

Equality Impact Assessment -Proposed policy changes

– Home to school/college transport

Introduction

Herefordshire home to school/transport policy sets out what the Council is to provide, and make arrangements for, regarding transport for children and young people attending schools and colleges.

The policy sets out the circumstances where the Local Authority must make transport arrangement due to legislation and what is provided additionally by the Council as a result of local determination. The policy applies to children of statutory school age and young people between 16 and 19 years of age attending further education courses. The policy considers children and young people:

- of different ages;
- with identified learning difficulties and disabilities;
- who are from low income families;
- with different religion or belief.

The approximate number of children and young people using Council co-ordinated transport are given in the table below:

| | Number |
|---|--------|
| Children aged 5-16 attending mainstream school | 3,600 |
| Children with special educational needs attending mainstream and special school | 230 |
| Children attending schools on the grounds of religion and belief | 130 |
| 16-19 years olds | 1,100 |
| 16-19 year olds with SEN | 110 |

The overall school population is 21,400.

The overall cost of transport provision is circa £3.7m. The costs are £4.8m and through charging for non-entitled transport there is an income £1.1m. The charges do not cover the average costs of transporting the non-entitled children and young people.

The proposed policy changes

- 1) To provide free home to school transport for children aged 5-16 years to their nearest school in England rather than their nearest and catchment.

- 2) To withdraw the subsidy for transport to 16-19 year olds with SEN and introduce the same charge as for non SEN 16-19 year olds.
- 3) Reduce the level of subsidy for those travelling on Council coordinated transport.

Numbers affected

The number affected by change to nearest school only is approximately 800 (500 at secondary and 300 at primary).

The number of 16-19 year olds with SEN who would be charged under the revised is 110.

Consultation

During May and June 2013 Council officers discussed the proposed changes with elected members and asked interested and affected parties to respond through the web site. There was subsequently 6 weeks of formal consultation between the 9th September and the 18th October. Respondents were asked:

- and what mitigation could be put in place for either group.
- what other savings might be made as an alternative;
- whether there were other ways of reducing the impact on young people with SEN or from rural communities;

Details of the proposals and information in the form of a frequently asked question (FAQ) response sheet were circulated. Head teachers, governors and parent groups were advised of the desire to get a wide range of responses. Affected and interested parties were asked to express their views and consider the implications. The responses to the consultations were collated and considered in officer groups and by cabinet member for Children's Services.

Impact

Changes to nearest, rather than nearest and catchment, may mean that children from rural communities may not receive free transport to the school they are at now or would have chosen to go to. This is not considered to specifically disadvantage any children or parents with protected characteristics.

Changes to charging for students with SEN may adversely affect children and young people with disabilities. It may be that students feel they cannot attend a particular provision due to the cost.

Assessment of Impact

There were no credible alternatives identified through consultation as to how to realise the savings the proposals bring.

Other Local Authorities already have such policies about nearest school and charging for post 16 SEN students. Where authorities have introduced these policies there was no discernible change in numbers attending provision.

While the charge to SEN students does have the potential to impact on a group with protected characteristics the introduction of charging is considered reasonable because:

There are grant schemes funded by the Education Funding Agency available through further education training providers or on an individual basis.

Mitigation

1. If it is decided to introduce these changes, 3 months' notice will be given to parents to give time to secure an approach to payment.
2. The local authority and further education providers will support parents with information and guidance in making grant applications for financial assistance.
3. The local authority will make available easy ways for parents to pay the charges with weekly and monthly schemes.
4. The policy change will be monitored and reviewed in terms of the impact on a monthly basis.