils, but that it would have the greatest affect on families who are just above the income threshold under which their children would be eligible to receive the Education Maintenance Allowance of £30 a week. It is noted that families within which there is a disabled person are more likely to be in poverty and therefore more likely to be affected. It is concluded that the change in policy will not lead to unlawful discrimination or harassment, and that the assessment does not find any affect that would justify veering from the recommendation of this report.

Next steps and time-table

- 6.1 The new policy will be implemented from September 2016.
- 6.2 Students/pupils who have already purchased a 16+ Travel Ticket for £60 under the terms of the current policy can continue to purchase a 16+ Travel Ticket for £60 whilst they complete their course. If somebody is purchasing a 16+ Travel Ticket for the first time from September 2016, the ticket will be offered under the terms of the new policy.

Views of the statutory officers

The Chief Executive:

“I am aware that the changes in this policy have arisen to some degree from the detailed work completed by the Scrutiny Investigation into Post-16 Transport. As noted in a previous meeting of the Cabinet, there is still much to be done in

order to realise some of the changes suggested by the start of the 2016/17 academic year, but adopting this policy is an important step forward in accomplishing that goal.”

The Monitoring Officer:

“Whilst reviewing the policy a consultation process was followed which received legal input and the results have been reported upon appropriately. Note also that the equality impact assessment has been included and evaluated. There are statutory requirements attached to publishing information about a transport policy and doing so before 1 October of the year preceding the academic year to which the information relates. I will provide further guidance on the implications of this orally in the meeting.”

Head of Finance :

“I confirm that the Financial figures contained in the report are quite fair projection based estimates, but several factors may impact pupils/students actual income level (up or down). When the current ‘Post-16 Transport Policy’ was approved by the Council Board 25/01/2011, it was mentioned that the Education Department would have to deal with any shortfall under the proposed plan (departmental savings plan) compared with the original savings targets. In 2015-16, a shortfall of £45,000 is envisaged in the income, and the new policy would assist to meet the shortfall and income target of an additional £50,000 for a departmental savings plan for 2016/17.”

Appendices

Appendix 1 – Post-16 Transport Policy (September 2016)

Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment – Post-16 Transport Policy (September 2016)