

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, EDUCATION STANDARDS AND
INCLUSION****DISCRETIONARY TRAVEL TO PREFERRED SCHOOLS****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report seeks approval to undertake a public consultation regarding a proposal to discontinue the rollout of the Discretionary Travel Scheme for children travelling to preferred secondary schools in Nottinghamshire with effect from September 2014 and for a further report for decision about the future of the scheme to be brought to Policy Committee on 11 September 2013.

Information and Advice

2. In July 2010 the Cabinet of Nottinghamshire County Council approved arrangements to introduce a Discretionary Travel Scheme for children attending preferred schools in Nottinghamshire. The scheme was established in accordance with the Transport Act 1985 and came into effect in September 2011. The scheme is managed and implemented by Environment and Resources Department on behalf of and supported by Children, Families and Cultural Services Department.
3. The scheme was introduced for year 7 pupils, with a view to an incremental roll out to qualifying pupils in years 7 to 11 over subsequent years. Specific eligibility criteria were set out, and eligibility has been administered in parallel to the Home to School Transport Policy.
4. Prior to commencement of the scheme it was determined that it would be kept under review after the first year of operation, as take up and actual costs were difficult to predict. A further report to the Cabinet Members for Children and Young People's Services and Transport and Highways was considered in April 2012, which provided an analysis of the scheme up to that date. Options considered were to either discontinue the scheme or fully implement it for all secondary school year groups 7 – 11. Agreement was given to continuation of the programme on an incremental basis across years 7 to 11 by 2015.
5. A table showing the current and estimated future costs of the scheme were the rollout to continue are shown in **Appendix A**. Assuming a similar level of take up in 2013/14 for Year 7 as in previous years, i.e. approximately 425 pupils per year group, which is in the region of 5.05% of the relevant cohort, the approximate costs for that year group would be £179,230 inclusive of travel, administrative and contingency costs. Therefore, the approximate overall costs of the scheme in academic year 2013/14 would be £505,170.

Were the scheme to continue to be fully rolled out across years 7 to 11, the estimated annual running costs would be in the region of £860,000 to £906,000 each year.

6. The number of young people who take up the scheme and the cost of transport provision are key variables in relation to these projected costs. The report of 18 April 2012 noted that in relation to special transport provided to qualifying children with specific transport needs due to their special educational needs or disabilities, provision of transport under the scheme must be considered on a case by case basis. This may require bespoke transport arrangements which can be costly, and the example given was of provision for one pupil in 2012 at a cost of £13,300 for the year.
7. The scheme currently applies to years 7 & 8 with a new cohort due to benefit with effect from September 2013 for whom offers of secondary school places were made in March 2013. Discontinuation of the rollout from September 2014 would mean that there would be no new entrants to the scheme beyond that date. However, provision would be made to ensure that existing (qualifying) pupils would continue to receive the benefit of the scheme until they reach the end of statutory school age in year 11.
8. Discontinuation of the scheme as described would lead to accumulated savings in the region of £1,695,995 by 2017/2018.
9. For the academic year 2014/2015 applications /preferences for secondary school places will be made by 31 October 2013. For the scheme to be discontinued for this intake it will be important for parents and carers to receive as much notice as possible prior to the admissions closing date. A provisional notice stating that the scheme is currently under review is on the Nottinghamshire County Council website. A notice period for transport contractors would be required by 31 December 2013 in order to cease the rollout of the scheme with effect from September 2014.
10. Discontinuation of the scheme does not affect the statutory entitlement of pupils to transport assistance. Feedback on the proposal can be used to inform any future decision of the Council regarding the scheme. An outline of the proposal for consideration and comment can be available on the Council's public website and for schools, other local authorities, the dioceses and other stakeholders for a period of 4 weeks in July and August 2013.

Other Options Considered

11. As part of considerations to protect public services whilst making efficiency savings, options have been considered in relation to the sustainability of this discretionary scheme. Established as an enabling measure by the previous administration, the scheme does not affect the statutory entitlements of children and young people in relation to home to school transport, as these are provided for in Council policy.
12. Options considered were to continue the rollout of the scheme in September 2014 and beyond, or to recommend cessation of the scheme. Costs of the scheme in 2013/2014 will be in the region of £505,170. However, continuation of the rollout of the scheme to additional cohorts of pupils would over time incur annual costs to Nottinghamshire County Council in the region of £860,000 to £906,000.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

13. Nottinghamshire County Council faces serious financial challenges in the years to come. Nottinghamshire is the only local authority in England to operate a discretionary free travel scheme in relation to children and young people travelling to schools of their preference. The trend over recent years and increasingly is for councils across the country to review their expenditure and to critically assess the affordability of services. The current financial climate has resulted in a paring back of discretionary travel arrangements. This recommendation recognises that the statutory entitlements of children and young people are protected through the Home to School Transport Policy, including the entitlement of qualifying low income families to free travel to preferred schools, and the provision of free travel to catchment designated schools over three miles for secondary aged pupils. The recommendation to consult on the proposal recognises the importance of listening to the views of parents, carers and other stakeholders in order that these can be taken into account prior to a decision being made.

Statutory and Policy Implications

14. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of finance, the public sector equality duty, human resources, crime and disorder, human rights, the safeguarding of children, sustainability and the environment and those using the service and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Implications for Service Users

15. Service users would have an opportunity to comment on the proposal prior to a decision being made about the future of the scheme.
16. There will be no new entrants to the scheme with effect from September 2014. However, existing qualifying beneficiaries of the Discretionary Travel Scheme will continue to receive free travel to preferred schools until they reach statutory school leaving age in year 11. Information about the discontinuation of the scheme and signposting to the Home to School Transport Policy, as usual, will be available for parents, carers and schools in the Summer and Autumn 2013, as applications are made for secondary school places in September 2014.

Financial Implications

17. Details of the costs and projected financial savings associated with the scheme and with its discontinuation appear in the report and in **Appendix A**. Costs incurred regarding the consultation will be met by the service.

Equalities Implications

18. Due regard has been given to the Public Sector Equality Duty.
19. The travel scheme has been operating in parallel to the Home to School Transport Policy through which the statutory entitlements of children and young people are protected. The

Equality Impact Assessment 2012 noted neutral impact of the scheme in relation to people with 'protected characteristics', other than in relation to age, as the scheme is specific to secondary aged pupils.

Human Rights Implications

20. The scheme had a nil impact in relation to Human Rights legislation

RECOMMENDATION/S

That:

- 1) approval be given to undertake a public consultation regarding a proposal that the rollout of the Discretionary Travel Scheme for children travelling to preferred schools be discontinued with effect from September 2014
- 2) a further report for decision about the future of the scheme be brought to Policy Committee on 18 September 2013.

John Slater
Service Director, Education Standards and Inclusion

For any enquiries about this report please contact:

Gill Thackrey
Group Manager, Business Development and Support
T: 01159773644
E: gill.thackrey@nottscc.gov.uk

Constitutional Comments (LM 05/07/13)

21. The Policy Committee have delegated authority within the Constitution to approve the recommendations in the report.

Financial Comments (KLA 03/07/13)

22. The financial implications of options within the proposed consultation are set out in the appendix to the report and the financial implications arising directly from the report are set out in paragraph 17.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Free travel Scheme for Children Travelling to Preferred Secondary Schools – report to Cabinet on 14 July 2010

Discretionary Travel Scheme for children attending preferred secondary schools in Nottinghamshire - report to Cabinet Members for Children and Young People's Services and for Transport and Highways on 18 April 2012

Equality Impact Assessment - Discretionary Travel Scheme: Preferred Schools, March 2012

Nottinghamshire County Council Home to School Transport Policy
<http://www.nottinghamshire.gov.uk/learning/schools/schooltravel/>

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

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