

Leeds City Council - consultation briefing paper on the redevelopment of the Children's Services transport policy and strategy

Purpose of consultation

Leeds City Council wishes to consult on the current transport policy which provides, in certain circumstances, free transport to enable children and young people to get to school or college. The overall purpose of this consultation is to consider broad options for all current transport provision for children and young people and other ways to save money. Some of these options are about services we could decide to stop providing immediately. We want your views on how far you agree or disagree with any changes we might introduce.

We want to look at two things in particular. Firstly, to consider the level of support that we offer with the cost of home to school and college travel arrangements and see if there is a better way to make that universally available. Secondly, to consider whether or not the council should continue to make available all discretionary free transport currently provided. This is support that the council chooses to provide over and above what it must provide by law. The Council's Executive Board paper outlining the proposed consultation can be found [here](#) or by cutting and pasting the following link into your web browser:

<http://democracy.leeds.gov.uk/documents/s90056/School%20Transport%20Cover%20Report%20050213.pdf>

Why are we consulting now?

Councils throughout the country are facing financial pressures on the services they provide. This means that they must make choices about what they can continue to offer and how it is delivered. We know that we cannot afford to continue to deliver the current services in the way we do now, so 'no change' is not an option.

We do not have the option to keep children's transport expenditure at the current level; we have to do things differently. This consultation paper is about how you think we should provide appropriate travel arrangements for the children of Leeds in the future to help them to get to school or college. We want to listen to your views to help us make these decisions. In particular, on the extent to which you think things should be changed and how quickly. The review of the policy also aims to make it much clearer, in the future, who is eligible for subsidised travel and why.

What do we do now in Leeds?

Every Local Authority has a duty to make arrangements for children who qualify to travel to school free of charge. This includes young people who live more than a certain distance from their nearest school or for those where transport is required as part of their Statement of Special Educational Needs (SEN).

Leeds City Council has also for many years been able to offer much more than required by law. For example most of our neighbouring authorities no longer provide this level of support having gradually withdrawn both faith and post 16 support over the last few years. The total cost of providing both statutory and discretionary school transport to our Leeds families is currently in excess of **£16 million** per year.

Views of Young People

Young people, locally and nationally, have put access to good quality affordable transport for all young people at the top of their wish list when it comes to seeking improvements. We are actively working with children and young people in Leeds so that we fully understand their needs. Some of the things young people have already suggested are outlined below:

- § a young person's day rider ticket that is recognised by all operators across the city;
 - § young person friendly route planning and pricing;
 - § reduced fares for 5 -10 year olds accompanied by an adult;
 - § a multi-purpose 'youth card' for use on buses that can also be used to obtain discounts with high street retailers, building on the *Breeze* brand;
- We understand young people's wishes to have safe and affordable transport and will continue to work with all our partners to achieve this goal, especially the Youth Council.

How will this contribute towards Leeds becoming a Child Friendly City?

We are actively working with a range of partners across the city to help them understand the possible implications of any changes to the current policy so that they can consider how they can best help in these times of austerity. Some of these partners include: Metro; Schools; Colleges; Specialist Inclusive Learning Centres (SILCs) and Health Services.

The government has also asked bus operators in their own right to consider offering travel discounts to all children under 18, not just those who attend school or college. In addition we are in active discussion with Health Services and Adult Social Care about how we might share costs to become more efficient in the use of our respective resources.

We understand young people's wishes to have safe, flexible and affordable transport for all children and young people and will continue to work with all partners to try to achieve this goal.

Facts and figures

The details in the table at Appendix 1 give you some facts about the current provision to help you form a view. Some elements of current provision must be provided by law (statutory) but we could deliver it in different ways; the remaining elements are discretionary and do not have to be provided and could be stopped altogether or could also be delivered in different ways. The current projected total statutory expenditure is **£6.32m** and the expenditure on discretionary is approximately **£4.91m**. A further **£2.3m** is spent on looked after children's transport and **£3.1m** on concessionary half-fares via Metro for all children aged 11-18 in full time education. This represents a total annual expenditure in the region of **£16.63m**.

Other important information and facts

You may also want to know that:

- children under the age of five travel free on public transport when travelling with a full fare passenger;
- there are currently approximately **108,000** young people in Leeds (aged 11 – 18) who are eligible for a concessionary half-fare pass;
- half price concessionary fares are available to all children and young people in Leeds who are in full time education, including those in sixth form;
- Leeds City Council currently contributes **£3.1million** every year to Metro's cost of providing concessionary fares;
- this currently enables approximately **40,000** young people in Leeds to travel anywhere in West Yorkshire. It is proposed that this arrangement will continue but we clearly need to review the value for money and take up of this benefit to ensure its continuing cost-effectiveness;
- Independent Travel Training (ITT) has recently been introduced in Leeds. This is a service that currently works primarily with young people with SEN. It is designed to help individual children to learn how to travel as independently as they can. This quality service has proved very popular and efficient both in improving children's confidence and saving money;
- it can help some young people move away from using a taxi every day to school or college, which is very expensive, and become more confident and able to use public

transport, perhaps with the help of a 'travel buddy'. One young person, who has recently benefited, said: " *I (now) feel more confident...I have really enjoyed doing this and would give the training 10 out of 10...*";

- for some young people, however, independent travel is not a possibility. This means that we will always need to consider the individually assessed circumstances of each child;
- in **2012/13** (to date) approximately **£125k** has been saved either by not spending money in the first place or by transferring **70** children on to less costly transport;
- an outline business case has recently been approved to extend this service to work with more children with SEN; looked after children, and children in year 6 who are in transition to high school. This approach to focussing primarily on improving the quality of what we do will continue, but in the process it is estimated that we will save a further **£500k** net in **2013/14**.

Why does it all cost this much?

There are several reasons; the population of Leeds is growing - in 2000 the annual birth rate was 7,500, it is now over 10,400 per year and rising. More children are going to school and college, and the cost of fuel and other over-heads have increased significantly over the past 10 years. Nevertheless, we also know that in order to save more money we could still do things better and more imaginatively. We are already trying new ways of working (such as ITT), and we intend to continue, but would like your ideas on other things you think we should consider.

What options are open to the council?

- We could stop providing some, or all, of the existing discretionary free transport that we currently choose to make available. Ending all discretionary travel would save £4.91m per year depending on when any changes were introduced. No change would lead to increased costs in line with the increase in population and needs;
- we could offer discretionary free transport only to families on a qualifying low income. This would generate substantial savings compared to current expenditure;
- we could protect those families currently receiving discretionary free transport until their child leaves school or for a fixed period. For example a 2 year period of protection would cost £2.89m in year 1 and £1.82m in year 2;
- we could change the way we deliver some of our current statutory provision. For example we could do other things similar to Independent Travel Training in order to save more money. We would like your ideas on how you think we could make more savings;
- we could ask all parents of children with a Statement of Special Educational Needs, as a matter of course, to make their own arrangements to transport their own child to school and provide instead an appropriate personal budget for them to choose how to use the money. This may mean we would only provide support with transport by exception, in the most cost effective way, and only when it was absolutely necessary.

How do I share my views?

- The consultation will run from 27th February to 24th April 2013;
- You are encouraged wherever possible to respond on line by accessing the survey via www.leeds.gov.uk/schooltransport
- You can also access a survey pack in the following alternative ways:
 - You can email a request to transpolicy.consult@leeds.gov.uk
 - You can ask for a hard copy to be sent to you by post by either ringing 0113 247 5593 or by writing to:

Children's Services Transport
10th floor west
Merrion House
110 Merrion Centre
Leeds
LS2 8DT

- If you are a member of a group and would like a senior officer to come to a planned meeting during the consultation period to talk to you about these possible changes please either ring 0113 247 5593 or email transpolicy.consult@leeds.gov.uk

What happens after the consultation period ends?

- After the consultation period ends all responses will be summarised and a report prepared for Children's Services Leadership Team;
- Any recommended changes to the current policy would then require final approval by the Executive Board who will then decide whether to proceed with the recommended options;
- These options will be based on a full analysis of your views with all comments, whether given in writing, verbally or at a public meeting, being treated equally. So it is very important that you have told us what you think;
- The earliest that a decision can be made is **19th June 2013**.

Statutory children’s school transport – this must be provided by law

| Type of provision | Cost per year £ | Number of pupils per year | Comments |
|----------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------|---|
| Mainstream schools (5-16) | 2.54m | 4,203 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • These numbers and costs are rising year on year and does not include a projected increase in costs of £770k in 13/14 • The individual cost varies depending on the assessed need |
| SEN (5 -16) | 3.78m | 650 | |
| Sub-total statutory | 6.32m | 4,853 | |

Discretionary school transport – we can choose to provide this or not

| Type of provision | Cost per year £ | Number of pupils per year | Comments |
|---|-----------------|---------------------------|--|
| Children who choose to attend a school on the basis of faith | 800k | 2,600 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The law only requires Leeds City Council to fund transport to faith schools for families on low income • 55 children are currently in receipt of free travel to Catholic Primary schools; the remainder attend the four Catholic High schools and one Church of England school in Leeds • Some of these attend six different church schools outside the Leeds boundary as it is their nearest faith school • Most of our neighbouring local authorities no longer fund transport to faith schools on a discretionary basis • Families who have a qualifying low income are entitled to free transport to a faith school and so would not be affected by any changes • We would like your views on whether we should continue to provide this support here in Leeds. |
| Post 16 transport to mainstream schools and colleges | 1.36m | 4,245 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The law does not require Leeds City Council to meet the cost of home to school/college transport for young people over the age of 16 • We currently provide this for those who attend the nearest school or college that offers the course combination they have chosen to follow (where that is more than three miles away) • Our neighbouring local authorities do not make free transport available to their families for this group of young people • Over half of these students will finish their studies in June 2013 • We would like your views on whether we should continue to provide this support here in Leeds. |
| Post 16 transport for young people with Special Educational Needs (SEN) | 2.6m | 350 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people with a statement of SEN often qualify for funded transport • The current policy in Leeds also provides funded transport for young people <u>over</u> 16 up to the age of 25 |

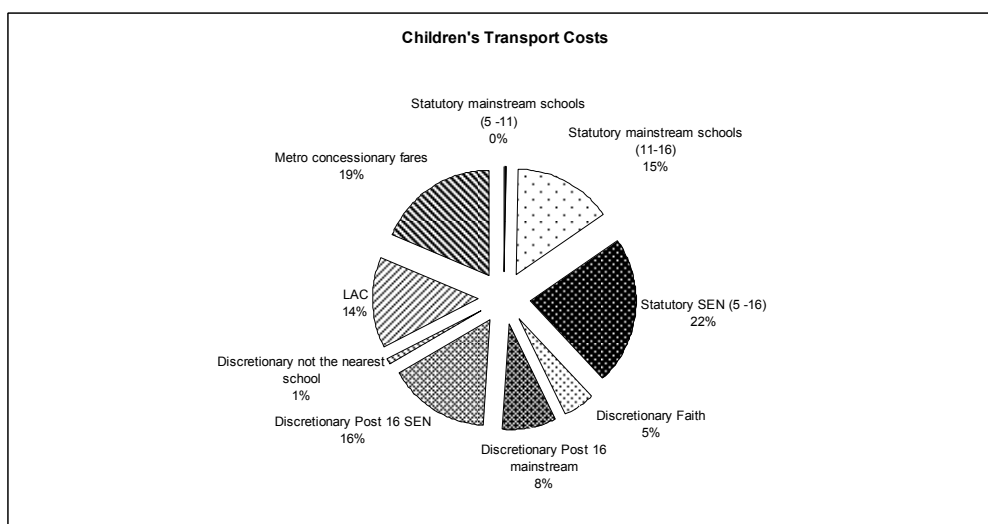
| Type of provision | Cost per year £ | Number of pupils per year | Comments |
|--|-----------------|---------------------------|---|
| | | | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes this will be in a taxi or minibus, other times a parent will want to take their child to school/college themselves and we pay them a mileage allowance • Due sometimes to a child's more complex needs a child may have to attend specialist provision to meet their particular needs, and this involves a much longer journey to school than other children This can often include the need to provide an escort, which increases the cost • The transport may also be provided in the form of a bus pass but more often involves individual taxis which means the costs are much higher for those requiring greater support • Often a parent has their own transport but will still be provided with a taxi for their child. This may be important so that they can take their other children to school • The cost of providing taxi based transport on a daily basis per student ranges from £15 to £150 per day depending on the child's needs • Most local authorities continue to make some free transport available for young people with SEN who attend learning. Some make charges and the amount of support available varies • We would like to hear your views on whether we should continue all or some of the current discretionary provision and any other alternatives you think we should consider. |
| Free travel to a school that is not the nearest appropriate school | 150k | 181 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes we are unable to provide a place at a school within 3 miles of the child's home address • In these circumstances the present policy allows free travel to a school of the parent's choice rather than the nearest appropriate school with an available place, provided it is within a reasonable distance • If the policy was changed the children would still qualify for free transport, but only if they were attending their nearest school and it was more than 3 miles away • The majority of children currently affected live in Bramhope, who choose Otley Prince Henrys, and children living in North East Leeds, who choose to go to Tadcaster • If this was ended a child would not qualify for free transport unless they were attending their nearest school and it was more than 3 miles away. |

| Type of provision | Cost per year £ | Number of pupils per year | Comments |
|--|-----------------|---------------------------|--|
| Sub total - discretionary | 4.91m | 7,376 | |
| Sub total statutory | 6.32m | 4,853 | |
| Total children's school transport costs | 11.23m | 12,229 | These total figures vary on a weekly basis |

In addition to the above there are two other key areas of expenditure on children's transport; some of this is discretionary.

| Type of provision | Cost per year £ | Number of children per year | Comments |
|--|-----------------|-----------------------------|---|
| Support for looked after children | 2.3m | 750 | Much of this support is covered by the council's statutory responsibilities as a corporate parent. There is some flexibility, however, in how this support could be provided. It covers some costs of transport to schools; contact arrangements; short breaks and leisure activities. We are currently actively working towards supporting all looked after children to travel independently based on ability and need; |
| Metro, Service Level Agreement | 3.1m | 40,000 | This pays for concessionary half-fare for young people aged 11-18. Currently young people have to pay for the administration costs of a photo ID (£2). Over 100,000 young people are eligible and for each journey made there is a shared cost by the authority and the bus operator. We are working with Metro to improve this offer. This figure also includes the cost of managing the commissioning arrangements for new tenders and the running of a small team. |
| Grand Total | 16.63m | N/A | Plus approximately £770k projected additional costs in 13/14 |

The graph below shows the distribution of costs:



Definitions

| | |
|---|---|
| ‘Appropriate personal budget’ | money to support a child getting to school or college in the cheapest way possible that meets their needs |
| ‘Appropriate school’ | this means the right school for a child based on educational needs age and home address |
| ‘Assessed need’ | a consistent formal process that records what a child needs |
| ‘Children who qualify’ | this refers to children who are entitled to free travel |
| ‘Concessionary’ | this means cheaper fares as a result of Leeds City Council contributing money to the cost of running the buses |
| ‘Consultation’ | a process by which you can obtain the views of other people on a particular subject or issue |
| ‘Discretionary’ | this means something you don’t have to do by law. Something that the authority can choose to do or not |
| ‘Executive Board’ | this is the main decision-making body of the council |
| ‘Faith school’ | in practice in Leeds this currently means a Jewish, Catholic or Church of England school |
| ‘Independent Travel Training’ | this involves supporting children to help them travel to school or college on the bus or by walking |
| ‘Looked After Child’ | a child who is in the care of the local authority |
| ‘Qualifying low income’ | this is defined by law and can trigger free transport |
| ‘Specialist Inclusive Learning Centres (SILCs)’ | schools for children with a special educational need |
| ‘Statement of Special Educational Need’ | this refers to an assessment that is done at a specific time in a child’s life if they are considered to have specific needs to help them access education and any additional support |
| ‘Statutory’ | something you have to do by law |
| ‘Subsidised’ | this means not having to pay the full fare |
| ‘Universal subsidy’ | every young person is entitled to this reduced fare if they are in full-time education and below a certain age |