
Meeting: Schools Forum
Date: 28 November 2011
Subject: Use of Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) for Special Educational Needs (SEN) Transport
Report of: Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children's Services
Summary: This paper makes a request to Schools Forum for a £400k contribution from DSG for Special Educational Needs (SEN) Transport in 2011/2012

Contact Officer: Helen Redding
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Council
Reason for urgency (if appropriate) N/A

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. To propose the use of £400k Headroom in 11/12 to contribute to the SEN Transport costs**

Background

1. The School Finance (England) Regulations 2011 came into force in March 2011. Schedule 2 of these regulations set out the classes or descriptions of planned expenditure prescribed for the purposes of the Schools budget of a Local Authority which may be deducted from it to determine the Individual School Budget (ISB).
2. Schedule 2 includes special education provision, and within the section on 'other expenditure', paragraph 37(e), includes expenditure on special educational needs transport costs. In some councils SEN transport is funded entirely by the DSG.
3. The SEN transport to schools costs include transport to special schools both in and outside of Central Bedfordshire, Transport to specialist provisions in Central Bedfordshire, and transport to the Pupil Referral Unit.
4. The Local Authority has been fully funding SEN Transport to date. The total spend on SEN Transport to schools in 10/11 was £3,383,000, with a further £329,000 spent on transport to post school provision in colleges. The requested £400k contribution represents less than 12% of the costs of SEN Transport to schools and the PRU.

5. The Home to School Transport Policy 2010/2011, and the Post 16 Transport Policy 2011/12 set out the eligibility for pupils with SEN, and this policy is in the process of being implemented.

Update

6. Each year of the current spending round the Council is making efficiency savings in order to meet government targets on public sector spending. While implementation of the council's pupil transport policies is a high priority for the council in achieving efficiency savings while still ensuring all pupils who are entitled to transport to school receive that transport, a number of factors are working against this. One is the fact that overall costs in transporting pupils are rising with fuel prices rising ahead of inflation. A second factor is the unpopularity of removal of school transport amongst parents. This has led the council to undertake the implementation of this policy with great care for example by giving increased attention to the involvement of stakeholders in the process of walking assessments. The implementation of the revised transport policy is therefore likely to take additional time to impact on costs.
7. As part of the implementation of these policies, work is also being undertaken to reduce the costs of SEN transport, while at the same time increasing the abilities of young people with SEN to travel independently where possible and where this is appropriate to their assessed needs.
6. The Local Authority is currently awaiting the outcome of the consultation of the changes to the Finance Regulations.

Next Steps

7. That a further paper is brought to Schools Forum following the publication of the revised Schools Finance Regulations to consider a contribution to the future funding of SEN Transport

Appendices:

Appendix A – Home to School Transport Policy

Appendix B – Post 16 Transport Policy