

Report title: <i>Transport Provision during school holidays during emergency</i>	
Report to: Andrew Cook	
Report author: Helen Morris	
Date: 2 April 2020	For: Decision
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1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 The Coronavirus outbreak is a major public health emergency. This report asks for a decision on the provision of transport for entitled students during the Easter holidays and Easter Bank Holidays during the Coronavirus crisis which is outside of ECC's current contractual arrangements.

There is no legal obligation to provide any education transport arrangements outside of normal term times, the Council could choose not to intervene or make (fund) any such arrangements. Such an approach would inevitably invite much criticism and be against the spirit of Government guidance and the national effort against COVID-19.

The Department for Education (DfE) guidance to local authorities is clear that where special schools and colleges continue to offer some or all of their provision over the Easter holidays to look after critical workers' children and vulnerable children, local authorities will need to ensure usual provision will continue to be available to meet education, health and care needs, that the Council uses its discretion to provide transport arrangements beyond its normal statutory and policy responsibilities.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 To approve the provision of Home to School Transport to eligible children of vulnerable or Key worker children attending school during the Easter school holiday and Easter bank holidays only
- 2.2 Pending Government determination of emergency funding and the outcome of negotiations with the operators agree to reallocate existing Home to School transport budget allocations up to £500,000 to fund the additional unbudgeted provision of Home to School Transport over the Easter period.

3. Summary of issue

- 3.1 The Council normally provides transport to eligible children under the Education Act 1996 and its Education Transport Policy to facilitate attendance during term time. In the current national situation with the COVID-19 pandemic, some

schools may choose to open during the Easter holiday period to enable the attendance of children of 'key (critical) workers' and vulnerable children, for example those with an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP)

- 3.2 The Department for Education (DfE) guidance to local authorities is clear that where special schools and colleges continue to offer some or all of their provision over the Easter holidays to look after critical workers' children and vulnerable children, local authorities will need to ensure usual provision will continue to be available to meet education, health and care needs.
- 3.3 The Council has the discretion to provide transport arrangements beyond its normal statutory and policy responsibilities. Help people in Essex prosper by increasing their skills

4. Options

4.1 Option 1 Do Nothing – not recommended

In this situation, as there is no legal obligation to provide any education transport arrangements outside of normal term times, the Council could choose not to intervene or make (fund) any such arrangements. Such an approach would inevitably invite much criticism and be against the spirit of Government guidance and the national effort against COVID-19

This would have no financial impact, as the budget assumes no transport is provided during this period.

4.2 Option 2 – Provide Transport out of term time recommended

That the Council uses its discretion to provide transport arrangements beyond its normal statutory and policy responsibilities to maintain transport provision throughout the school holiday period and Bank Holidays.

The Council could instruct its operators holding existing education transport contracts to liaise directly with schools and parents to establish which eligible children currently transported during term time, will be attending school during the Easter holidays.

Option 2 is recommended because the number of children anticipated as requiring the service is likely to be minimal when compared to usual circumstances. Supporting their attendance (and hence helping their parents go to work) is entirely in keeping with the combined efforts of all parts of the public sector to jointly tackle the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic

5. Issues for consideration

5.1 Financial implications

Summary

There is **no revenue budget envelope** for the provision of Home to School Transport during the Easter Holidays and Easter Bank Holidays. The current envelop assumes home to school transport is provided during term time only.

Therefore there is an **unfunded revenue pressure** arising in providing Home to School Transport for the Easter period. On a worst case scenario it is estimated to be a maximum of **£500,000**. This is based on a number of assumptions as stated below and is subject to further negotiations with operators to agree a daily cost that is representative of the costs expected to be incurred and it is likely that this revenue pressure will reduce.

Cost of providing the additional service

The additional cost of providing the service over the Easter period is estimated to be £500,000 on a worst-case basis. This is based on the following financial assumptions:

- Daily rate per route:
 - The daily rate per route is based on the actual invoiced cost per route for January, which is considered to be a representative month. We anticipate that costs per route will be negotiated down with operators given the significantly lower number of passengers travelling. e
- Routes operating:
 - The worst-case scenario is based upon routes that are operating because passengers were travelling on Wednesday 25th March as per operator confirmations, we assume these passengers will continue to travel during the Easter holidays. There is a risk that the daily rate per route is understated because positive confirmations have not been received from all operators. There is a further risk that routes that are operating are misstated because passenger numbers fluctuate on a daily basis.
- Duration
 - That transport is provided for 10 days, this includes the Easter Bank Holidays

Funding Requirements

The unfunded revenue pressure will be contained within exsisting resources. Alternative mitigations will be found to reduce costs elsewhere within the budget. This includes a proposal to suppliers to meet 80% of the cost that would have otherwise been incurred had the service been delivered as contracted. This creates a 20% reduction to the budget earmarked for schools that are closed as a result of covid-19. This saving has not yet been quantified, but it is anticipated to be sufficient to fund this budget pressure on the basis of the schools which were closed over the last 2 weeks and the January cost of the route.

I approve the above recommendations set out above for the reasons set out in the report.

Date

Andrew Cook, Director of Highways & Transportation	3rd April 2020
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In consultation with:

Role	Date
Councillor Ray Gooding, Cabinet Member for Education	2nd April 2020