

CABINET	AGENDA ITEM No. 6
19 DECEMBER 2022	PUBLIC REPORT

Report of:	Jonathan Lewis, Service Director Education	
Cabinet Member(s) responsible:	Cllr Lynne Ayres, Cabinet member for Children's Services, Education, Skills and the University	
Contact Officer(s):	Fran Cox, Assistant Director Education Capital and School Places	Tel. N/A

PASSENGER TRANSPORT CHANGES TO MILEAGE

RECOMMENDATIONS	
FROM: <i>Cabinet Member for Children's Services, Education, Skills and the University</i>	Deadline date: <i>N/A</i>
<p>It is recommended that Cabinet</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Authorise officers to explore and implement the increase in payment per mile for volunteer drivers from 45p per mile to 60p per mile. 2. Authorise officers to work with parents to co-produce a policy position in relation to payment for transportation of children to school alongside the use of personal transport budgets. 	

1. ORIGIN OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report is submitted to Cabinet following a referral from the Corporate Leadership Team (CLT) on 7 December 2022.

2. PURPOSE AND REASON FOR REPORT

- 2.1 The purpose of this report is to obtain views on a proposed development or review of a strategy, plan or policy;
- 2.2 This report is for Cabinet to consider under its Terms of Reference No, 3.2.1, *'To take collective responsibility for the delivery of all strategic Executive functions within the Council's Major Policy and Budget Framework and lead the Council's overall improvement programmes to deliver excellent services.'*

3. TIMESCALES

Is this a Major Policy Item/Statutory Plan?	NO	If yes, date for Cabinet meeting	N/A
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4. BACKGROUND AND KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 Children and Education Scrutiny Committee met on the 2 November to review and consider the adoption of the Transport Transformation Strategy which seeks to address a range of issues currently present both in Peterborough but also nationally.

4.2 Children & Education Scrutiny Committee supported the proposed strategy on the 2 November and were content for officers to continue to implement a detailed action plan sitting under the strategy in order to drive both efficiency and improvement of services of the next 2 years. (see Appendix A)

4.3 One area of key consideration is the diversification of travel options the council utilises. Currently the council find itself reliant on a market which is being dramatically impacted by inflation and a shortage of vehicles and drivers.

Alongside the market issues, the council is experiencing additional demand for passenger transport. There is a shortage of SEN places in the city, which is being addressed through the SEND Strategy, however the immediate impact is children and young people being placed outside of the city, necessitating longer travel arrangements. This is placing a significant pressure on the budget position. The November outturn shows a forecast overspend of £1.1m.

4.4 As part of this review, the CLT wishes to explore bringing forward a number of changes to reduce our reliance on taxis and third-party providers. This paper specifies 3 key areas the council wishes to seek approval from Cabinet to explore further and implement.

4.5 1. Volunteer Drivers

4.5.1 The council currently operates a scheme whereby volunteer drivers are able to sign up to support the delivery of school transport predominately for children under social care. Volunteers are appropriately checked in relation to safeguarding and insurance to provide the council with assurance for them to undertake this responsible role.

4.5.1 Volunteer drivers provide a very efficient and reliable mechanism for transporting children to and from school. It is extremely cost effective and feedback from parents/carers and schools suggest that routes covered by volunteer drivers provide a child focused approach to passenger transport. The Transport Team have direct contact with volunteer drivers which allows for any changes or issues to be addressed quickly. New transport software, which is currently at mobilisation stages, will allow the Transport Team to schedule and manage journeys more effectively and will have a driver App for volunteers in order to receive live updates and messages.

4.5.2 Feedback from volunteer drivers suggested that the current payment of 45p per mile for the voluntary service is increasingly untenable for the volunteers. With the increased and fluctuating cost of fuel alongside the increased cost of living, volunteer drivers are finding the current payment terms unattractive.

4.5.3 The Council recognises this pressure and would like to explore changes to the current offer in order to retain the current volunteer driver bank and recruit further given the increasing pressure to deliver more transport routes.

4.5.4 The following offer is proposed for consideration:

- Payment of 60p per mile for all volunteer drivers

4.5.5 It is envisaged that this revised offer will prove attractive to potential volunteers and Council officers intend to form a recruitment campaign around the offer in January 23 in order to build resilience in the current volunteer group.

4.5.6 The government has responded to a petition to increase the approved mileage allowance to 60 pence per mile with comments below;

“Employers are not required to use the AMAP rates. Instead, they can agree to reimburse a different amount that better reflects their employees’ circumstances.... However, where payments exceed the relevant AMAP rate, there will be an Income Tax and National Insurance charge on the difference.”

- 4.5.7 The income and tax and national insurance implications need to be fully understood and clarified ahead of this option being enacted. This will be explored by finance and education officers following Cabinet feedback. If Cabinet are minded to agree in principle to the increase, the tax implications need to be clearly understood and approved by CLT ahead of this change being enacted. It is vital that any action here does not cause liability to the council.
- 4.6 2. Peterborough Staff Passenger Transport Driver Scheme
- 4.6.1 Alongside the wider volunteer driver scheme, the Passenger Transport team would like to work with HR colleagues to develop a council staff-based scheme that offers options for staff wishing to support the home to school travel provision.
- 4.6.2 The scheme would look to offer staff an option to undertake home to school transport routes for Peterborough children and young people alongside their current contracted role. Staff wishing to participate in the transport scheme would be offered an additional relief contract as a driver with an hourly rate.
- 4.6.3 Staff would be paid for the hours undertaken over and above their current contract and would also be able to claim mileage for the route in accordance with the council mileage rates. To participate staff would need to have a current Disclosure & Barring Service (DBS) check and also Business Class 1 Insurance.
- 4.7 3. Parent Carer Driver schemes and Personal Transport Budgets
- 4.7.1 Currently there are mechanisms within the home to school transport offer whereby parents are often asked whether they wish to transport their children who are entitled to free home to school transport, with remuneration being offered through mileage paid of 45p per mile.
- 4.7.2 Whilst it is not always feasible for a parent to accept this offer, feedback from parents suggest that even when it is feasible, the current rate of mileage payment being offered is not adequate in the context of the cost of fuel.
- 4.7.3 Council officers wish to work closely with Family Voice Peterborough (our Parent Carer Forum) over the next 2 months to listen to parents further and co-produce a scheme for parents and carers delivering transport. This needs to be carefully considered both in terms of affordability for parents and carers, but also in relation to the appropriateness of parents supporting this way in some circumstances.
- 4.7.4 The council wishes to move towards a policy position whereby the first response to the provision of transport for an eligible child is to discuss with a parent or carer an offer of remuneration for the delivery of transport for their child. This will provide best value for the council but more importantly will provide wider options for children and young people other than taxi provision.
- 4.7.5 It is vital this scheme is co-produced by the council with parents and carers to ensure a scheme is developed which responds to the current feedback and challenges faced by parents.
- 4.7.6 CLT seeks agreement to move forward on this piece of work with a view to developing the scheme and starting to implement it as soon as it is ready to be launched. This will form part of a wider strategic workstream focusing on communication and engagement with parents and carers to ensure services are developed and refined in response to feedback.
- 4.7.7 The council will be reviewing its policy position across the framework of policy areas for Passenger transport ahead of Spring 2023 and it is proposed to embed the outcomes from the co-produced scheme within the policy review.

4.7.8 It is important to note that given the will to co-produce this element of the strategy with Family Voice in Jan and Feb 23, any impact of the new proposals will not occur until the 23/24 financial year.

5. CORPORATE PRIORITIES

5.1 The recommendation links to the Council's Corporate Priorities:

1. The Economy & Inclusive Growth

The completed Carbon Impact Assessment highlighted the potential for transport emissions decreasing due to route optimisation

2. Our Places & Communities

In a national transport context that lacks resilience we want take the opportunity to build local resilience amongst our staff and within our communities through investing in the correct ways to provide a framework for local stability.

3. Prevention, Independence & Resilience

We have listened to the feedback of both our volunteers, parents and staff. It is evident that there is a good basis of interest to build this arm of the council's provision. however, the offer needs to be correct and mindful of the national financial context our communities find themselves in.

Further information on the Council's Priorities can be found here - [Link to Corporate Strategy and Priorities Webpage](#)

6. CONSULTATION

6.1 Initial conversations have been undertaken with Family Voice Peterborough who have expressed an interest in partnering with the council to co-produce in this space. There is a recognition that things need to improve in order for parents to feel able to be actively involved in transport provision but there are good examples where this has been successful and in collaboration officers and parents are keen to build on these.

6.2 As specified in 4.7 the council wishes to undertake a wider consultation with Peterborough parents and carers in relation to personal transport budgets and parental mileage for passenger transport. Consultation events in January and February will be published with a view to beginning this piece of work as soon as possible.

6.3 This recommendation been considered by the Corporate Leadership Team.

7. ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES OR IMPACT

7.1 Consideration of the change to mileage payments and wider remuneration packages for parents and carers is expected to streamline current processes and provide greater value for money to the council. It is also expected to provide an improved service to entitled children, young people and their families.

8. REASON FOR THE RECOMMENDATION

8.1

- 1) improved resilience within service provision
- 2) improved efficiency and cost effectiveness to the council
- 3) improved outcomes for children and young people travelling to school via council provision

9. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 It has been considered to maintain the current mileage rates for volunteer drivers. The impact of this will be an increasingly reduced volunteer driver group, which will require the council to use an increased amount of taxi provision

It has been considered whether to explore further with parents a better and more attractive personal transport budget offer. Feedback from parents suggests we need to do this in order to promote sustainable travel and provide parents and carers with a sustainable financial mechanism should they wish to participate in their child's travel provision.

10. IMPLICATIONS

Financial Implications

- 10.1 Routes from home to school via taxi provision can cost the council significantly more per day than by personal transport budgets and/or voluntary drivers. It is intended that the recommendations in this report, should they be enacted, would have a favourable impact on the current budget pressures in the passenger transport finance area. These will be fully quantified as the changes are rolled out.
- 10.1.1 The income and tax and national insurance implications need to be fully understood and clarified ahead of this option being enacted. This will be explored by finance and education officers following Cabinet feedback.

Legal Implications

- 10.2 There do not appear to be any legal implications as the report is suggesting an alternative to the current scheme for an existing service

Equalities Implications

- 10.3 There are no anticipated to equalities implications other than improving the provision of transport options for parents and carers.

11. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Used to prepare this report, in accordance with the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985

- 11.1 None.

12. APPENDICES

- 12.1 Appendix A - Passenger Transport Transformation Strategy

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