**Consultation on changes to the Transport Policy for Children and Young People with Special Educational Needs Frequently Asked Questions**

**Why are the changes proposed?**

The County Council’s policy on special educational needs and disability (SEND) transport was updated in 2012 when a transport banding system was introduced to enable more effective commissioning of transport provision for eligible children and young people.

We would like to update the current policy to bring it in line with the mainstream home-to-school transport policy for pupils across the county whilst also meeting duties placed upon the local authority, for example the Equality Act 2010.

We want to ensure that this policy is fair, cost-effective and supports those children and families who need it the most. If fully implemented, the proposed changes will help to contribute around £300,000 of the overall £300 million savings that Lancashire County Council has to achieve by 2018.

**How much does SEND transport cost the council?**

Currently, some 2,907 pupils receive transport support which costs around £16.26m per year. The proposals would contribute around £300,000 which represents a 1.85% saving on this budget. The average annual transport cost per child eligible for home to school/college SEND transport is £5,500; the proposed charge is £475 per annum which is a small proportion of the average costs per pupil

It is important to point out though, that anyone affected by this would continue to be assisted by the county council's continued larger contribution for this provision.

**When will any changes come into effect?**

Any changes would not be introduced until September 2014. Individual parents, carers and their children and young people will be informed well in advance by letter if any agreed changes in policy affect their child’s eligibility to transport or travel arrangements.

**Who would be affected?**

The proposal to introduce a means-tested financial contribution towards the cost of transport support to school and college affects those young people who continue in education from the age of 16 to 19.

**Has the decision already been made?**

No decision has been made yet. This will only be made by Lancashire County Council’s Cabinet Member after the consultation period so that we can take any views expressed into account.

**Would children be required to change schools?**

Children would not be required to change school as a consequence of any change in eligibility criteria for SEND transport assistance.

**How was the figure for the contribution arrived at?**

The County Council is looking at having a SEND transport policy much more in line with its mainstream transport policy in future. This includes any charges it makes for transport - so the current proposal to request a financial contribution towards SEND transport has been based on the charges that mainstream students can expect to pay to attend school or college. The proposed charge of £475 per year with a formulaic increase to future years' concessionary charge that is on the basis of Retail Price Index (RPI) plus 5% applies to discretionary (non-statutory) mainstream transport so we are seeking to apply this consistently across all our transport policies except where exemptions apply.

**Would any financial contribution be income assessed?**

Yes. Where a family is in receipt of qualifying benefits, they would be exempt from the contribution. It is proposed to use Income Support, Income Based Job Seekers Allowance, Income Based Employment Support Allowance and General Pension Credit as the qualifying benefits for this.

**Would there be a discount applied if a family has more than one child requiring travel assistance and having to pay for it?**

At present a discount for travel assistance, of this nature, is not included in the existing proposals.

**How would the changes affect my child?**

If you are in receipt of qualifying benefits you would be exempt from the contribution. It is proposed for this purpose to use Income support, Income Based Job Seekers Allowance, Income Based Employment Support Allowance and General Pension Credit.

This could be paid annually in full or paid monthly by instalments.

**Can the money be found elsewhere?**

Due to cuts in government funding Lancashire County Council is required to make a £300 million saving between 2014 and 2018.

One of the key principles on which the Council’s Financial Strategy is based is to maximise the contribution made by efficiency savings. However, a savings requirement of this size cannot be met by efficiency savings alone and service reductions or increased charges are necessary.

The same is true for the transport budget. Despite this, the authority still need to look at all areas of its budget in order to achieve this savings target and the introduction of a financial contribution has to be considered.

**Can I speak to someone further?**

You can talk to someone directly by contacting the Inclusion and Disability Support Service on 01772 532241 or 01772 530839 or email us at idss@lancashire.gov.uk

**What happens next?**

Following consultation with parents and carers, pupils, staff, governors, and the wider community a report detailing the response to the consultation will be presented to the County Council Cabinet Member in May 2014, to enable a decision on the way forward to be taken.

We will publish the consultation results on the website [www.lancashire.gov.uk/haveyoursay](http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/haveyoursay) and will also advise schools at the same time.