BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

DATE 17 FEBRUARY 2015

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR EDUCATION AND TRANSFORMATION LEARNER TRAVEL POLICY

1. Purpose of Report.

1.1. The purpose of this report is to inform the Children and Young People's Overview and Scrutiny Committee of the outcome of the public consultation in relation to the review of the Council's learner travel arrangements and for Committee to consider and agree any recommendations it may want to make to Cabinet when it meets to consider the matter in March 2015 in light of the proposals and the consultation responses.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1. The report links to the following corporate priorities:-
 - Working together to make the best use of resources.
 - Working together to raise ambitions and drive up educational achievement.

3. Background

- 3.1. The Council's approved medium term financial strategy (MTFS) 2013/14 to 2017/18 seeks to achieve potential revenue savings in the home to school/college transport budget through amendments to the Learner Travel Policy.
- 3.2. Table 1 below indicates the main events since the original public consultation on the learner travel policy to date, including the September 2014 Cabinet approval for a new 12 week consultation on the following three proposals:-

Proposal 1

To increase the distance required for free transport between a pupil's home and their school, to match the distance required by law (including Welsh and religious schools).

Proposal 2

To charge the full cost of a school bus pass for pupils who do not receive free school transport.

Proposal 3

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

Table 1: Schedule of events 2013-14

Event	Date	Outcome
Cabinet approval to consult with the public on Learner Travel proposals	17 Sept 2013	Approved
Public consultation commences	16 Dec 2013 to 24 Jan 2014	Consultation suspended on 14 January 2014 in light of views expressed through the consultation process and in light of the national consultation on Learner Travel Operational Guidance.
Cabinet approval to consult with the public on revised Learner Travel proposals	16 Sept 2014	12 week consultation approved
Public consultation commences	29 Sept 2014 to 22 Dec 2014	Successful consultation. Consultation outcome report prepared (see Appendix 1.)
Outcome of consultation reported to Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee	17 Feb 2015	To be decided
Outcome of consultation reported to Cabinet (including advice from Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting of the 17 February 2015	3 March 2015	To be decided

- 3.3. Consultation held between 29 September 2014 and 22 December 2014.
- 3.4. As a result of lessons learned in respect of the initial consultation in December 2013, there has been a significant investment in the approach that the Local Authority (LA) has taken to consult with the public as a new public consultation exercise.
- 3.5. The consultation took place over a 12 week period and was available bilingually, through a variety of alternative formats.
- 3.6. The consultation included:-
 - a full range of scheduled user engagement events at venues across the County Borough.

- full use of the Council's website.
- a web link was sent to all key stakeholders e.g., Bridgend College and promoted on all promotional items such as press releases, posters etc.
- use of social media, especially Twitter.
- letters to parents of all pupils within Bridgend schools (via pupil post).
- Further direct communication with key stakeholders including Head teachers, governing bodies, parent governors, Bridgend Youth Council, etc.
- Schools use of their own texting service and other forms of communication such as newsletters etc.
- 3.7. Table 2 below details the breakdown of the responses to the survey of which there were 725. Of the responses received 693 were in English and 32 were in Welsh.

Table 2: Breakdown of consultation responses

Format	English	Welsh	Total
Paper	552	1	553
Online	131	31	162
Email	7	0	7
Letter	2	0	2
Report	1	0	1
Total	693	32	725

- 3.8. The questionnaires were developed in plain English with clear proposals that could be easily understood. The focus of the consultation was on seeking feedback on the impact of the proposed policy changes on pupils, parents and families rather than asking respondents to consider whether they agreed with the proposals.
- 3.9. Summary of consultation responses and main findings in respect of each proposal.
- 3.10. Full details of the Learner Travel Review Consultation results are reported in Appendix 1.

Proposal 1

To increase the distance required for free transport between a pupil's home and their school, to match the distance required by law (including Welsh Medium and Voluntary Aided schools)

- 3.11. This would mean that from September 2016 the following would apply to the council's free school transport:-
 - Pupils in primary schools living 2 miles or further from home to their nearest suitable school would receive free transport.
 - (N.B The current provision for primary schools is 1.5 miles.)
 - Pupils in secondary (comprehensive) schools living **3 miles** or further from home to their nearest suitable school would receive free transport.
 - (N.B The current provision for secondary schools is 2 miles.)

- Pupils in Voluntary Aided and Welsh Medium schools living 2 miles or further for primary schools and 3 miles or further for secondary schools would receive free transport regardless of whether the school is the nearest suitable school.
- Only when a child begins school full-time or changes their school, will the new change apply.
- If a child is already in receipt of free home to school transport at a school and their brother or sister starts their full-time education at that school whilst they are there, they too will receive free transport until they also change school.
- 3.12. This would mean that the move to statutory minimum distances would equally apply to all schools in Bridgend County Borough, regardless of whether they are mainstream schools, Voluntary Aided or Welsh Medium. Currently all learners attending voluntary aided or Welsh medium schools regardless of whether the school is the nearest suitable school, receive free transport.
- 3.13. The outcome of the consultation indicated that this could be considered as the least contentious proposal.
- 3.14. There were three main responses relating to this proposal (for a full breakdown see consultation report in Appendix 1).
 - i. **34%** of respondents indicated that there would be **little or no impact** on them or their families.
 - ii. Of the respondents currently stating they use free transport **almost two in three (65 per cent)** said that the introduction of proposal one would have little or no impact on either themselves or their family.
 - iii. 16% indicated that there would likely be some **financial impact** on them in having to find additional monies to fund transport for their child; and
 - iv. 13% indicated that they would possibly consider a change from Welsh medium to English medium education if the proposal was adopted.
- 3.15. Points for consideration:
 - i. A relatively high percentage (34%) of respondents do not consider this proposal to have a significant impact on them or their families.
 - ii. Of the respondents currently stating they use free transport **almost two in three (65 per cent)** said that the introduction of proposal one would have little or no impact on either themselves or their family.
 - iii. It is possible that the proposal could have a detrimental impact on some families personal finances if they choose to pay for their child's continued home to school transport especially if this proposal is adopted alongside proposal 2 (increasing the cost of a paying place to the actual cost.)
 - iv. There may be scenarios (see Appendix 2 for examples) where secondary school pupils living up to 2.9 miles away from their nearest suitable school and primary school pupils living up to 1.9 miles away, who may also not have access to private transport, or be unable to fund the cost of daily transport, would be required to walk almost 6 miles daily too and from school. Therefore, due to the enhanced rights of pupils with siblings already attending school eligible for free transport, there are likely to be some

- inequalities with other pupils of the same age without siblings living at the same distance from their nearest suitable school or potentially at a greater distance. (however such anomalies are likely to exist currently too) See Appendix 2 for example scenarios
- V. However, it is important to remember that statutory distances of 2 miles for primary school children and 3 miles for secondary school children are laid down in legislation i.e. the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008. BCBC has provided over the statutory minimum for many years.
- vi. There is the potential for any decision by Cabinet to accept proposal one, to potentially have a greater impact on our Welsh Medium Secondary School, Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Llangynwyd (YGG Llangynwyd). YGG Llangynwyd is located in the north of the County Borough which means that any alteration to the free transport distance from two miles to three miles as well as the potential impact of proposal three to withdraw free transport for post 16 pupils (currently provided beyond 2 miles) may have a more significant impact on these pupils. Therefore, if pupils live within walking distance of an English medium comprehensive, the cost and the risk of not being guaranteed a seat on the bus could encourage parents or pupils/students themselves to consider attending an English medium comprehensive.
- vii. Cabinet will therefore need to consider the reasonableness of this in light of the LA's duty in section 10 of the Learner Travel Wales Measure to promote education through the medium of the welsh language.

3.16. Impact on current identified MTFS savings

3.17. Table 3 below identifies the current savings identified in relation to proposals 1-3. However, the total savings are unlikely to be met in the same timescale indicated in the MTFS as these were based on the previous proposals outlined in the report to Cabinet on 17 September 2013.

Table 3: Re-profiled MTFS – Learner Transport (excerpt from July 2014) relevant to current proposals

MTFS Ref.	Savings Proposals	Indicative 2016-17 £000	Indicative 2017-18 £000	Indicative 2018-19 £000
CH5	Review of Learner Transport Policy regarding statutory distances for free travel	250	240	
CH7	Increase charges for paid places on home to school transport	25		
CH8	Cease provision of non-statutory free post-16 transport	300	200	400
CH11	Review of learner transport policy regarding charging for post 16 transport	50	25	

- 3.18. There is now far more complexity around the ability of the Local Authority to meet the savings previously identified in the MTFS during the 2016/17 to 2017/18 period in particular, as the proposal introduces greater complexity around the rights of pupils with siblings and the fact that those pupils currently eligible for free transport of statutory school age, will continue to receive this until they change school. Therefore the overall savings are now very difficult to quantify for both primary and secondary schools.
- 3.19. Learners who are currently in year 5 and who commence their year 6 education in September 2015 (last year of primary education) will be the first to experience the impact of the policy change when they transition to secondary education in September 2016. Table 4 identifies that there are currently just under 1500 year 7 pupils currently on roll in Bridgend schools. Of these 33% have siblings currently in primary schools who would retain the right to free transport under the 'family' element of the current proposal if their sibling currently in the same comprehensive school as they will transition to, is already receiving free transport.
- 3.20. It is important to note that the impact of the proposal is spread over a period of 5 years (siblings currently in years 2 to 6). Of these, 137 pupils will transition in from primary to secondary education in September 2016 (current yr 5 pupils) as eligible siblings and of these only an estimated 46 pupils (based on 38.8% identified in Table 4 below) are likely to be eligible for free transport across all our comprehensive schools (as pupils living beyond 3 miles).

Table 4: Current year 7 pupils with siblings in Bridgend Comprehensive Schools

	No. of yr. 7 pupils (Jan. 2015)	No. of yr. 7 pupils with siblings (Jan. 2015)	No. of siblings in feeder primary schools in yrs. 2- 6	No. of yr. 5 pupils eligible for free transport in Sept 16	Percentage of current year 7 pupils with eligible siblings	Pupils receiving free transport as a percentage of all pupils*
Archbishop McGrath	116	36	45	16	31.0%	79.6%
Brynteg	211	71	86	17	33.6%	29.6%
Bryntirion	163	51	59	16	31.3%	0.0%
C C Y Dderwen	231	78	92	19	33.8%	74.5%
Cynffig	128	45	60	15 35.2%		35.8%
Maesteg	181	60	85	8	33.1%	36.8%
Pencoed	162	43	51	10	26.5%	9.0%
Porthcawl	191	66	71	21	34.6%	10.8%
YGG Llangynwyd	114	47	60	15	41.2%	100%
Total	1497	497	609	137	33.2%	38.8%

*NB Data on pupils eligible for free transport may not be entirely accurate as some eligibility is assessed on previous years data for pupils in years 6 to 7 and years 11 to 12 etc.

3.21. It is extremely difficult to undertake the same analysis within primary schools as the data available to us to determine the impact of the 'family' element of the policy i.e., non school age pupils who will enter year 1 at the age of 5 in September 2016, is limited. Even though we can identify all pupils in our primary schools, the numbers and spread of their siblings who are likely to enter primary education in September in 2016 is not robust enough to include in any meaningful analysis. There is potential for yet unborn children to be still eligible if their siblings are eligible for free transport in September 2016.

Proposal 2

To charge the full cost of a school bus pass for pupils who do not receive free school transport.

- 3.22. The proposal involves increasing the charge for a surplus seat on a school bus for pupils who are not eligible for free transport.
- 3.23. When setting the budget for 2013/14 full Council agreed to increase the charge to £270 per annum for both primary and secondary school pupils. However this equates to £1.42 per day and is well below the actual cost of a seat as identified in the Table below

Table 5: The actual cost of a paying place on BCBC school buses 2013-14

Cost of primary school transport provision per primary school pupil	£756.41
Total number of operating days 1 st April to 31 st March	190
Cost per day	£3.98
Cost of secondary school transport provision per secondary school	£646.98
pupil	
Total number of operating days 1st April to 31st March	190

Cost per day £3.4	1
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3.24. The charges above would fluctuate in line with the cost of the service. However, this would likely reduce in line with efficiencies currently being implemented and the cost reductions as a result of the re-procurement of services from operators.

- 3.25. The consultation asked for people's views and comments about charging the actual cost for a seat on a school bus.
- 3.26. 35% respondents stated that the increase would make a paying place too expensive and suggestions were received that a subsidy should continue to be offered (albeit not at the same rate). However more pragmatic suggestions were also made around spreading the cost by making monthly payments. It is also worth noting that only 2% of respondents identified that they would actually be affected if the increase was introduced.
- 3.27. The second most popular response (23% of respondents) stated that the effect would have little or no effect on them, however it was recognised that the change could potentially affect parents through causing changes in lifestyle such as a change/reduction in working hours and modes of travel that people use.
- 3.28. Our community engagement workshops also highlighted the fact that people felt strongly that if parents/pupils were willing to pay for school transport then it should be available for them. Currently only 48 pupils have a "paying place" on secondary school transport as there are limited surplus places and on some routes there are waiting lists for these places.
- 3.29. Table 6 below illustrates the difference in cost between the actual and currently charged cost of the paying places currently being used, if the proposed increase was introduced.

Table 6: Charging difference between actual and currently charged cost of a paying place

Number of current surplus places being utilised	48
Actual cost to BCBC of surplus places per annum	£31,055
Current charge for these places	£12,960
Benefit to the Council of increasing the charge	£18,095

- 3.30. This proposal implemented on its own would not generate significant savings. However, there are potential significant expected benefits /Income to the Council if implemented in conjunction with one or both of the other current proposals.
- 3.31. The impact of proposal 3 (To stop providing free transport for learners aged 16 or over, who go to school or college) on the availability of paying places.
- 3.32. Table 7 below identifies the potential availability of paying places as a direct result of post 16 pupils losing their entitlement to free transport from September 2016 who attend Bridgend college. This is the easiest saving to quantify as this is not a service that is put on by the Local Authority, it is for passes for public transport. Therefore if removed, there would be an immediate saving of £253,208 based on the cost of the existing service.

Table 7 – Current cost of providing free transport to Post 16 Learners in Bridgend College

Bridgend College location	No. of post 16 learners currently eligible of free transport	Annual cost of passes
BRIDGEND	412	£151,410
PENCOED	277	£101,798
Total	689	£253,208

3.33. The savings to the LA relating to the comprehensive schools of removing post 16 provision is more complicated as post 16 learners use the same buses as pupils of statutory school age. Table 8 below identifies the current numbers of Post 16 learners and the cost of the over all service to the school.

Table 8 – Current cost of providing free transport to Learners in Comprehensive Schools

School	No. of pupils (post 16)	No. of post 16 pupils currently recorded as eligible for free transport*	Percentage of all post 16 pupils currently recorded as eligible for free transport	Annual cost of contract (all ages)
Archbishop McGrath				
Catholic School	152	154	100%	£300,941
Brynteg School	446	142	31.8%	£145,730
Bryntirion Comprehensive	204	0	0.0%	£0
Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen	173	259	100%	£174,610
Cynffig Comprehensive	107	33	30.8%	£72,960
Maesteg Comprehensive School	208	102	49.0%	£152,000
Pencoed School	146	15	10.3%	£38,950
Porthcawl Comprehensive	343	33	9.6%	£58,140
Ysgol Gyfun Gymraeg Llangynwyd	122	151	100%	£258,020
Grand Total	1901	889	46.8%	£1,201,351

*NB Data on post 16 pupils recorded as eligible for free transport may not be entirely accurate as some eligibility is assessed on previous years data for pupils in years 11 to 12.

- 3.34. Even though there are currently 889 pupils in secondary schools who could potentially lose their entitlement to free transport (N.B the number in September 2016 will vary) it is unlikely that such a proposal would have a significant impact on the overall cost of the service to each Comprehensive School. It would be incorrect to state for example, that the 173 pupils in Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen would significantly reduce the number of buses required as there are currently 16 buses contracted to the school, so the current post 16 pupils would be spread over all of these buses. There may be some opportunity to reduce routes and buses but as yet we are unable to quantify these.
- 3.35. The LA would however, be able to offer the equivalent number of seats freed up as a result of the removal of the free transport provision to post 16 pupils, to learners of statutory school age who would lose their entitlement in September 2016 i.e., those

transitioning from year 6 to year 7 and who do not have siblings in the same school. Table 9 identifies the possible numbers of year 7 pupils who, as based on current data, would and would not be eligible for free transport against the number of seat freed up as a result of the removal of free transport.

- 3.36. For those schools where the number of seats is lower than the number of pupils who are no longer eligible for a free transport such as Coleg Cymunedol Y Dderwen, or where there is limited take-up of the offer of a paying place, the remaining seats could then be offered to post 16 pupils.
- 3.37. The LA would need to determine the interest in paying places as early as possible, limited interest would mean that existing bus numbers and routes would need to be rationalised to ensure efficiency of the contracts. If these were reduced, the number of paying places would be more limited.
- 3.38. Based on existing numbers of pupils, offering these seats could potentially generate £575,983 of receipts.

Table 9 - Possible overall annual receipts generated by Post 16 paying places

	No. of year 7 pupils (Jan. 2015)	Percentage of current year 7 pupils with eligible siblings	Percentage of current year 7 pupils without eligible siblings	No. of year 7 pupils potentially not eligible for free transport in Sept. 2016	No. of potentially available paying places as a result of removal of post16 eligibility	Possible overall annual receipts generated if all paying places were taken up	
Archbishop McGrath	116	31.0%	69.0%	80	154	£99,777	
Brynteg School	211	33.6%	66.4%	140	142	£92,002	
C C Y Dderwen	231	33.8%	66.2%	153	259	£167,806	
Cynffig Comprehensive	128	35.2%	64.8%	83	33	£21,381	
Maesteg School	181	33.1%	66.9%	121	102	£66,086	
Pencoed School	162	26.5%	73.5%	119	15	£9,719	
Porthcawl Comprehensive	191	34.6%	65.4%	125	33	£21,381	
YGG Llangynwyd	114	41.2%	58.8%	67	151	£97,833	
Total	1334	33.2%	66.8%	891	889	£575,983	

Proposal 3

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

- 3.39. This proposal applies equally to school pupils in sixth form and students in further education.
- 3.40. However, this proposal includes options to alleviate the impact on learners with the retention of a 'hardship fund' of circa £30k and the opportunity to offer places at full or partial cost, as well as protecting priority groups, for example, those who may be disabled.

- 3.41. It is important to note that some learners will already receive Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA). This is an income assessed weekly allowance of £30 to help students with the cost of further education, including transport.
- 3.42. There are considerable opportunities to utilise the seats released on comprehensive school transport as paying places and Table 9 above identifies that there may be an opportunity to offer back these places for pupils of statutory school age and post 16 pupils to purchase.
- 3.43. The outcome of the consultation in respect of removing free transport provision for post 16 pupils (currently provided to those learners who live over 2 miles from either their nearest suitable school or college) indicates that 19% were concerned the proposal would have a negative impact on attendance on FE courses whilst 18% stated that they considered that there would be little or no impact.
- 3.44. Points for consideration:-
- 3.45. Specific concerns raised in the consultations are outlined below:-
 - 20% of respondents were concerned that the proposal might impact negatively on local communities. Although responses were not explicit in why this might be.
 - ii. Respondents indicated their concern that post 16 attendance maybe negatively impacted
 - iii. That there could potentially be a negative impact on attendance at the only Welsh Medium comprehensive school YGG Llangynwyd.
 - iv. That the current infrastructure, specifically the current bus routes, does not lend itself to easy access for all learners, especially those attending further education establishments;
 - v. 19 per cent stated that the cost may deter pupils from accessing further education.
 - vi. In relation to both Archbishop McGrath High School and YGG Llangynwyd respondents felt that they might be disproportionately affected if the proposal were to be introduced due to their large catchment areas.
 - vii. Qualitative responses indicated that parents and pupils may choose to attend the local English medium comprehensive from the beginning of secondary school as opposed to obtain their GCSE's and subsequently moving schools for further education. Respondents have stated this could in fact have an impact on the pupil's academic performance.
 - viii. At the community engagement workshop in YGG Llangynwyd, attendees also noted the additional risk to the sustainability of the LAs only Welsh Medium Comprehensive school if free transport was to be removed. The main risk outlined was that parents might determine that given that their child would not be receiving free transport Post16 to a school not geographically central to Bridgend and therefore relatively isolated in the North of the County Borough, parents may consider a geographically closer English medium comprehensive school before looking at the option of Welsh medium education further compounded by the proposal to cease free transport at 16.
- 3.46. However in relation to the above, 18 per cent of overall respondents believed the proposal would have little or no impact on themselves or their family.

4. Current situation

- 4.1. It should be noted that very early on in the consultation there was confusion around the use of the word 'proposal' as some attendees to the public engagement events reported that they had made the assumption that these were 'options' and the Local Authority would therefore in its determination approve only one of these.
- 4.2. Officers were therefore explicit with attendees in each of the other engagement events to clarify that each proposal was independent and Cabinet could, in its final determination, conclude to approve or not approve any combination of the three proposals.
- 4.3. The outcome of the consultation is a key element for consideration in determining the appropriateness of the three current proposals identified in paragraph 3.2 above.
- 4.4. As is demonstrated above, there is a great financial benefit to the Council in introducing these proposals. However, that needs to be weighed against the risks that these proposals may bring for schools, pupils, parents and families.

5. Effect upon Policy Framework& Procedure Rules

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

6. Equality Impact Assessment

6.1. An initial screening was initially carried out and the consultation also invited stakeholders to raise equality issues. A full EIA has since been prepared and is included in Appendix 3.

7. Financial Implications

- 7.1. The cessation of the original consultation in January 2014 has meant that the original savings identified for 2015/16 could no longer be realised and the MTFS for the Children's directorate has therefore been re-profiled as shown in Table 3.
- 7.2. The failure to realise these savings would have a significant impact on the Children's Directorate capacity to deliver the total savings identified in the MTFS, and equivalent savings would therefore have to be found from our critical and key core services from within the Directorate.

8. Recommendation

- 1. That Committee note the content of this report and the outcomes from the consultation (see Appendix 1)
- 2. Consider and agree any recommendations the Committee may wish to make to Cabinet that is consistent with its challenge and support role in light of the proposals and the consultation responses.

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January 25th 2015

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Appendix 1: Consultation Report

Appendix 2: Learner Travel Scenario Table

Appendix 3: EIA

Background documents

Cabinet Report, 17th September 2013, Learner Transport Policy

Report to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 12th November 2013, Learner Transport Policy

Cabinet report, 10th December 2013, Learner Transport Policy

Report to the Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 2nd

September 2014, Learner Travel Policy

Cabinet report, 16th September 2014, Learner Travel Policy

Appendix 1

Appendix 2

Learner travel scenario table

			Year	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021		2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	
	Example	scenario		Yr 1	Yr 2	Yr 3	Yr 4	Yr 5	Yr 6		Yr 7	Yr 8	Yr 9	Yr 10	Yr 11	
Pupil	Distance from school	Age on 01/09/2016	Siblings in same school already in receipt of transport?	Eligible for free transport?		Eligible for free transport?										
A	1.9 miles	5	N	N	N	N	N	N	N		N	N	N	N	N	
B	1.7 miles	5	Υ	Υ	Y	Y	Y	Υ	Υ	Secondary transition	N	N	N	N	N	Post 16
	1.6 miles	7	N	n	n/a Y Y Y				Secon	N	N	N	N	N		
P	2.9 miles	11	N		n/a						N	N	N	N	N	
P	2.1 miles	11	Y		n/a					Y	Y	Y	Y	Y		