

CITY OF
WOLVERHAMPTON
COUNCIL

Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Minutes - 9 March 2020

Attendance

Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Rita Potter (Chair)
Cllr Udey Singh
Cllr Rashpal Kaur
Cllr Paula Brookfield
Cllr Paul Sweet

In Attendance

Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre

Cabinet Member for Education and Skills

Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith
Emma Bennett
Maria Smith
Mark Taylor

Scrutiny Officer
Director of Children's Services
Project Manager
Deputy Chief Executive

Part 1 – items open to the press and public

Item No. *Title*

- 1 **Apologies**
Apologies were received from the following members of the panel:

Cllr Sohail Khan
Cllr John Rowley
Cllr Beverley Momenabadi
Cllr Clare Simm
- 2 **Declarations of interest**
There were no declarations of interest recorded.
- 3 **All Age Travel Assistance Policy**
Cllr Dr Michael Hardacre, Education and Skills, introduced the report and outlined the background to the drafting of the proposed changes to the current All Age Travel

Assistance Policy. The Cabinet Member advised the panel of the main findings from the public consultation and the changes made in response to feedback received. The Cabinet Member explained that the underlying philosophy was to be a 'good parent' and give children and young people the opportunity to become more independent travellers and to learn new life skills. The Cabinet Member accepted that the proposed changes to the policy will take time to implement.

The Cabinet Member referred to the statutory responsibilities of the Council to promote the use of sustainable travel and transport to children and young people of compulsory school age. The Cabinet Member explained the responsibilities of parents to ensure their child receives suitable education and accompanying them to school was considered to be part of this responsibility. The Cabinet Member advised that an example of the change might be a young person could be issued with a bus pass or collected from a nearby bus stop rather than outside their home.

The Cabinet Member advised the panel that major change to the current policy will be the introduction of charges for young people of sixth form age. The panel were advised that the policy change will be introduced from September 2021 and the schools and colleges will be reminded that they have been funded by Government to provide financial support through bursaries to meet their travel costs in the future.

The Cabinet Member added that the Council has no power to direct schools to do this and it will be a challenge, but it is part of the new approach to encourage and support people to travel independently; while recognising for some pupil that this will not be an option because of their particular disability or illness.

The response to the consultation paper was supportive of the proposed change in policy. The panel were invited to comment on the proposals.

The panel suggested that the proposals listed in para 4.3 of the report should be reorganised in priority and the current proposal 9 should be first priority to reflect the new policy regarding travel assistance. The Cabinet Member accepted the suggestion and agreed to review the list in terms of priority.

The panel queried whether applicants whose current health is such that there would be no realistic expectation that they could become an independent travel would still need to be assessed under the new policy. Emma Bennett, Director of Children's Services, confirmed that each would be assessed as the aim was to offer personalised support. The assessment should be seen as positive opportunity to identify a person's needs and provide appropriate support that will better meet their needs; particularly for people with complex physical and/or behavioural needs.

The panel queried the extent of the choice that people would be offered at the end of the assessment process.

Cabinet Member commented that the current travel arrangements do not offer young people a choice as the Council will determine the most appropriate means of transport. For example, the start of the day for a young person could be 2 hours earlier than other children as the bus pick up service is based on a set route.

The new policy will support the right of young people to travel within their ability. The Cabinet Member reassured the panel that would not be a time limit on when a young person would be considered to be ready for independent travel. The Cabinet Member also advised the panel that the budget is not an issue and that parents were generally supportive of the change policy. This has been supported by the Director and the Leader of the Council.

The panel queried the plans for rolling out the programme. The Director of Children's Services advised the panel that there would be a phased rollout of the scheme as detailed in the report para 6.1.

The panel queried the resource implication of providing resources to manage the increased number of assessments and provide training support. The Director of Children's Services advised that there would be sufficient resources to meet demand.. The panel were advised each case would be assessed when their annual review is due which would make the process more manageable.

The panel queried if a log would be maintained to record any travel incidents following the changes in policy. The Director of Children's Services reassured the panel that the current policy already includes a risk assessment and a process for recording travel incidents. The aim will be to provide a safe travel environment for young people.

The Cabinet Member commented on the need to improve the travel assistance offer and provide a different service to that offered in the 1950s and 60s to young people who have special educational needs and or disabilities. The Cabinet Member gave examples of the benefits of encouraging young with disabilities to be more independent travellers where possible and the importance of breaking the cycle of dependency in preparation for future adult life, where it is appropriate to do so.

The Director of Children's Services commented that assessments for travel assistance take place all year round and at any one time there could be a number of assessments that need to be completed.

Reviews are then held annually to review a person's travel needs

The panel discussed the appeal process. The Director of Children's Services explained that decision about recommended travel assistance option would be part of a discussion between the Council and the young person and not simply be imposed.

The Cabinet Member advised the panel that the appeal process would be much clearer and there would opportunities to challenge a decision at different stages. The appeal process would have an independent element at the second stage as detailed in the report and Councillors would no longer be involved in process. This was influenced by consultation feedback.

The Director of Children's Services commented that the Council would work with parents to find a solution if there were concerns following the assessment of the recommended travel assistance option.

The panel welcomed the proposals and the assurances given about how the policy would be implemented.

Resolved:

1. The panel comments on the proposal changes to the All Age Travel Assistance Policy to be considered when the report is presented to Cabinet for approval.
2. The panel welcome the assurances given by the Cabinet Member and Director of Children's Services about the implementation timeline of the policy and support plans for the phased introduction as detailed in the report.

The meeting closed at 18:35