

**CABINET – 28 APRIL 2020****ITEM 8 - MAINSTREAM AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICIES 2020/21**

From Max Hunt CC, Labour Transport spokesperson

When low income families have borne the brunt of Government austerity programme, those with children with disabilities or other special needs have borne an even heavier burden. The Labour Group therefore maintains its strong objection to this policy and the related policies agreed by Cabinet on 9<sup>th</sup> March 2018. This applies to transport for SEND Nursery education as well as the 16-18 SEND mainstream discussed in this paper.

We note the outcome of the Judicial Review, a process which only confirms the strong feelings of parents of SEND children and the frustration they continue to experience.

We are concerned that estimates of the MTFs savings have not been matched (see para 11) so far. The authority must stand by the commitment to exceptions and not allow these to be eroded in order to drive up the savings. We suspect that at the end of the day, the suffering this will cause will outweigh any net financial gain.

We will therefore be seeking fuller details of the current roll out of the Nursery policy and the proposed implementation of the 16-18 policy. In particular, we note the proposals as set out to the E&T Scrutiny Committee on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2017 and 1<sup>st</sup> March 2018.

We would like reassurance that the following are being met:

- Where children had been provided with medical escorts, discussions take place with parents and carers to understand the transport arrangements made when such children were not at school. The PTB reflects the particular needs of the child;
- Low income families were defined as those who were in receipt of the maximum Working Families Tax Credit or eligible for free school meals but the former criterion has been replaced by Universal Credit for new claimants and many other families. How has this impacted on the scheme?
- Measures have been developed to help support families in moving to a new system based on Personal Transport Budgets (PTB). This would include, for example, working with schools to identify families who could share home to school transport, potentially arranged by the school and funded through each family's PTB. Mitigation measures would be put in place to help address potential drop-out rates.
- Exception arrangements have been put in place to address and support families for whom a PTB was unworkable. Exceptions are considered on a

case by case basis by staff well experienced in dealing with PTBs as well as mainstream and SEN home to school transport.

- A two-stage appeals process is in place; the first stage is dealt with by staff who were well-versed in the area of work, although had not dealt with the case previously; and the second stage would be handled by an independent panel. The committee was informed that, should significant issues arise with the operation of the PTB, the system could be reviewed;
- Mechanisms would be put in place to monitor use of PTBs to identify early on any issues being experienced by individual families. Payments would be made monthly in advance to help support families with budgeting;
- Where a student was deemed likely to enter into care as a result of transport pressures which had led to poor attendance at school, a robust escalation process would be in place. This would be developed, in conjunction with schools and the SEN service.