



East
Northamptonshire
Council

Policy and Resources Committee – 17 January 2011

Student Travel Scheme

Purpose of report

To provide members with information on the East Northamptonshire Student Travel Scheme, its usage and the implications of withdrawal.

Attachment(s)

None

1.0 Background

- 1.1 At the meeting of the Policy and Resources Committee on 8 November 2010 Members considered the way forward for the existing range of concessionary travel schemes specific to East Northamptonshire.
- 1.2 At that meeting Members considered the costs of providing additional concessions. They concluded that the Council could not afford to sustain a self-funded travel tokens scheme but were keen to consider the option of supporting young people who wished to stay in further education or training.
- 1.3 Councillors asked that officers investigate options for a 16 to 18 year old student travel scheme for those in need and bring back those proposals to a future committee meeting.
- 1.4 Since the Policy and Resources Committee meeting in November Northamptonshire County Council (NCC) Cabinet has met and confirmed that NCC library service will be administering the mandatory bus pass scheme only, which is defined by age or disability, with no enhancements, for travel after 9:30 and before 23:00.

2.0 East Northamptonshire Student Travel Scheme

- 2.1 East Northamptonshire Council (ENC) is currently the only district council in Northamptonshire that provides financial support for sixth form students to travel on school buses where space is available. The scheme provides for half of the cost of the school bus pass as shown below.

| | NCC charges before subsidy | Cost after ENC subsidy |
|----------------|----------------------------|------------------------|
| The whole year | £400.00 | £200.00 |
| Autumn term | £160.00 | £80.00 |
| Spring term | £140.00 | £70.00 |

- 2.2 The scheme is for students who meet the following eligibility:

- Are over 16 years of age before 1 September 2010 and,
- Live more than 3 miles walking distance from their designated school and,
- Are attending their designated or nearest school on a full time basis.

- 2.3 It is important to note that the second bullet ensures that eligibility is restricted to those students who attend there “designated” or nearest school only. If students choose to undertake their education at a different school or college then they are not eligible for the concession.
- 2.4 In effect the criteria restrict eligibility such that only students who attend Prince William School in Oundle and live over the 3 mile radius from the school qualify.
- 2.5 In the academic year 2010/11 50 students have purchased passes for the Autumn term which takes them up to 17 December 2010. The Spring term pass which covers students up to 6 April 2011. We have yet to get the final number from NCC but they anticipate that this is likely to be under 50 passes.
- 2.6 As the Council has been aware for some time that the responsibility for concessionary travel was transferring to NCC, officers have been in dialogue with the Prince William School staff to ensure that they are informing students and parents of the possibility of the scheme either changing or ending in 2011. The school have been advising students to purchase the passes for the full academic year, rather than just specific terms so that they can take advantage of the full scheme whilst in operation. In addition this message has been repeated when officers have had any enquiries from the public regarding the scheme.
- 2.7 All our documentation, leaflets and the website have stated the following,
- “Proposed legislation changes may mean we can no longer offer concessions after the 31 March 2011. This could effect terms 5 & 6. If you know you will need a pass to cover term 5 & 6 you may wish to purchase a full year's pass”.
- 2.8 The demand for student passes drops considerably in the second year of study as the hours required to attend classes reduces considerably and therefore the bus pass does not always prove economical. In addition some students on reaching there seventeenth birthday will pass their driving test and have access to a car. In addition they are very likely to then provide transport for their friends.
- 2.9 At the Policy and Resources Committee meeting in November Members referred to the possibility of retaining a student travel scheme for those young people in “need”. It is very difficult to determine how to measure “need” without undertaking a form of “means test”.
- 2.10 Therefore an assumption has been made to define “in need” as those young people who may be part of a “low income” family where the cost of travel could prevent that student from undertaking sixth form education. However it is important to note that NCC already supports students aged 16+ whose parents are in receipt of benefits by meeting 50% of the pass costs. In these cases they do not then qualify for an additional 50% from ENC.
- 2.11 In order to avoid a complicated and therefore costly administrative process it is advised that should members be minded to continue with a scheme for students then it would be recommended to keep it as simple as possible and therefore retain the existing eligibility as outlined in paragraph 2.2 above.

3.0 Implications of changes to the NCC scheme

- 3.1 NCC have informed us that at a future Cabinet meeting Members will be giving consideration to a range of options with regard to the cost of student travel. These options include
- 1) an increase in the cost of the annual pass.
 - 2) the 50% support for low income families (outlined in 2.10 above) to be reduced.

- 3) Removal/reduction in financial support towards travel for those students with special needs.
- 3.2 The impact of NCC introducing any of the options could be significant on any scheme that ENC choose to undertake. For example,
- 1) if NCC increase the cost of the pass and ENC continue to meet 50% of that cost this falls to the ENC budget, or
 - 2) if NCC withdraw financial support for low income families (see para 2.10) then the number of students eligible for the ENC scheme increases.

3.3 It is important to note that no decisions have been made regarding the above options as at the date of writing the report.

3.0 Equality and Diversity Implications

3.1 Members will recall that an Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) had been undertaken by NCC with regard to the withdrawal of any concessionary travel schemes and this was attached as an appendix to the report distributed for the meeting on the 8 November. The report stated that the withdrawal of these schemes would have a significant impact on the communities of East Northamptonshire and Kettering.

4.0 Legal Implications

4.1 As the Council is no longer the "Transport Concessions Authority" (TCA) from April 2011 it has no direct powers to administer any form of concessionary travel scheme. If Members are minded to continue with some form of student travel scheme the Council would need to take legal advice on using the "well being powers" to undertake this role.

5.0 Risk management

5.1 Members are clearly concerned about the risk of a young person not being able to continue into sixth form education due to the increase in their travel costs.

5.2 It would be impossible to mitigate against this risk completely without asking each individual student about their plans and current financial situation. The decision to undertake sixth form education is usually taken amidst a number of factors being taken into consideration such as other work opportunities and whether they wish to continue on to university. In these circumstances the cost of £400 to invest in a bus pass for the whole year does reduce in significance.

5.3 Officers administering the scheme have talked to staff at Prince William School who have undertaken to inform their students of the potential changes. However they did confirm that whilst the pass is still available they recognise that there is a risk that this message may not be being passed back to the parents.

5.4 In addition to all of the above it would appear that NCC will be making decisions in the near future that will result in a reduction or withdrawal of financial support to the scheme combined with an increase in the annual cost of a pass. Therefore should ENC continue with a scheme there is a significant risk that ENC would be picking up the transferred costs from NCC.

6.0 Financial Implications

6.1 There will obviously be financial implications should Members be minded to offer a student travel scheme from April 2011.

6.2 Initially there will be a one off cost of obtaining legal advice with regard to using the well being powers as set out in paragraph 4 above.

6.3 Ongoing there would be the revenue implication of supporting the scheme. This is likely to fall into two areas. The first would be the cost of the pass which is estimated at the possibility of 100 students requiring a 1 year pass at £200.00 amounting to £20,000 per annum. This is based on the current costs of a pass being £400. This will increase to £31,250 if NCC increases the cost of the pass to £625, as it is considering. The second possible cost could be the administration costs of the scheme. The passes are currently administered by NCC who if we continue to subsidise the scheme may require a fee to cover any costs, especially if they withdraw their own concessionary scheme. This is open to further negotiation.

6.4 £26k has been retained in the 2011/12 budget for a possible scheme. However this has also been identified as a possible future saving since the announcement of the details of the Comprehensive Spending Review.

7.0 Other Issues

7.1 Communication regarding the possible end of the concessionary scheme has been issued via leaflets, the website and in addition the local press have recently produced articles of the transfer of the responsibility to the County Council and its subsequent decision to run only the mandatory scheme.

7.2 Officers have, to date, not had any response from the public to this either through complaints or telephone enquiries.

8.0 Recommendations

The Committee is recommended to end its student travel scheme on 31 March 2011.

(Reasons –

1. *the small group of students currently accessing the scheme,*
2. *the lack of response from the public regarding the end of the scheme after the issuing of this years Autumn and Spring term pass,*
3. *the decision by NCC as the TCA to only undertake the mandatory scheme and*
4. *the potential costs of administering a scheme.)*

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| Legal | Power: Transport Acts 1985 & 2000, Concessionary Bus Travel Act 2007 Local Government Act 2000 | | | | |
| | Other considerations: | | | | |
| Background Papers: | | | | | |
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| Date: 4 January 2011 | | | | | |
| CFO | | MO | | CX | |

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