

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL
REPORT TO SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEES ONE AND TWO

6 JULY 2020

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR EDUCATION AND FAMILY SUPPORT

LEARNER TRAVEL CONSULTATION

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1. The purpose of this report is to inform the committees of the outcome of the public consultation in relation to the local authority's Home-to-School/College Transport Policy and for the committees to consider and agree any recommendations it may wish to make to Cabinet when it meets to consider the matter in July 2020.

Executive summary

- 1.2. This report provides feedback on the outcome of the public consultation on proposals to amend the local authority's current Home to School/College Transport Policy. The public consultation prompted 1396 responses from the public and from learners. The results are a product of an online survey and ten public meetings as well as several bespoke consultation meetings/events with both primary and secondary school-age pupils. The analysis of the survey results is presented in the consultation report (see Appendix 2).
- 1.3. Five proposals were consulted upon as follows:

Proposal 1

Withdrawal of transport for all learners benefitting from an available walking route to school, in line with statutory distances of two miles for primary school-age pupils and three miles for secondary school-age pupils.

Proposal 2

Removal of escorts from all taxis and minibuses of less than 8 passengers.

Proposal 3

Removal from the local authority's Home to School/College Transport Policy of specific examples of the special circumstances where the local authority will provide discretionary transport.

Proposal 4

To stop providing free transport for learners aged 16 or over, who go to school or college other than those pupils who attend a Welsh-medium sixth-form at a school within Bridgend or who wish to pursue a faith-based education in a sixth-form at a voluntary aided school within Bridgend.

Proposal 5

To stop providing free transport for nursery-age pupils (aged three and four-years-old).

- 1.4. For Proposals 1, 2, 4 and 5, more respondents objected to the proposals than agreed with them. For Proposal 3, it was clear from the responses, that there was some misunderstanding over the intention of the proposal and therefore the majority of respondents were unsure about the proposal. Proposal 4 invoked the greatest proportion of objections from both respondents and from learners. Appendix 2 provides greater detail.
- 1.5. Detailed comments and suggestions were received via the written responses to the consultation. A summary of these are reported in Appendix 3, against the following main themes:
 - Time
 - Distance
 - Responsibility
 - Safety
 - Faith-based education
 - Welsh-medium education
 - Cost
 - Environment
 - Additional learning needs (ALN)
 - Attendance/attainment
 - Expectation

2. Connection to corporate improvement objectives/other corporate priorities

2.1. This report assists in the achievement of the following corporate priorities:

- **Helping people and communities to be healthy and resilient** - helping people and communities to be more health and resilient - taking steps to reduce or prevent people from becoming vulnerable or dependent on the Council and its services. Supporting individuals and communities to build resilience, and enable them to develop solutions to have active, healthy and independent lives
- **Smarter use of resources** - ensure that all resources (financial, physical, ecological, human and technological) are used as effectively and efficiently as possible and support the creation of resources throughout the community that can help to deliver the Council's well-being objectives.

3. Background

3.1. The learner transport budget has been under significant financial pressure for many years. Ongoing annual budget reductions under the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) have been significant with efficiency savings of £1.794m between 2014-2015 and 2019-2020. There has, however, also been some budget growth of £550k to

support increased pressure on the home-to-school transport budget in the period 2018-2020. Table 1 below provides further detail of these savings and growth.

Table 1 MTFS savings/growth 2014-2015 to 2019-2020

MTFS savings	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	TOTAL
	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	
Retender learner transport contracts	250	400	100				750
Rationalise special education needs transport	200	100	150				450
School transport route efficiencies		200	200	40			440
Phased implementation of Learner Transport Policy regarding statutory distances for free travel				20	67	67	154
TOTAL	450	700	450	60	67	67	1,794

MTFS growth	2014-2015	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019	2019-2020	TOTAL
	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	£000s	
Increasing costs associated with home-to-school transport, including demand for pupils with additional learning needs (ALN) and demographic growth						427	427
Transport costs for Welsh Government's Junior Apprenticeship Programme						42	42
Increase in costs of learner travel due to re-tender exercise that took place in 2017-2018					81		81
TOTAL					81	469	550

3.2. However, ongoing pressure on the home-to-school transport budget, as a result of the significant savings set against the budget identified in Table 1, has meant that year-on-year spend has exceeded the available annual budget, leading to a £1.1m

overspend position in 2019-2020. While there has been additional budget growth of £550k over the 2018-2019 to 2019-2020 period, this has only addressed the additional costs brought about primarily through increased contractor prices, changes to eligibility for pupils and additional costs associated with transporting pupils with ALN.

- 3.3. In addition to the savings and growth outlined in Table 1, the MTFs 2020-21 to 2023-24 approved by Council on 26 February 2020 includes additional proposals in 2020-2021 for the 'Phased implementation of Learner Transport Policy regarding statutory distances for free travel' of £75k which will bring the MTFs savings total to £1.869m since 2014-2015. In addition, Council approved additional funding growth of £356k relating to retendering of contracts for buses and taxis bringing the total growth to £906k since 2018-2019.
- 3.4. In September 2015, Cabinet determined changes to the local authority's Home to School/College Transport Policy in order to meet MTFs savings identified from 2016-2017 to 2019-2020. The policy change was implemented in September 2016. However, initial savings were predicated on the full implementation of a change to statutory distances of 2 miles for primary school-age children from the current 1.5 miles and 3 miles for secondary school-age children (including post-16 learners) from the current 2 miles. No change was proposed to nursery-age children eligibility of 1.5 miles. On implementing the policy change, Cabinet determined to protect the entitlement of all pupils currently benefitting from home-to-school transport at the former distances until they moved schools or moved from one phase of education to another. Furthermore, protection was provided for siblings of children already in receipt at the former distances.
- 3.5. Cabinet was not minded to remove the discretionary arrangements for post-16 learners, who would therefore continue to benefit from home-to-school/college transport at the 3-mile distance.
- 3.6. The 'in-receipt' and the 'sibling rule' entitlement has meant that, year-on-year, the number of pupils the policy change applies to, is relatively small. However, parents have challenged this inequity and have been critical of its intention, especially as children without siblings are disadvantaged.
- 3.7. In July 2019, Cabinet agreed to undertake a full 12-week public consultation on the following new proposals:
 - removal of escorts from all taxis and minibuses (excluding those transporting pupils with special education need) of less than 8 passengers;
 - withdrawal of transport for all learners benefitting from an identified and available (safe) routes to school in line with statutory distances of 2 miles for primary school-age pupils and 3 miles for secondary school-age pupils;
 - removal of 'sibling' and 'in receipt' protection for pupils;
 - removal from the local authority's Home to School/College Transport Policy of specific examples of the special circumstances where the local authority will provide discretionary transport;
 - removal of all transport for nursery pupils; and
 - removal of all post-16 transport.

- 3.8. The public consultation took place over a 12-week period from 14 October 2019 to 5 January 2020 and was available bilingually, through a variety of alternative formats. Consultation with learners took place throughout January at specially arranged events in the Council Chamber and in support of the separate consultation on the review of Post-16 education in Bridgend.
- 3.9. Two of the proposals agreed by Cabinet were combined as material issues into five total proposals that formed the proposals detailed in the public Consultation Document (see Appendix 1) and summarised at paragraph 1.4.
- 3.10. Table 2 below provides a summary of the impact of these proposals on learners if they were to be approved by Cabinet.

Table 2 Current and proposed learner travel policy arrangements

Post-16 transport		
Learner type	Current arrangement	Proposed arrangement (from September 2021)
Post-16 student (English-medium) Attending Bridgend College or the nearest college offering the course eg Coleg Cymoedd	Free home-to-college transport provided over three miles from college or where there is no available walking route (normally this is provided via a public service bus pass)	No home-to-college transport provided
Post-16 student (English-medium) Attends sixth-form at <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Brynteg School • Pencoed Comprehensive School • Cynffig Comprehensive School • Porthcawl Comprehensive School • Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen • Maesteg School • Bryntirion Comprehensive School 	Free home-to-school transport provided over three miles from school or where there is no available walking route.	No home-to-school transport provided
Post-16 student (Welsh-medium)	Free home-to-school transport provided over three miles from school or	No change

Post-16 transport		
Learner type	Current arrangement	Proposed arrangement (from September 2021)
Attends sixth-form at Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Llangynwyd	where there is no available walking route	
Post-16 student (faith-based education) Attends sixth-form at Archbishop McGrath Catholic High School	Free home-to-school transport provided over three miles from school or where there is no available walking route	No change
Post-16 student with additional learning needs (ALN) in specialist provision	Free home-to-school transport provided if over three miles from school or where there is no available walking route Free home-to-school transport also provided at the discretion of the local authority	Free home-to-school transport provided at the discretion of the local authority following an assessment of the needs of the learner
Post-16 student with ALN not in a specialist provision	Free home-to-school transport provided over three miles from school or where there is no available walking route	Free home-to-school transport provided at the discretion of the local authority following an assessment of the needs of the learner

School transport for secondary school-age pupils		
Learner type	Current arrangement	Proposed arrangement (from September 2021)

School transport for secondary school-age pupils

Learner type	Current arrangement	Proposed arrangement (from September 2021)
<p>Secondary school-age pupil (English-medium, Welsh-medium and faith-based education)</p> <p>Age 11-16</p> <p>Attends a secondary school which is their nearest suitable school, and they live over three miles from the school or no available walking route exists</p>	<p>Free home-to-school transport provided</p>	<p>No change</p>
<p>Secondary school-age pupil (English-medium, Welsh-medium and faith-based education)</p> <p>Age 11-16</p> <p>Attends a secondary school but it is not their nearest suitable school, as a parent has expressed their parental preference for an alternative school</p>	<p>No home-to-school transport provided</p>	<p>No change</p>
<p>Secondary school-age pupil (English-medium, Welsh-medium and faith-based education)</p> <p>Age 11-16</p> <p>Attends a secondary school which is their nearest suitable school, and they live over two miles from the school and they were previously in receipt of free home-to-</p>	<p>Home-to-school transport provided</p>	<p>Home-to-school transport provided only where the pupil lives over three miles from school or where there is no available walking route</p>

School transport for secondary school-age pupils		
Learner type	Current arrangement	Proposed arrangement (from September 2021)
school transport at this distance when the policy changed in September 2016		
<p>Secondary school-age pupil (English-medium, Welsh-medium and faith-based education)</p> <p>Age 11-16</p> <p>Attends a secondary school which is their nearest available school and they live over 2 miles from the school as they became eligible for free transport when the policy changed in September 2016 as a sibling was already attending the same school and was already in receipt of free home-to-school transport at this distance</p>	Home-to-school transport provided	Home-to-school transport provided only where the pupil lives over three miles from school or where there is no available walking route

School transport for primary school-age pupils		
Learner type	Current arrangement	Proposed arrangement (from September 2021)
<p>Primary age pupil (English-medium, Welsh-medium and faith-based education)</p> <p>Age 5-11</p> <p>Attends a primary school which is their nearest suitable school, and they live over two miles from the</p>	Home-to-school transport provided	No change

School transport for primary school-age pupils

Learner type	Current arrangement	Proposed arrangement (from September 2021)
<p>school or no available walking route exists</p>		
<p>Nursery-age pupil (English-medium, Welsh-medium and faith-based education)</p> <p>Age 5-11</p> <p>Attends a primary school, but it is not their nearest suitable school as a parent has expressed their parental preference for an alternative school</p>	<p>No home-to-school transport provided</p>	<p>No change</p>
<p>Primary school-age pupil (English-medium, Welsh-medium and faith-based education)</p> <p>Age 5-11</p> <p>Attends a primary school which is their nearest suitable school, and they live over 1.5 miles from the school, as they were previously in receipt of free home-to-school transport at this distance when the policy changed in September 2016</p>	<p>Home-to-school transport provided</p>	<p>Home-to-school transport provided only where the pupil lives over two miles from school or where there is no available walking route</p>
<p>Primary school-age pupil</p>	<p>Home-to-school transport provided</p>	<p>Home-to-school transport provided only where the</p>

School transport for primary school-age pupils		
Learner type	Current arrangement	Proposed arrangement (from September 2021)
<p>(English-medium, Welsh-medium and faith-based education)</p> <p>Age 5-11</p> <p>Attends a primary school which is their nearest suitable school and they live over 1.5 miles from the school and they became eligible for free transport when the policy changed in September 2016, as a sibling was already attending the same school and was already in receipt of free home-to-school transport at this distance</p>		<p>pupil lives over two miles from school or where there is no available walking route</p>

Transport for nursery children		
Learner type	Current arrangement	Proposed arrangement (from September 2021)
<p>Nursery age pupil (English-medium, Welsh-medium and faith-based education)</p> <p>Age 3-4</p> <p>Attends nursery school which is their nearest suitable school, and they live over 1.5 miles from the school or no available walking route exists</p>	<p>Home-to-school transport provided</p>	<p>No home-to-school transport provided</p>

Transport for nursery children		
Learner type	Current arrangement	Proposed arrangement (from September 2021)
<p>Nursery age pupil (English-medium, Welsh-medium and faith-based education)</p> <p>Age 3-4</p> <p>Attends nursery school, but it is not their nearest available school as a parent has expressed their parental preference for an alternative school</p>	No home-to-school transport provided	No change

3.11. Some learners with ALN who are of compulsory school age have their needs met within a mainstream school setting, but with prescribed support (confirmed on their Statement of Special Education Needs). For these learners travel assistance will be assessed and provided on an individual basis.

3.12. The Consultation Report (see Appendix 2) provides detail of the consultation approach taken and results.

3.13. In total, there were 1396 interactions during the consultation. The method of response is detailed below in Table 3 below.

Table 3 Consultation response interactions

Interactions	Number
Survey completions	943
Parents meetings	97
Pupil workshops	305
Emails	13
Letters	3
Social media comments	35
Total interactions	1396

4. Current situation

The outcome of the consultation

4.1. Proposal 1

Withdrawal of transport for all learners benefitting from an available walking route to school, in line with statutory distances of two miles for primary school-age pupils and 3 miles for secondary school-age pupils

4.2. There were three main responses relating to this proposal (for a full breakdown see consultation report in Appendix 2).

- 57% of the respondents and 76% of learners did not agree with the proposals.
- 29% of the respondents did agree with the proposal and 14% were unsure. Whereas 18% of learners agreed with this proposal and 6% were unsure.
- Of the 456 respondents disagreeing with the proposal 27% identified that it was too far to walk and would take too long especially in bad weather and 24% identified that children would be unsafe walking to school.
- Of the 296 learners responding, 14.5% identified that it would be too far to walk, 11% identified that the local authority should keep all transport and 9% identified that there was no safe walking route to school.

4.3. There did seem to be some misunderstanding of the already implemented distances of two miles for primary school-age pupils and three miles for secondary school-age pupils. The local authority's current Home-To-School/College Transport Policy was approved in September 2015 and implemented from September 2016. The local authority's current policy matches the statutory distances of two miles for primary school children and three miles for secondary school children are laid down in national legislation ie the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008.

4.4. Proposal 2

Removal of escorts from all taxis and minibuses of less than eight passengers

4.5. There did appear to be some confusion regarding this proposal, as many public respondents as well as learners, assumed that this proposal included the complete removal of escorts on vehicles for pupils with additional learning needs, even though this is not part of the proposal as clarified in the consultation document.

- 43% of the respondents and 35% of learners did not agree with the proposals.
- 37% of the respondents did agree with the proposal and 20% were unsure. Whereas 37% of learners agreed with this proposal and 28% were unsure.
- Of the 264 respondents disagreeing with the proposal 16% identified that there could be safeguarding issues for both children and driver and 15% identified that child safety could be compromised.
- Of the 303 learners responding 40% provided reasons for their responses, 18% of these commented that escorts were not needed, 18% commented that an escort was not needed if the driver makes the pupil feel comfortable and safe and 16% commented that escorts provide personal/medical support.

4.6. It is important to note that the role of escorts is not to provide any form of medical support to pupils, merely to ensure pupil and vehicle safety by communicating with the driver who takes ultimate charge of the safety of the vehicle and occupants. Any emergency situation would be dealt with via the vehicle stopping and the emergency

services being contacted. Escorts are not authorised to administer medication to pupils or provide any personal support.

4.7. Proposal 3

Removal from the local authority's Home to School/College Transport Policy of specific examples of the special circumstances where the local authority will provide discretionary transport

4.8. There did appear to be some confusion regarding this proposal, as it does not identify a specific reduction of provision, merely the refinement of the Home to School/College Transport Policy.

- 37% of the respondents and 31% of learners did not agree with the proposal. 20% of respondents and 44% of learners agreed with this proposal.
- 43% of respondents and 25% of learners were unsure.
- There 138 comments from respondents disagreeing with the proposal. Of these 25% identified that each pupil should be assessed on a case by case basis and 14% identified that the service is needed.
- 78 learners responding provided comments. 34% of these commented that it will encourage more people to apply and 26% commented that pupils with special circumstances should have this transport.

4.9. Proposal 4

To stop providing free transport for learners aged 16 or over, who go to school or college

4.10. A significant 71% of public respondents and 85% of learners did not agree with this proposal.

- 18% of public respondents and 8% of learners agreed with this proposal.
- 11% of public respondents and 7% of learners were unsure.
- There were 412 comments received from respondents disagreeing with the proposal. Of these, 19% identified that 'it will discourage young people from attending sixth form' and 54% identified that it will be costly to pay for transport. 13% commented that it would negatively impact young people living in poverty/deprived areas and a similar 13% commented that we should encourage young people to attend sixth form.
- 136 learners responding provided comments. 41% of these commented that pupils will be unable to pay for travel and 20% commented that this proposal limits opportunities for pupils.

4.11. Respondents and learners were asked to identify who they believed should still receive free post-16 transport if this was to be removed. Disabled young people (694) and young people in care (572) were the two highest responses from public respondents. Learners chose disabled young people' (155) followed by 'care leavers' (96).

4.12. Proposal 5

To remove all transport for nursery pupils

- 58% of the respondents and 63% of learners did not agree with the proposals.
- 25% of the respondents did agree with the proposal and 17% were unsure. Whereas 26% of learners agreed with this proposal and 11% were unsure.
- Of the 246 respondents disagreeing with the proposal 19% identified that it would impact negatively on Welsh-medium education and 15% commented it would be difficult for working parents.
- 117 learners responded with comments 27% commented that Welsh-medium education should be protected.

4.13. The community engagement workshops primarily identified concerns in relation to safe walking routes and the distance from home-to-school and how this is measured. The impact on post-16 learners was also identified as a concern and that the proposal to remove post-16 transport should be considered alongside the proposed options for post-16 education in Bridgend.

5. Effect upon policy framework and procedure rules

5.1. There are no implications for the Council's policy framework or procedure rules.

6. Equality Impact Assessment (EIA)

6.1. An initial screening has been carried out. A full EIA will be produced to accompany the report to Cabinet on the outcome of the consultation when it is considered.

7. Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 Assessment

7.1. A Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 assessment has been completed. A summary of the implications from the assessment relating to the five ways of working is as follows:

Long-term Ongoing reliance on the local authority to provide free home-to-school transport where this is not supported by national policy will have a significant impact on the ability of the local authority to support and sustain other critical services long-term. National government policy supports active travel and the reduction in the reliance on private and public transport. Benefits include the reduction in emissions, less dependence on fossil fuels and improvements to health and wellbeing.

Prevention The proposal to remove discretionary transport is not taken lightly. However, there are current tensions in respect of the inequity in the current policy. The proposal, therefore, is for a public consultation to address the inequity in the local authority's Home to School/College Transport Policy and to ensure that further budget efficiencies.

Integration The local authority has a strategic role in facilitating the attendance of pupils to school where they are eligible for free home-to-school transport or where it is provided under the discretion of the local authority.

Collaboration The local authority works closely with schools and pupils to ensure that the needs of learners are taken into consideration in the identification and delivery of transport services.

Involvement The local authority intends to involve all sectors of society in consulting on its proposals. This will involve sufficient time and resources to fully identify, understand and respond to the issues identified for individuals and their communities.

8. Financial implications

- 8.1. There are significant potential efficiency savings associated with this public consultation. The pressure on the home-to-school/college transport budget is significant (see Table 1).
- 8.2. The learner transport budget has reduced by £1.794m from 2014-2015 to 2019-2020 with future year savings also identified as part of ongoing medium-term financial strategy savings.
- 8.3. For 2019-2020, there is a school/college transport budget of £5.47m with a projected £761k overspend for the current financial year as at Quarter 3. The provision of post-16 transport (c. £500k), nursery transport (c. £40k) and transport escorts (c. £35k) are all non-statutory.
- 8.4. £906k of recurring corporate funding has been allocated to support the learner transport budget covering the period 2018-2019 to 2020-2021.
- 8.5. Table 4 below identifies the potential savings associated with each of the five policy proposals being put forward for consideration.

Table 4 Approximate savings for learner transport policy proposals

	Proposal	Potential Savings
Proposal 1	Withdrawal of transport for all learners benefitting from an available walking routes to school, in line with statutory distances of two miles for primary school-age pupils and three miles for secondary school-age pupils	£200k
Proposal 2	Removal of escorts from all taxis and minibuses of less than eight passengers	£35k
Proposal 3	Removal from the local authority's Home to School/College Transport Policy of specific examples of the special circumstances where the local authority will provide discretionary transport	£0k
Proposal 4	To stop providing free transport for learners aged 16 or over, who go to school or college	£500k
Proposal 5	To remove all transport for nursery pupils	£40k
	Total	£775k

9. Recommendation

9.1 It is recommended that Committees:

- note the content of this report and the outcomes from the consultation (see Appendix 2); and
- consider any recommendations the Committees may wish to make to Cabinet which are consistent with their challenge and support role in light of the proposals and the consultation responses.

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Background documents

Cabinet report, 1 September 2015, Learner Travel Policy
Cabinet report, 23 July 2019, Learner Travel Efficiencies
Report to Subject Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2, 5 February 2020, Home-To-School Transport

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Learner Travel Consultation Document, October 2019
Appendix 2 - Learner Travel Consultation Report, February 2020
Appendix 3 - Learner Travel Consultation, Emerging Themes