

Surrey Heath Borough Council Response to Surrey County Council's Consultation on:

- [Family Resilience: Children's Centres](#)
- [Concessionary bus travel](#)
- [Special Educational Needs and Disabilities](#)
- [Libraries and Cultural Services](#)
- [Community Recycling Centres](#)

In addition to the issue of cost shunting to Boroughs & Districts, the other overriding impact is to disadvantage those living in rural areas. The consequences on the poor, elderly and disadvantaged are set out below but more generally the approach raises the issue of rural isolation. In addition, as rural communities have to travel further to access basic services with no improvement to bus services being proposed, the inevitable consequence will be increased car journeys.

1. Family Resilience: Children's Centres

Surrey Heath Borough Council objects to the closure of 3 Children's Centres: Mytchett Children's Centre (currently covering Deepcut, Mytchett and Frimley Green), Bagshot Children's Centre (currently covering Bagshot, Lightwater and part of Windlesham) and Chobham Children's Centre (currently covering Chobham, West End, Bisley and part of Windlesham).

Families living in the 6 villages on the outskirts of the borough are unlikely to choose to access the two remaining Children's Centres due to poor and irregular transport links to these venues. This will increase the isolation of families requiring support, leading to children and families not being identified early enough. There is a significant risk that issues that are currently being picked up early won't be in future. The consequences of this failure are likely to lead to such cases being picked up later when the costs of addressing family problems will be greater which will have a bigger impact on funding and other resources in the long term.

Children's Centres currently deliver universal services such as baby groups, play and learn. These services are where the majority of early intervention work happens, supporting parents with advice on breastfeeding, weaning, toilet training, behaviour strategies etc. for young children from highly trained children's centre staff.

Transitioning the delivery of some aspects of universal services to volunteers has the potential to lose this support to parents, in particular there are concerns as to how the very specific training needed will be provided for volunteers and the risk of inconsistency in the standard of support provided by volunteers, with parents therefore feeling unable to discuss any concerns they have. This is likely to result in family issues not being dealt with early enough and a subsequent increase in caseloads reaching early help and Children's Social Services. It is therefore considered that any saving made on this change will lead to higher costs due to more significant intervention being needed further down the line. The changes proposed are about saving money not about the quality of the service being delivered.

The closure of the two mobile children's centres will further increase the isolation of hard to reach groups in the area, such as the gypsy and traveller community, as the bus is currently used to engage with this community in the borough. This is likely to result in these groups, who are already significantly disadvantaged, needing more specialist support which again will impact on cost and possibly prevent safeguarding issues from being identified.

The introduction of a fee to access support from the Children's Centre, such as attending a parenting course, healthy eating course etc. is likely to most affect those families who need this course most. Although it has been noted that this charge can be voluntary for families needing financial support, we know that our most vulnerable families are unlikely to even attempt to access these services if they feel that there will be a cost involved.

Transport links across the boroughs, within our North West Quadrant are limited and also come with large costs for families, who cannot struggle even to afford to buy food. Currently, all children's centre services are within walking distance of almost any family who may choose to access them. This suggested change of courses being delivered at a quadrant level, puts the poorest families at further risk, increasing the poverty gap for families and increasing the potential need for families to require more specialist support at a later date.

2. Concessionary Bus Travel

Two possible areas of impact on the lives of disabled pass holders, of all ages are as follows:

- Impact on access to employment/education
- Impact on access to health, social care and other services

With no statistical data provided as part of the consultation on the number of journeys undertaken during the proposed time windows where concessionary travel is proposed to be removed, it is difficult to identify the trends in use etc. and potential impact. However Surrey Heath Borough Council's thoughts on each of the above are as follows:

Impact on access to employment/education

Children with disabilities who require transport to access education are likely to have their transport funded by education and receive door to door contracted transport via SCC's Transport Coordination Centre. However, young people and adults aged 16+ who are attending colleges; vocational training, apprenticeships etc. are likely to have to pay for their own transport. Likewise those aged 16+ who are in employment and who require public transport to access their place of work will also now be required to pay, should they need to travel prior to 9:30am. The impact of this will be dependent on levels of income, other benefits accessed and the financial status of families and individuals to support paying for travel.

Impact on access to health, social care and other services

The changes in arrangements, in particular early morning on weekdays, could have an impact on the ability of individuals to attend medical appointments, social care arranged activity etc. As an example, those who use their pass to attend hospital appointments, dependent on where they live are unlikely to be able to make an appointment until after 10am under the new arrangements and possibly slightly later still given the need and preference of individuals to have enough time to comfortably make appointments. This could therefore result in NHS services having to rearrange appointments or could result in an increase in the number of missed appointments. With a smaller window available for individuals to attend, it could also extend the wait to access an appointment. As a result this would have a cost to both the NHS and possibly Adult Social Care.

One way of mitigating this would be to ensure that the eligibility criteria for disabled pass holders, is consistent with non-emergency patient transport eligibility, so as to avoid scenarios such as those outlined above becoming realised by providing an alternative travel option to residents accessing health services.

In regard to Adult Social Care services, there are individuals who currently access services using public transport, which would be more affordable to ASC, make personal budgets stretch further etc. However, if unable to use a concessionary fares pass, there is the potential that a cost burden would either be carried by the individual privately, through their personal budget, or by ASC in ensuring continuity in service provision for supported individuals.

Carers

The Concessionary Fares consultation outlines proposed changes in regards to carers being able to travel free of charge as a companion on public bus services. The proposal is that all concessionary travel for carers will be removed.

It is widely recognised with Health and Social Care the role that carers play in support of public sector services and in the lives of others, more often than not a spouse, parent or child but potentially more widely. In the recent 10 Year Strategy workshop, arranged by SCC and NHS partners, PWC presented 12 key priority areas for Surrey, of which “Supporting the Carers of Surrey” was one area. The information presented in regards to carers is attached for information.

Not all carers in Surrey will have access to concessionary fare travel as eligibility is determined by the person cared for. In addition, older residents who are carers will be eligible for their own concessionary fares pass and therefore less likely to arrange for a companion permit, if they are the person travelling as a carer. Equally, many of the up to 140,000 residents who are carers will not require the use of public transport, most likely using their own vehicles to provide transport for the person they care for or relying on friends families, or the use of taxis.

The Impact of a Loss of Free Travel

The loss of free travel for Carers is likely to have two main impacts, these being:

- Financial impact

- Increase in Social Isolation and inability to access services, leisure and recreation

The financial position of carers and the person they care for will vary from situation to situation, however for many there is likely to have been a reduction in income into the household, an increase in costs year on year and the potential need to contribute to any formal carer support services. As a result, the potential to have to pay for travel just a few times a week could have a significant impact on the finances of households where there is a carer. The result of this could be missed appointments, withdrawal from social events and recreational activity or in paying for all travel currently undertaken in the interests of providing the best quality of life for the person cared for, other impacts at home such as fuel poverty, rent arrears etc. Any one of these scenarios could have the potential impact of the deterioration in the quality of life for the carer and the person they care for.

Consideration should be given to the financial impact on the carers of those who are eligible for a disabled pass, in that should both the disabled pass holder and the carer currently travel early morning or late at night, in order to maintain their quality of life or access services they would need to pay two fares at these times. This would only add to the financial burden on families and carers.

The free companion travel available to Carers is in reality more than just a means to enable the person they care for to access public transport. Access to such a service may positively affect carers emotional wellbeing, knowing that they have an ability to lead an active life so far as is possible through being able to travel without charge. Therefore, whilst the concessionary fares consultation focuses on the travel element of the offer, the wider benefits need to be considered.

To provide some context on the need to consider the support for carers more holistically, within the data provided by PWC as part of the ten year vision, clear reference was given to the impact of social isolation on carers. Some of the key information provided is as follows:

- In 2016/2017, compared to peers 15% fewer carers in Surrey felt they had as much social contacts as they would have liked
- With strong links to depression, there is therefore a larger proportion of carers who are at higher risk of poor mental health and emotional wellbeing
- The number of adult carers who feel socially isolated in Surrey is 30,457
- Using the estimated service cost of treating someone with depression (£2,730), improving social isolation amongst carers could result in a £5.3 million opportunity compared to peers

Therefore, if the opportunity has been identified to make considerable savings based on improving the welfare of carers, through a reduction in social isolation, access to free travel would be an important element of such attempts. It should be noted that the figures do not include the potential savings from avoiding carer breakdown, costs otherwise incurred by health and social care in picking up the role the carer undertakes through emergency carer support, unavoidable hospital admission or through a need to arrange long term respite care placements.

An Alternative Carers Scheme?

One of the ways in which costs could be reduced by SCC whilst maintaining free travel for carers is by changing the eligibility criteria. At present, the Carer is not issued with a pass and instead a free of charge companion is confirmed on the cared for persons pass. As a result, anyone who travels with this person are eligible to travel free of charge, regardless of their role as a carer, the level of caring they undertake or their affordability to pay for travel.

Given the information above and the desire to support carers, the potential opportunity to agree travel companion status for carers by Adult Social Care or Children's Services through their assessment of the person cared for (or of the carer as a duty under the Care Act 2014), would ensure that free transport provision would be targeted to the carers who require it most, whilst also maintaining the ability of the person who is cared for to travel.

To implement this, a change to the current scheme could be implemented whereby the carer would be named on the main pass holders pass and with the carer needing to provide some identification when travelling, would ensure that free travel for carers is only provided to the person who has been assessed.

(This item has been prepared in conjunction with Surrey Heath's partner Runnymede BC)

3. Special Educational Needs and Disabilities

Surrey Heath Borough Council supports the aims of the proposed changes to SEND the following reasons:

- Children in the local area will be identified earlier and a faster support plan will be in place to support them in mainstream education or a specialist provision where required.
- Children with SEND living in the borough will be able to access education closer to their home – there is a direct link between children accessing education outside of their local area and social isolation.
- Children who have to travel long distances to school, often become school refusers; increasing their risk of committing crime, anti-social behaviour, unemployment and requiring additional specialist support.
- Local schools will be provided with additional and specialist training to support children with SEND, improving outcomes for all local children and young people.
- Improved multi-agency working and an early intervention level, reduces the risk of families requiring more specialist, costly support. It also reduces the risk of poor school attend

However, this approach fails to recognise that children with SEND often cannot be accommodated in local schools. The nationally highlighted issue of exclusion rates disproportionately including SEND children shows schools can't cope due to lack of resources and trained staff. Given that the rationale behind the proposed changes is cost savings, how will improved local provision be delivered as this will inevitably

require new specialist facilities and staff? Given that this will take time and the need to make cost savings is immediate what, in reality, will the proposed changes mean for local children?

4. Library & Cultural Services

Surrey Heath Borough Council is in broad agreement with the five principles for the re-shaping of the library and cultural services to ensure they remain sustainable. However there is concern that if these services do not continue to be delivered by Surrey County Council directly it could lead to inconsistency in terms of quality and accessibility. It is also important to be mindful that the pursuit of delivering principles 3, 4 and 5 is not to the detriment of principles 1 & 2.

Surrey Heath Borough Council is in favour of the development of multi-agency co-located cultural and public sector hubs (or a “one-stop-shop”) which we believe would improve accessibility and support ongoing sustainability of these important services.

Technology should be used where ever possible to ensure that this is a service that is fit for modern living and a service that is truly valued.

However it is unclear what these 5 principles translate into for each area and what library services in Surrey Heath will look like as a consequence.

It is not clear exactly what is referred to by cultural services, but the map includes the Adult Education Centre at France Hill and clarification needs to be sought as to the future of this service.

What is the impact on the poorest and most disadvantaged children from any closure?

Again, the rural areas will be most affected

5. Community Recycling Centres (CRC)

The Council is aware that the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Defra) resources and waste strategy will soon be published. This will make significant changes in the way that waste is managed. It is understood that this will include “significant” reform of packaging regulations in order to boost the market for a wide range of secondary materials. It may be better to delay the closure of CRCs until the full impact of the strategy is known and the role which CRCs will play. Once a CRC is closed it may be difficult to re-open.

If the Bagshot CRC is closed it could lead to longer queues into the Wilton Rd, Camberley CRC, which may impact upon the flow of traffic on the Frimley Road. This road is already severely congested at the weekends.

This is also another example where the impact will be most keenly felt in rural areas.

If the Bagshot CRC is closed there could be more fly tipping on Swift Lane, Bagshot which leads to the site of the CRC. The Council would like assurance from Surrey County Council that any fly tipping along the lane is dealt with in a timely manner.