

BRIDGEND COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

REPORT TO BRIDGEND TOWN AND COMMUNITY COUNCIL FORUM

21 MARCH 2016

REPORT OF THE CORPORATE DIRECTOR EDUCATION AND TRANSFORMATION

LEARNER TRAVEL POLICY

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1. To report to the Forum the decision of Cabinet regarding the change to the Council's Learner Travel Policy which will take effect from September 2016, and to inform the Forum on how the policy change will contribute to the overall saving in the Council's Medium Term Financial Strategy 2016/17 to 2019/20.

2. Connection to Corporate Improvement Objectives/Other Corporate Priorities

- 2.1. The report links to the following corporate priorities:-

- Supporting a successful economy
- Smarter use of resources.

3. Background

- 3.1. The Council's statutory responsibilities in relation to home to school/college transport are set out in the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 (the Measure).
- 3.2. The Measure, amongst other things, places a statutory duty on the Council to provide free home to school transport to eligible learners of compulsory school age if they live beyond the statutory walking distance.
- 3.3. Statutory walking distance is defined under section 3 of the Measure as 2 miles for primary school children and 3 miles for secondary school children.
- 3.4. However, 'walking distance' within the Council's current school transport policy is defined as 1.5 miles for eligible primary school pupils and 2 miles for eligible secondary school pupils. The Council's current policy is therefore more generous than the statutory provisions.
- 3.5. In Bridgend the policy applies to the local catchment area school, English medium, Welsh medium, voluntary aided or maintained special school.
- 3.6. In the Council's current Learner Travel Policy, Bridgend County Borough Council used its discretionary powers to reduce the statutory walking distance to provide free transport for:-

- primary and nursery aged children, residing more than 1.5 miles from the nearest suitable school, and secondary aged children residing more than 2 miles from the nearest suitable school;
- post-16 learners, subject to a 2 mile limit and;
- all learners attending Voluntary Aided schools (subject to existing limits), regardless of whether the school is the nearest suitable school, with free transport.

4. Current situation / proposal

4.1. The Council's Learner Travel Policy is no longer financially sustainable and the Council's approved Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS) 2016/17 to 2019/20 seeks to achieve potential revenue savings relating to the Learner Travel Policy as detailed in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Re-profiled MTFS – Learner Transport proposals (March 2016)

Ref.	Budget Reduction Proposal	Budget 2015-16 £'000	2015-16 Budget Reductions £000	Actual 2016-17 £000	Indicative 2017-18 £000	Indicative 2018-19 £000	Indicative 2019-20 £000
CH3	Retender Learner Transport contracts	4,310	400	100			
CH4	Rationalise Special Education Needs transport	4,310	100	150			
CH5	Review of Learner Transport Policy regarding statutory distances for free travel	4,310			67	67	67
CH9	School transport route efficiencies	4,310	200	200	200		

4.2. Budget reduction proposals enabled significant savings under learner transport to be made in the MTFS in 2014/15 (£250,000) and 2015/16 (£700,000). Further savings have been identified for 2016/17 (£450,000) with a further £401k for the 2017/18 to 2019/20 financial years. It is important to note that proposals CH3, CH4 and CH9 do not require any change to the Local Authority's (LA's) Learner Travel Policy. Only CH5 is predicated on a change to the Council's Learner Travel Policy.

4.3. In order to take forward these savings the following three proposals to amend the LA's Learner Travel Policy, were presented:-

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).

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.

- 4.4. From 29th September 2014 to the 22nd December 2014 a full public consultation was undertaken on the above proposals.
- 4.5. The outcome of the consultation was presented to Cabinet at the meeting on 1 September 2015 where it was resolved that Cabinet:-
1. Approved the changes to the current Learner Travel Policy to bring it in line with minimum statutory requirements, realising savings of £67,092 in 2016/17 rising to £776,550 by 2023/24. This would mean that the qualifying distance for free primary school transport would change from 1.5 miles to 2 miles and the qualifying distance for free secondary transport would change from 2 miles to 3 miles. This will also apply to Welsh-medium and voluntary aided schools and will include Post-16 students. Pupils who currently receive free transport will maintain their entitlement until they transition to the next stage of their education. The change in policy will also include support for families through ensuring siblings attending the same school will receive the same level of transport entitlement, i.e., if a child maintains free transport at the lower threshold of 1.5/2miles then any sibling starting the same school whilst the elder sibling is still there will also receive the same entitlement. The policy will be introduced in September 2016.
 2. Approved the cost of a paying place at £1.90 per day for all school pupils (including post-16 students) which is £361 per annum, rather than full cost recovery. This equates to an increase of 33.7%, realising £4,367. The increase to the cost of a paying place will be introduced from September 2016 and will be reviewed on an annual basis.
 3. In line with current proposals regarding the strategic review of the school curriculum and estate, agreed that no decision is made regarding proposal 3 (to withdraw free post-16 transport to school and college students), leaving an estimated budget shortfall of £529,000* for 2016/17.

[* Note: Since the Cabinet decision in September the budget proposal built into the MTFs relating to this saving/estimated shortfall has been removed, mitigating the potential budget shortfall]

- 4.6. Therefore proposal 1 was accepted. Proposal 2 was also accepted but the cost of a paying place was amended to £1.90 per day. However, proposal 3 was not accepted, other than post 16 pupils receiving free home to school transport in line with the statutory walking distance for secondary age pupils i.e. at 3 miles, rather than 2 miles.

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

- 6.1. A Full EIA was presented to accompany the Cabinet report in September 2016

7. Financial Implications

7.1. The failure to realise the savings outlined in the Table 1 (above) would have a significant impact on the Education and Transformation Directorate's capacity to deliver the total savings identified in the MTFS 2016/17 to 2019/20, and equivalent savings would therefore have to be found from our critical and key core services from within the Directorate.

8. Recommendation

That the Bridgend Town and Community Council Forum note the contents of this report outlining the decision of Cabinet on the changes to the LA's Learner Travel Policy and associated MTFS savings.

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Background documents

Cabinet Report, 1 September 2016, Learner Travel Policy