

# Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	<b>Cabinet</b>	
MEETING DATE:	<b>10 April 2013</b>	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		<b>E 2546</b>
TITLE:	<b>Home to School Transport Review</b>	
WARD:	All	
<b>AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM</b>		
<b>List of attachments to this report:</b> Appendix 1- Early Years, Children and Youth Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel Home to School Transport Review 2012. Appendix 2 – Early Years, Children and Youth Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel Recommendations Table. Appendix 3 – Equalities Impact Assessment.		

## 1 THE ISSUE

- 1.1 To consider recommendations from the Early Years, Children and Youth Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel Transport Review.

## 2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet agrees that:

- 2.1 The Council should continue to seek to encourage more sustainable methods of home to school transport; the Panel would particularly like to see an increase in cycling.

- 2.2 The promotion of safe cycling routes to school as an alternative to using the car where there is a safe route to do so should be encouraged and the feasibility of establishing the following two routes should be investigated.:-

- A) Between Bishop Sutton and Chew Valley School.
- B) Between Compton Dando and Marksbury.

- 2.3 The Council considers exploring and implementing from September 2014 one of the following four options in order to reduce the overall spend on home to school transport.

- a) Raising the level of financial contribution currently paid by parents/carers using home to school transport from the Council i.e. those who do not qualify for free home to school transport. This could take the form of raising the fare currently paid for the 1<sup>st</sup> child from £50 per term to a level that would ensure that the service operated on a cost neutral basis (this amount would need to be identified by the Cabinet and Service Officers );
- b) Removing the 50% reduction for 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> children and/or removing the subsidised transport for families with more than three children requiring home to school transport (unless they qualified as a low income family).
- c) A combination of option A and option B.
- d) A phased withdrawal of subsidised home to school transport services for new starters attending denominational schools from September 2014 who would not qualify under other home to school policy subsets e.g. as a low income family. This option would not affect students who currently attend the school, only new pupils joining in September 2014. The anticipated savings from this withdrawal would be seen over a number of years can be found in the table in 3.2.5.

2.4 The budget to provide transport for Children in Care [circa £70,000] is maintained for the foreseeable future.

2.5 Passenger Transport Services should review home to school transport routes on a termly basis to ensure best value for money and that home to school transport bus routes are as efficient and effective as possible. This should also include liaising with parents/carers of students who have Special Educational Needs to consider whether it is appropriate for them to receive independent travel training and a personalised transport budget to arrange their own transport which may be more suitable for their needs, similar to the system used at Coventry City Council.

### 3 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

#### 3.1 Recommendation 2.1 and 2.2

3.1.1 Part of the medium term service and resource plan for 2013/14, £500,000 has been allocated to improve cycling provision. There will be a number of calls on this budget and the two cycling routes will need to be considered alongside other priorities as part of the process to allocate these resources.

#### 3.2 Recommendation 2.3

##### 3.2.1 Fare Paying Scheme

3.2.2 Depending on the type of transport used eg Coach, minibus or taxi the true cost of each actual seat can vary. The average cost of a seat is approx £1,000. The current charge is £300 per annum [£50 per term]. For the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> child a reduction of 50% is given. No further charge is made for additional children if a family has more than 3 children travelling. If a family is in receipt of free school meals or maximum working tax credit they are exempt from the charge.

3.2.3 As an example if the charge is increased to £600 per annum but the 50% reduction remains the income collected, if all children continue to travel, will increase from £80,000 to £160,000. If the 50% reduction is removed the annual income collected will further increase to £175,000. If the charge is increased to £1000 the income collected will increase to £266,000. If the 50% reduction is removed the annual income collected will further increase to £290,000.

##### 3.2.4 Denominational transport

###### Phased withdrawal

3.2.5 A phased withdrawal of denominational transport from September 2014 will result in the following savings.

	Year 1 2014-15	Year 2 2015-16	Year 3 2016-17	Year 4 2017-18	Year 5 2018-19	Year 6 2019-20	Year 7 2020-21
Spend on denominational Transport	£228,500	£172,500	£125,500	£78,500	£31,500	£21,500	£15,000
Anticipated Saving	£29,500	£85,500	£132,500	£179,500	£226,500	£236,500	£243,000

3.2.6 The above savings are calculated on the basis that the money is allocated to denominational schools to arrange transport which is suitable to them. If the Council continues to arrange transport on behalf of the schools the savings in the first few years may not be as great. This is because we may have to continue to use the same size vehicle until numbers drop sufficiently to reduce the size of the transport. Based on current numbers the Council will continue to spend £15,000 per year as our statutory duty under the extended rights to free travel scheme. This will be for children from low income families who live between 2 and 15 miles from their nearest denominational school.

3.2.7 The full saving of £258,000 will not be achieved until the 2021-22 financial year. Transport to Secondary Schools will cease at the end of the 2018-19 academic year and to primary schools at the end of the 2020-21 academic year.

### **Increased Charge**

3.2.8 The current charge is £300 per annum [£50 per term]. For the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> child a reduction of 50% is given. No further charge is made for additional children if a family has more than 3 children travelling. If a family is in receipt of free school meals or maximum working tax credit they are exempt from the charge.

3.2.9 As an example if the charge is increased to £600 per annum but the 50% reduction remains the income collected, if all children continue to travel, will increase from £48,000 to £96,000. If the 50% reduction is removed the annual income collected will further increase to £120,000.

### **Cost neutral option**

3.2.10 The Council currently provides denominational transport to the following 5 schools:

St Benedict's primary School  
St Gregory's Secondary School  
St John's Primary School  
St Mark's Secondary School  
St Mary's Primary School

3.2.11 The cost of this transport with the number of pupils travelling is as follows:

#### **St Benedict's.**

The total cost of the transport is £18,156 and 19 pupils currently travel. Therefore the cost per pupil per annum is £956.

#### **St John's**

The total cost of the transport is £11,284 and 8 pupils currently travel. Therefore the cost per pupil per annum is £1411.

#### **St Gregory's**

The total cost of the transport is £188,500 and 194 pupils currently travel. Therefore the cost per pupil per annum is £972.

#### **St Mark's**

The total cost of the transport is £66,500 and 63 pupils currently travel. Therefore the cost per pupil per annum is £1056.

#### **St Mary's**

The total cost of the transport is £36,005 and 21 pupils currently travel. Therefore the cost per pupil per annum is £1715

3.2.12 The costs for each school can vary due to the nature of the transport provided. For example a 52 seat coach is cheaper per pupil than if children travel in a smaller vehicle or taxi. The cost per pupil is the amount each new child will be required to pay for the transport to be cost neutral.

### **3.3 Recommendation 2.4**

3.3.1 The budget of £70,000 for Children in Care Transport is already included in the Home to School Transport budget and requires no additional funding.

### **3.4 Recommendation 2.5**

3.4.1 Can be achieved through existing staffing resources and requires no additional funding

## **4 CORPORATE OBJECTIVES**

- *Promoting independence and positive lives for everyone*
- *Creating neighbourhoods where people are proud to live*

## **5 THE REPORT**

5.1 The basis for this review was a letter received by the Early Years, Children and Youth (EYCY) Panel at their public meeting on the 23rd January 2012. The letter was from the Cabinet Member for Early Years, Children and Youth at the time, Councillor Nathan Hartley, in which he asked the Panel to consider undertaking a review of Home to School Transport in order to attempt to make some financial reductions as part of the 2013/14 budget setting process.

5.2 An in depth review was carried out and the findings were made in a report to the Early Years, Children and Youth Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel on the 28<sup>th</sup> January 2013. [See Appendix A].

5.3 The Council currently spends £4 million per annum on Home to School Transport. To make the existing home to school transport more efficient the Early Years, Children and Youth Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel has asked the Cabinet to explore and implement changes in respect of the fare paying scheme and denominational transport.

5.4 The Council operates a fare paying scheme where when we have spare seats on vehicles carrying entitled passengers we offer these seats to non-entitled children. The current charge is £300 per annum [£50 per term]. For the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> child a reduction of 50% is given. No further charge is made for additional children if a family has more than 3 children travelling. If a family is in receipt of free school meals or maximum working tax credit they are exempt from the charge. Currently 251 children

pay the full charge, 34 children pay the reduced charge and 39 children are exempt from the charge. This creates an annual income of £80,000.

5.5A Local Education Authority has the discretion to pay the whole or any part as they think fit of the reasonable travelling expenses of any person receiving education at a school or college. In considering whether or not they are required to make arrangements in relation to a particular person a Local Authority shall have regard to any wish of the parent for him/her to be provided with education at a school or institution in which the religious education provided is that of the religion or denomination to which the parent adheres.

5.6 Denominational transport is currently provided to the nearest appropriate school for children up to the age of eight if the statutory walking distance of over 2 miles is exceeded. For children over the age of 8 the walking distance increases to 3 miles.

5.7 In September 2007 the Council introduced a charging policy for children qualifying for denominational transport. The current charge is £300 per annum [£50 per term]. For the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> child a reduction of 50% is given. No further charge is made for additional children if a family has more than 3 children travelling. If a family is in receipt of free school meals or maximum working tax credit they are exempt from the charge.

5.8 The Council currently spends £320,000 on transport to denominational schools. The total annual income collected from parents who pay the denominational charge is £48,000. The council also collects £14,000 from children who don't qualify under the denominational policy but travel as fare paying passengers. The current net cost of providing denominational transport is therefore £258,000. A total of 133 children pay the full denominational charge and 51 children pay the 50% reduction. A further 34 children travel but are exempt from the denominational charge. A total of 39 children pay the full fare paying charge and 15 children pay the 50% reduction.

5.9 Under the extended rights to free travel grant we have a statutory duty to provide transport for low income families if the school attended is the nearest faith school between 2 and 15 miles from the home address.

5.10 The earliest any changes can be made are from September 2014 at the beginning of the 2014-15 academic year. The Council has to publish admission and transport policies for children applying for a school place in September 2014 by September 2013.

## **6 RISK MANAGEMENT**

6.1 The report author and Lead Cabinet member have fully reviewed the risk assessment related to the issue and recommendations, in compliance with the Council's decision making risk management guidance.

## **7 EQUALITIES**

7.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) has been completed. Adverse impacts were identified and have been justified/mitigated. [See Appendix C].

## **8 RATIONALE**

8.1 The report asks the Cabinet to explore and decide which of the options listed in Section 2 to implement.

## 9 OTHER OPTIONS CONSIDERED

9.1 The range of options are set out in Section 2.

## 10 CONSULTATION

10.1 Cabinet members; Trades Unions; Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel; Staff; Other B&NES Services; Service Users; Local Residents; Community Interest Groups; Youth Council; Stakeholders/Partners; Section 151 Finance Officer; Chief Executive; Monitoring Officer

10.2 A questionnaire was issued, primarily aiming to contact existing home to school transport service users but also teachers, governors and home to school transport providers in order to identify whether services users thought the existing service was efficient and effective and how they would seek to prioritise future home to school transport provision. The questionnaire was available in electronic form and in paper copy from 10th September until 2nd November 2012. This was publicised via a press release, letters to existing home to school transport users, all schools and governors within B&NES, transport companies operating within B&NES and all town/parish Councils along with promotional materials to encourage people to complete the questionnaire.

10.3 The Panel held a public contributor session on 22nd October at the Guildhall in Bath. This meeting was an opportunity for members of the public to share their views about the current home to school transport system and to find out what research had been done to date by the steering group.

## 11 ISSUES TO CONSIDER IN REACHING THE DECISION

11.1 Social Inclusion; Customer Focus; Sustainability; Young People; Human Rights; Corporate; Impact on Staff; Other Legal Considerations

## 12 ADVICE SOUGHT

The Council's Monitoring Officer (Divisional Director – Legal and Democratic Services) and Section 151 Officer (Divisional Director - Finance) have had the opportunity to input to this report and have cleared it for publication.

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<b>Background papers</b>	
<b>Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format</b>	

