

Statement from the Home to School Transport LECG Task & Finish Group

Background

The Leicestershire Equalities Challenge Group (LECG), at its meeting in September 2017, flagged up its wish to be involved in the review of Home to School Transport Policies, this review being a key transformational policy change with clear potential equalities implications.

Leicestershire County Council welcomed the opportunity to involve LECG in the development of the Equalities & Human Rights Impact Assessment work in relation to the policy, and LECG set up a Task & Finish Group to that purpose.

Members of the LECG Home to School Task & Finish Group met twice with County Council officers involved in the review of Home to School Transport Policies. At the first meeting on 29th November the Group explored the details of the proposals and the public consultation. At the second meeting on 17th January 2018, the group looked in detail at the consultation results and the draft EHRIA. They also arranged a visit on 16th January 2018 to Ashmount Special School in Loughborough as part of their work.

Following the meeting on 17th January 2018, the following statement was agreed by members of the Group:

We appreciate the pressures on the Council and the context in which these undesirable proposals have been developed and need to be considered. We have found the County Council officers concerned very involved in the review, listening closely to feedback received through the consultation and open to suggestions from the Group.

With regards to Proposal 1 (reducing the level of discount available to students from low income families) we consider that a modest contribution towards transport costs may be appropriate as long as exceptions can be made. It is considered that other professionals and front-line workers working with these young people & families, including in the Early Help Service and school inclusion officers, should have the possibility to request such exceptions, on a temporary or permanent base, on behalf of the student and/or their family.

Similarly, Proposal 3 (stop providing transport to post 16 education for eligible mainstream post 16 students) should leave open the door for exceptional circumstances and enable professionals to appeal to those on behalf of the student and/or their family.

With regards to Proposal 2 (to stop offering council arranged taxis and minibuses to transport SEN students to post 16 education and offer a Personal Transport Budget instead) the Group is of the view that this is not the right thing to do, and that this policy could only work if it is implemented in a careful and humane way with adequate mitigation measures to accommodate people's different circumstances. Many people responding to the public consultation have put forward the argument that this measure will impact on families with

SEN who already have to deal with many issues – and this argument rings true to members of the Group.

The Group notes various mitigation measures have been put forward by officers and these are broadly supported.

- The Group in particular welcomes the intention to work more closely with special schools to look jointly at ways PTBs can be used by schools to offer appropriate transport solutions. If done well, this could lead to positive outcomes for children and parents.
- Officers appear to accept that PTBs will not be a suitable solution for all concerned. The Group believe this is the case for a considerable proportion of SEN students/families. A further proportion could only make use of PTBs if the financial value of the PTB is considerably higher than currently proposed. The group urges officers to develop a clear, transparent and fair process for considering the feasibility and financial value of a PTB. The Group would want there to be sufficient opportunity for families to be heard before an initial decision is made. A clear, customer friendly appeals process would need to be in place.

The Task Group want to thank County Council officers for their time.

Colin Norman	LECG Chair
Peter Lewis	Task Group Member
Mina Rodgers	Task Group Member
Anne Glasper	Task Group Member
Kazi Mashud	Task Group Member
John Catt	Task Group Member
Vicki Kainth	Task Group Member

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