

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

**REPORT TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

2 SEPTEMBER 2014

**REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE –
LEGAL & REGULATORY SERVICES**

LEARNER TRAVEL POLICY

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To inform the Committee of the current position with regard to learner travel arrangements in Bridgend.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives / Other Corporate Priorities.

- 2.1 The key improvement objectives identified in the Corporate Plan 2013-2017 have been embodied in the Overview & Scrutiny Forward Work Programmes. The amended Corporate Improvement Objectives adopted by Council on 3 April 2013 formally set out the improvement objectives that the Council will seek to implement between 2013 and 2017. The Overview and Scrutiny Committees engage in review and development of plans, policy or strategies that support the Corporate Themes.

3. Background.

- 3.1 The Committee has considered the issues around the provision of learner transport on a number of previous occasions. The most recent of these was at its meeting on the 30 September 2013, where the Committee made a number of recommendations, which were reported to the Cabinet meeting on 12 November 2013.

- 3.2 The recommendations were as follows:

1. The Committee were supportive of Proposal (a) in relation to Rationalisation of SEN Transport and commented that strong management in terms of implementation and monitoring would be key.
2. Further to this, Members requested that as part of the rationalisation of SEN Transport, Officers explore whether the Authority is double funding for SEN pupils who receive a Disability Living Allowance at the highest rate for mobility, as this includes an allowance/(car) for transport for their child.

3. The Committee commented on the lack of clear definitive guidelines from Welsh Government for Learner Transport provision for Welsh Medium and Voluntary Aided Schools. The ambiguity of the statutory guidelines had led to various interpretations and understanding between both Officers and Members, which was unhelpful.

Recommendations:

- A. The Committee recommend that Home to School Transport provision for Voluntary Aided Schools remain in line with the proposals for Welsh Medium Schools whereby transport is provided irrespective of whether there are alternative non-faith or non-welsh schools being closer.
- B. The Committee recommend that should any reductions be made to Home to College Transport, they would strongly support mitigation measure 3 in the report, which is to 'provide free transport for those students in receipt of an Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) and who live outside the qualifying distance criterion of 3 miles.'
- C. The Committee expressed concerns that the proposal for charging for post-16 transport did not treat all learners equally as it proposes partially subsidising transport for school learners, with no similar proposals for college learners. The Committee therefore recommend that if this proposal is taken forward, in order to treat all learners equally, a similar provision should be made such as a comparable contribution towards bus passes for post-16 college learners.
- D. The Committee recommend that any proposals for changes to school transport need to consider a phased in approach whereby they are introduced incrementally. The Committee recommend that a phased approach is particularly important in relation to proposal (c); to remove all provision for Home to College transport; as well as proposal (e); to remove provision for Voluntary Aided schools where the school is not the nearest available school and beyond the statutory distance.
- E. The Committee recommend that termly payments for 'paying places' (as opposed to annual payments) be more widely promoted to parents in order to assist and encourage parents to take up these places.
- F. The Committee recommend that further discussions are held with FE providers to determine whether they can assist in contributions towards transport for their learners.

The Committee further highlighted the following as areas that still need to be considered for any proposed changes to Learner Transport:

- Road Safety Issues;
- All routes need to be risk assessed;
- Impact of increases in cars outside schools as a result of proposed changes to Learner Transport;

- Impact on attendance as a result of proposed changes to Learner Transport;
- Potential risks to children as there is no legal requirement for parents to accompany children to school, which could lead to an increase in children of a young age walking to school unaccompanied;
- Impact of proposed changes on the Authority's NEETs figures;
- Impact on the 14-19 Collaboration Agenda – Members highlighted this as a risk given the uncertainty of future grant funding for pupils' transport under this project. If grant funding were to be removed, these pupils would fall under the same transport policy as other learners and could therefore be greatly affected by the proposed changes to Learner Transport.

The Committee concluded by requesting that they receive the firm proposals, once they have been developed further following consultation, as a pre-scrutiny item, prior to any final decision being made by Cabinet.

4. Current Situation / proposal.

- 4.1 The officers' report is attached at Appendix A. It sets out the actions that have been undertaken since the Committee last considered this item and sets out the planned way forward.
- 4.2 When considering this item, it is the role of the Committee to note the progress that has been made and to consider whether it wishes to consider this item again during the three month consultation process.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework and Procedure Rules.

- 5.1 The work of the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee relates to the review and development of plans, policy or strategy that form part of the Policy Framework and consideration of plans, policy or strategy relating to the power to promote or improve economic, social or environmental well being in the County Borough of Bridgend.

6. Equality Impact Assessment

- 6.1 The equality implications are outlined in the officer's report attached as Appendix A.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1 The financial implications are outlined in the officer's report attached as Appendix A.

8. Recommendation

The Committee is asked to:

- i. Consider and discuss the information within the attached report;
- ii. Explore issues consistent with its challenge and support role;
- iii. determine whether it wishes to make any comments or recommendations relating to these reports.

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Background Documents:

None