

SUBJECT: PERSONAL TRANSPORT BUDGETS – OPTION FOR SCHOOL TRANSPORT

MEETING: INDIVIDUAL CABINET MEMBER DECISION (Cllr Bryan Jones)

DATE: 14th February 2018

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: all

1. PURPOSE:

Seeks approval that, at the discretion of the Council, Personal Transport Budgets (PTB) be offered as an alternative to school transport being organised by the local authority.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

2.1 That officers be authorised to approve a Personal Transport Budget (PTB) where to do so is to the benefit of the authority, subject to certain checks being in place (as highlighted in appendix 1).

3. KEY ISSUES:

3.1 A personal transport budget (PTB) is a sum of money given to parents or guardians of a learner by the Council in order that they can make independent transport arrangements to and from school for the learner

3.2 The option to agree a PTB with a parent or guardian is intended to offer an alternative to the authority arranging transport for an individual learner or group of learners. It will be of particular interest (but not limited to) where ‘bespoke’ transport is required for a learners that are travelling to establishments supplying special education needs. They may be travelling individually or possibly with other learners.

3.3 The option of a PTB is an alternative to the authority organising and funding transport provision for a learner. Where education at a certain establishment has been agreed by the authority then it is the authority’s responsibility to provide transport for the learner to and from the establishment and the agreement of a PSB does not obviate the authority of that responsibility should the parent/guardian wish to revert to local authority provision at some point in the future.

3.4 The authority’s current policy (for qualifying learners) says that the transport is provided at no cost to the learner. Obviously the authority incurs costs in making such transport arrangements. In some instances it may be appropriate and cost effective for the authority that a PTB be agreed whereby the learners’ parents or guardians are paid by the authority to make arrangements for the learners’ transport.

3.5 To fulfil its safeguarding role, in arriving at a PTB, the authority must satisfy itself that the learner is receiving suitable transport. The authority may require information from the parents to confirm what arrangements are being put in place and to monitor its ongoing provision.

3.6 Attached is a draft guidance note that would be provided to parents/guardians where the authority considers a PTB as a suitable option for consideration (appendix 1). The note describes the background to the scheme and answers various questions about the scheme.

3.7 Should a PTB be agreed with parents/guardians then they are required to formally sign an agreement to the provision of the transport for the learner. They may withdraw from the agreement but notice is required to allow the authority to make alternative arrangements if transport is still required (notice would typically be one month).

4. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

4.1 The authority has an obligation to provide free transport to qualifying learners (qualifying might be nearest school, catchment, special needs establishment).

4.2 The option of a PTB is proposed as an alternative service provision where to do so is of mutual benefit to the authority and parents/guardians.

4.3 Should other feasible options become available then these will be presented to members in the future.

5. EVALUATION CRITERIA

An evaluation assessment has been included at Appendix 2 for future evaluation of whether the decision has been successfully implemented. The decision will come back to this committee in 12 months for review.

6. REASONS:

6.1 The concept of agreeing that a parent/guardian be paid to provide transport for a learner(s) has been used previously by officers for exceptional circumstances but approval of the scheme will allow officers to promote the scheme more widely where they consider it a suitable alternative to direct transport provision by the authority.

6.2 The recommendation simply seeks approval that PTB's may be approved where officers consider them of benefit to the authority without detriment to the learner. This appears somewhat unregulated and in the absence of specific criteria places considerable responsibility upon the officer to arrive at a reasonable PTB. However it would limit the potential benefits of the scheme if fixed criteria are used to value a PTB. There are numerous permutations that affect the cost of each service including for example, where the learner lives, what school are they going to, what existing transport is available, what bids have been received, is it single or multiple travelers, with or without escorts. The value of any PTB would be agreed with reference to the cost that the authority would incur to arrange suitable transport and any PTB offer would be approved by the PTU Manager or Head of Service.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

It is not possible to place a specific value upon the proposal as the reduction in cost or cost avoidance is reliant upon the number of PTB's introduced and their individual value either where an existing service is removed or the cost of a new service is not incurred. Although the recommendation is worded in such a way that PTB's may be used in any circumstances where a cost benefit to the authority is achieved it is anticipated that the main benefit will be achieved where specific transport arrangements are required for learners with special education needs.

At present MCC's Passenger Transport Unit has 78 contracts in place for learners with special education needs. Dependant upon the distances and service demands (e.g. individual or multiple, with or without escort) costs vary between say £15,000 per annum and £55,000 per annum. Overall the SEN transport budget is £1.8m so whilst the value of the proposal depends upon parent/guardian take up officers would hope to be able to achieve some financial benefit without diminution in service.

7. WELLBEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS IMPLICATIONS (INCORPORATING EQUALITIES, SUSTAINABILITY, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):

An impact assessment is provided in appendix 3.

8. CONSULTEES:

**SLT
Cabinet**

9. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Nil

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