



## Children's Services: Home to School Transport Policy

### 1. Statutory requirements

All Local Authorities have a statutory duty to make arrangements for the provision of transport as they consider necessary to facilitate school attendance. This includes providing transport assistance to pupils of statutory school age travelling to and from school if they live further than the statutory walking distance from their nearest school (this is two miles for pupils aged 7 and under and three miles for pupils aged 8 and over). Secondary pupils from low income families are entitled to free transport to any of the three nearest suitable schools that are more than two and less than six miles away, and to a denominational school up to 15 miles away. Normally assistance is in the form of a free bus pass. Local Authorities have a duty to have regard to parental wishes for a faith/denominational school. They also have a duty to raise the participation age in Post 16 education and training.

### 2. Discretionary support

Currently Torbay Council provides additional non-statutory assistance in a range of circumstances, as follows:

- (i) A financial contribution to the cost of a bus pass for pupils attending St Cuthbert Mayne on grounds of faith, where they live further than 3 miles away and do not qualify for statutory assistance. In 2012-13 the cost of a bus pass to the council is £515 and we charge parental contributions at £490 so the net cost to the council per paying pupil is £25. There is an additional subsidy of £245 per second child and £490 per third and subsequent child in a single family. The total annual cost to the council of this support to 62 pupils is approximately £4,000. The cost of purchasing an annual bus pass from Stagecoach by a parent is £575.
- (ii) A financial contribution to the cost of a bus pass for pupils attending a selective school who live more than three miles away, are not entitled to statutory transport assistance and live within the designated transport area for the school. The net cost and subsidy are as in (i) above. The total annual cost of this support to 42 pupils is approximately £2,520.
- (iii) The provision of a free bus pass to pupils from low income families to any secondary school between 2 and 6 miles away, even if it is not one of the three nearest suitable schools. This costs the council around £15,000 a year.
- (iv) A financial contribution to the cost of a bus pass for 144 post-16 students studying in school sixth forms, where they live further than three miles away. The council makes a net contribution of £25 per student, or £415 per student for low income families. The annual cost to the council is approximately £22,320.
- (v) A block contribution to South Devon College for assistance with transport of £70,000 per year.

### 3. Proposals

- (a) Remove all discretionary transport assistance with effect from 1 September 2013.
- (b) There is already an appeals process where families can appeal to a panel of elected members to ask for discretionary support where there are exceptional circumstances and genuine hardship. The availability of this process would be highlighted for pupils/students who feel they are significantly affected by the proposed changes.

The removal of discretionary transport assistance is estimated to produce a saving up to £66,000 for 2013-14 and up to £113,840 for a full year. In 2012/13 the Home to school transport budget is under considerable pressure from additional transport needs particularly for SEN pupils and is forecast to overspend by more than £220,000 in 2012/13.

### 4. Impact of proposals

There will be a direct financial impact on all families currently receiving discretionary transport support.

- (a) Some parents of pupils currently attending St Cuthbert Mayne school on faith grounds or attending selective schools may have the decision of either the additional financial commitment of the cost of transport or moving them to a school within walking distance. However, pupils from low income families will already be receiving free transport to St Cuthbert Mayne and to their selective school unless they live more than 6 miles away, so qualifying low income families will be protected from the impact of these changes.
- (b) Pupils from low income families will have a reduced choice of travel from any secondary school within 6 miles to the statutory 3 nearest suitable secondary schools. However, the proposed change will still mean that pupils in Torbay have the same opportunities as other pupils from low income families across the country and Torbay will be meeting its statutory obligations.
- (c) The biggest impact will be on post-16 students travelling more than 3 miles to their chosen learning institution. The Council's statutory duty to transport children from low income families does not include Post 16 students. However, the government has introduced a scheme for 16-19 bursaries. These are available for all those in care, leaving care or in receipt of some income support. Discretionary bursaries are available for other students to help with costs such as the cost of transport. These bursaries are distributed directly by post-16 institutions, such as schools and South Devon College, not the Council.

### 5. Special Educational Needs (SEN) Transport

Any statutory entitlement to free home to school travel for pupils with SEN would remain unchanged by these proposed changes.

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