

<b>Meeting of:</b>	<b>SUBJECT OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 1</b>
<b>Date of Meeting:</b>	<b>16 SEPTEMBER 2024</b>
<b>Report Title:</b>	<b>CABINET RESPONSE TO THE COMMITTEE'S RECOMMENDATIONS ON THE LEARNER TRAVEL CONSULTATION OUTCOME</b>
<b>Report Owner / Corporate Director:</b>	<b>CHIEF OFFICER – LEGAL &amp; REGULATORY SERVICES, HR &amp; CORPORATE POLICY</b>
<b>Responsible Officer:</b>	<b>MERYL LAWRENCE SENIOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES OFFICER - SCRUTINY</b>
<b>Policy Framework and Procedure Rules:</b>	<b>The work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committees relates to the review and monitoring of plans, policy or strategy that form part of the Council's Policy Framework and consideration of plans, policy or strategy relating to the power to promote or improve economic, social or environmental wellbeing in the County Borough of Bridgend. Any changes to the structure of the Scrutiny Committees and the procedures relating to them would require the Bridgend County Borough Council Constitution to be updated.</b>
<b>Executive Summary:</b>	<b>Following consideration of the Learner Travel Consultation Outcome report at the meeting on 18 July 2024, the Committee made 12 Recommendations, which were presented to the meeting of Cabinet on 23 July 2024.</b>  <b>The Cabinet Response is attached to this report as Appendix A, for the Committee's information.</b>

## **1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide the response from the Cabinet, attached as **Appendix A**, to the Recommendations made by the Committee on the Learner Travel Outcome Consultation report on 18 July 2024, which were presented to the Cabinet meeting held on 23 July 2024.

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 The Committee considered a report regarding the Learner Travel Consultation Outcome at its meeting on 18 July 2024, the purpose of which was to:

- Inform the Committee of the outcome of the public consultation in relation to the local authority's Home-to School/College Transport Policy; and
- For the Committee to consider and agree any Recommendations it wished to make to Cabinet when it met to consider the matter on 23 July 2024.

2.2 Given the close timings of the Committee meeting and the meeting of Cabinet on 23 July 2024, it was agreed that a verbal presentation be made to Cabinet in respect of any Recommendations from the Committee in light of the proposals and consultation responses.

### **3. Current situation / proposal**

3.1 The Committee considered the Learner Travel Consultation Outcome report on 18 July 2024 and, following its examination and detailed discussions with Cabinet Members and Officers invited, the Committee made 12 Recommendations to Cabinet for consideration:

#### **Recommendations:**

##### **Recommendation 1**

The Committee highlighted that, as Corporate Parents, all Councillors have a responsibility to Care Experienced Children and young people and recommended that consideration of how they might be affected by the Home to School Transport (HTST) proposals be explored as part of the Cabinet's decision.

##### **Recommendation 2**

Evidence at the meeting suggested that the proposals could have a potential impact on attendance and educational outcomes of pupils, particularly in areas of higher social deprivation. Members recommended that, if possible, prior to the decision of Cabinet, information and analysis be sought from other Local Authorities to understand the level of this impact in order to inform Cabinet's decision.

##### **Recommendation 3**

The Committee highlighted the importance of communication with parents as well as children and young people regarding any potential changes or ways in which they may be affected and recommended that this be a priority following any decision, in order to ensure they are aware at the earliest opportunity.

#### **Proposal 1**

##### **Recommendation 4**

The Committee highlighted various concerns regarding some of the routes to school currently regarded as safe, such as some areas having no pedestrian crossings, routes not being maintained and the lighting along them insufficient for dark winter evenings. The Committee therefore recommended:

- That all safe routes to schools be reviewed termly;
- That a mechanism be provided for parents to provide feedback on any issues with the routes so that they can be rectified quickly.

### **Recommendation 5**

Members discussed the issue surrounding children and young people having to walk to school, potentially 3 miles under the new proposals, in various bad weather conditions, and then some pupils also potentially being wet all day resulting from continued crossing of the school site in bad weather to access their classes. The Committee expressed concern over the potential for this to affect pupil attendance on days where the weather was bad. Members also expressed concern over reports that pupils were at times having to wait significant lengths of time for BCBC contracted buses to pick them up from school which meant that pupils and teachers were often waiting outside in awful weather.

- a. The Committee recommended that the Local Authority work closely with schools and teachers to try and ensure provision is made for pupils to either dry their clothing or possibly change when arriving at school.
- b. Likewise, that provision is made to keep pupils safe and warm after school should they have to wait a while for either a public bus or a BCBC contracted bus to get home.
- c. Members further recommended that the Authority explore with contractors the times that they are arriving at schools to pick pupils up to minimise waiting times for both pupils and teachers.

### **Proposals 3 and 4**

#### **Comment**

Whilst appreciating that the LA's strategy is to grow Welsh Medium education and the number of placements, the Committee expressed concern over the capacity of Welsh Medium schools as well as Faith Schools to account for the potential increase in applications for these schools given that their nursery and post-16 transport provision will be protected under these proposals.

### **Proposal 4**

#### **Recommendation 6**

Should this proposal be agreed, Members highlighted that there will inevitably be an increased reliance on public buses by post-16 pupils to enable them to get to school or college. The Committee therefore recommended that prior to any decision being made on post-16, the LA explore whether there are public buses going near or past each school that offers post-16 education and where there is not, the potential impact of this on pupils then opting out of post-16 education be fully understood. There was particular concern amongst the Committee of the significant impact these changes could potentially have for post-16 pupils living in the Llynfi, Ogmere and Garw Valleys, and the removal of transport for them leading to a potential removal of access to post-16 education.

### **Recommendation 7**

Members recommended that the LA work with local bus companies as soon as possible to consider how they could assist with post-16 transport provision to schools and colleges across the Borough. Furthermore, that the LA also explore any opportunities with the current contracted bus companies to consider if there is anything that they would possibly be willing to provide in terms of a local bus service which would assist pupils accessing schools and colleges. Members also requested that the LA ensure all bus routes and timetables are communicated to post-16 pupils affected by this change.

### **Recommendation 8**

The Committee recommended that the LA explore with Bridgend and Pencoed Colleges whether they would be willing to support their learners in providing free bus passes to eligible pupils, similar to schemes that are provided in colleges in other Welsh LAs.

### **Recommendation 9**

Members queried whether the proposed changes to Post-16 transport would be in line with the LA's commitments under the Wellbeing of Future Generations Act. Whilst acknowledging that the report summarises the implications relating to the five ways of working under the Act, the Committee felt that the response does not capture the impact of children no longer being able to attend post-16 education. The Committee therefore recommend that this be fully considered and the impact under the Act be made clearer.

### **Recommendation 10**

The Committee expressed concern over potential vulnerable pupils who might be disadvantaged by these proposals, such as those who would not be able to afford a bus pass to access post-16 education and were then at a higher risk of becoming NEET (*Not in Education, Employment or Training*). The Committee recommended that consideration be given to this, and the potential of a means tested scheme for pupils considered as vulnerable.

### **Proposal 5**

### **Recommendation 11**

The Committee recommended that clarification be sought on whether the mileage allowance of 45 pence per mile is sufficient to cover any extra costs parents/carers might incur such as any insurance costs if this was seen as a business mileage allowance. Similarly further clarification be considered as to whether this allowance would have any potential tax or benefit implications for parents/carers.

### **Monitoring Impact**

### **Recommendation 12**

During their consideration of the proposals, it was acknowledged by the Cabinet Member that if the proposals were agreed it would inevitably lead to some individual issues and problems and that this was unfortunately unavoidable when looking to reduce certain areas to the statutory minimum. In order to try and respond to these issues, he reported that he would be looking to set up and chair a monitoring group that would consider the impact of any changes to HTST and respond to these as

necessary. He explained that this group would engage with Officers across the various directorates when required to try and see how problems could be overcome.

a) The Committee welcomed the establishment of this Group and recommended that it specifically look to consider some of the aspects mentioned in the above comments and recommendations including:

- Regular review, maintenance and issues relating to Safe Routes to School;
- How schools are responding to pupils walking to school in bad weather conditions such as suitable facilities to dry or change clothes;

As well as:

- Impact on NEETs figure, pupil attendance, absenteeism, vehicle traffic outside schools;
- Ensuring that the LA is still meeting its requirements of the Wellbeing and Future Generations Act, particularly in relation to post-16 pupils;
- Consideration of disabled access and parking at schools and colleges to assist families and young people with getting to and from school safely, particularly as these proposals could potentially result in an increase in traffic outside schools;
- How schools are using timetabling to potentially assist its post-16 pupils in reducing the impact from these proposals, for example reducing the need of a pupil to have to attend school for only one class on a specific day;
- How schools were sharing best practices in the ways they were responding to these proposals and supporting their pupils with accessing education safely.

b) The Committee recommended that it was essential that school leaders were involved with any monitoring of impact from the proposed changes to HTST as well as any resulting actions.

3.2 The Committee's Recommendations were verbally presented to Cabinet on 23 July 2024.

3.3 The Cabinet Response to the Committee's recommendations is provided in **Appendix A** to this report, for the Committee's information.

#### **4. Equality implications (including Socio-economic Duty and Welsh Language)**

4.1 The protected characteristics identified within the Equality Act, Socio-economic Duty and the impact on the use of the Welsh Language have been considered in the preparation of this report. As a public body in Wales, the Council must consider the impact of strategic decisions, such as the development or the review of policies, strategies, services and functions. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable equality impacts as a result of this report.

## **5. Well-being of Future Generations implications and connection to Corporate Well-being Objectives**

- 5.1 The well-being goals identified in the Act were considered in the preparation of this report. It is considered that there will be no significant or unacceptable impacts upon the achievement of well-being goals/objectives as a result of this report.
- 5.2 The Act provides the basis for driving a different kind of public service in Wales, with 5 Ways of Working to guide how public services should work to deliver for people. The scrutiny function contributes to the 5 Ways of Working set out in the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and how they contribute to the Council developing its own five ways of working, driving and measuring those ways of working.
- 5.3 The scrutiny arrangements assists in the achievement of the Council's 7 Well-being Objectives under the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, listed below:
1. A County Borough where we protect our most vulnerable
  2. A County Borough with fair work, skilled, high-quality jobs and thriving towns
  3. A County Borough with thriving valleys communities
  4. A County Borough where we help people meet their potential
  5. A County Borough that is responding to the climate and nature emergency
  6. A County Borough where people feel valued, heard and part of their community
  7. A County Borough where we support people to live healthy and happy lives

## **6. Climate Change Implications**

- 6.1 There are no Climate Change Implications arising from this report.

## **7. Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications**

- 7.1 There are no Safeguarding and Corporate Parent Implications arising from this report.

## **8. Financial Implications**

- 8.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

## **9. Recommendation**

- 9.1 The Committee is recommended to note the response from the Cabinet attached as **Appendix A**, to the Recommendations made by the Committee on the Learner Travel Outcome Consultation report on 18 July 2024, presented to the Cabinet meeting held on 23 July 2024.

**Background documents:** None.