

Bath & North East Somerset Council

MEETING:	Cabinet	
MEETING DATE:	20 May 2013	EXECUTIVE FORWARD PLAN REFERENCE:
		E 2546R
TITLE:	Home to School Transport Review	
WARD:	All	
AN OPEN PUBLIC ITEM		
List of attachments to this report: 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 reconsider the following decision made in respect of denominational transport at the Cabinet meeting on the 10th April 2013.
- 1.2 *To agree with effect from September 2014 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] save in the case of children with siblings currently at the school. 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 3.15.*

2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The Cabinet agrees that:

- 2.1 It 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 1st child from £50 per term to a level that would ensure that the service operated on a cost neutral basis.

- b) Removing the 50% reduction for 2nd and 3rd 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] save in the case of children with siblings currently at the school. 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 paragraph 3.15.

Based on current numbers the Council will continue to spend £20,000 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 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 3.1 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 to non-faith schools and £1200 to faith schools. The current charge is £300 per annum [£50 per term]. For the 2nd and 3rd 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 The current subsidy for each seat to non-faith schools is £700 for those paying the full fare, £850 for those paying the 50% reduction and £1000 for those exempt from the charge. For faith schools the subsidy is £900 for those paying the full fare, £1050 for those paying the 50% reduction and £1200 for those exempt from the charge.

Non-faith schools

- 3.3 Under the current fare paying scheme to non-faith schools 251 children pay the full charge, 34 children pay the reduced charge and 39 children are exempt from the charge.
- 3.4 The Council currently subsidises these seats at a cost of £243,600 per annum.
- 3.5 If the charge is increased, for example, to £600 per annum but the reductions remain the subsidy paid by the Council, assuming all children continue to travel, will reduce to £163,200. [Option 2.1a] If the reduction for the 2nd and 3rd child is removed the subsidy will reduce to £129,600.[Option 2.1b]
- 3.6 If the charge is increased to £1000 but the reductions remain the subsidy paid by the Council, assuming all children continue to travel, will reduce to £56,000 [Option 2.1a].
- 3.7 For the proposal to become cost neutral to the Council the charge will be increased to £1000 for all children [Option 2.1a]. See table below for summary of the charges and subsidy:-

Charge	£300 with reduction	£600 with reduction	£600 no reduction	£1000 with reduction	£1000 no reduction
Council subsidy	£243,600	£163,200	£129,600	£56,000	Nil

- 3.8 It is difficult to judge exact numbers but it is likely if the charges are increased the number of children travelling will fall. If the cost is increased to £1000 for all children it will require 80 children to continue to travel for the Council to recoup the costs currently achieved and 178 children to continue to travel to achieve the same level of savings as shown in paragraph 3.22.

3.9 It is difficult to judge exact numbers but it is likely if the charges are increased the number of children travelling will fall. If this happens the subsidy provided by the Council will increase. For the cost to the Council to remain neutral the charge for the remaining children will need to increase.

Faith Schools

3.10 Under the current fare paying scheme to faith schools 172 children pay the full charge, 66 children pay the reduced charge and 34 children are exempt from the charge.

3.11 The Council currently spends £320,000 on transport to denominational schools. The total annual income collected from parents who pay for transport to faith schools is £62,000. The Council currently subsidises these seats at a cost of £258,000.

3.12 If the charge is increased, for example to £600 per annum but the reductions remain the subsidy provided by the Council, assuming all children continue to travel, will reduce to £197,000 [Option 2.1a]. If the reduction for the 2nd and 3rd child is removed the subsidy will reduce to £177,200 [option 2.1b].

3.13 If the charge is increased to £1000 per annum but the reductions remain the subsidy provided by the Council, assuming all children continue to travel, will reduce to £115,000 [Option 2.1a]. If the reduction is removed the subsidy will reduce to £82,000 [Option 2.1b].

3.14 For the proposal to become cost neutral to the Council the charge will be increased to £1250 for all children [Option 2.1a]. This will remove the Council subsidy apart from the statutory duty for low income families. See table below for summary of the charges and subsidy:-

Charge	£300 with reduction	£600 with reduction	£600 no reduction	£1000 with reduction	£1000 no reduction	£1200 no reduction
Council subsidy	£258,000	£197,000	£177,200	£115,000	£82,000	£20,000 [Low income families].

3.15 It is difficult to judge exact numbers but it is likely if the charges are increased the number of children travelling will fall. If this happens the subsidy provided by the Council will increase. For the cost to the Council to remain neutral the charge for the remaining children will need to increase.

3.16 It is difficult to be exact as it can't be accurately predicted how quickly the number and size of vehicles will reduce. However a phased withdrawal of denominational transport from September 2014 should 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	£238,000	£212,000	£186,000	£160,000	£134,000	£108,000	£82,000
Anticipated Saving	£20,000	£46,000	£72,000	£98,000	£124,000	£150,000	£176,000

	Year 8 2021-22	Year 9 2022-23	Year 10 2023-24	Year 11 2024-25	Year 12 2025-26
Spend on denominational Transport	£56,000	£50,000	£40,000	£30,000	£20,000
Anticipated Saving	£202,000	£208,000	£218,000	£228,000	£238,000

- 3.17 The full saving of £238,000 will not be achieved until the 2025-26 financial year.
- 3.18 If the subsidy is removed it is likely the Council will have to meet increased transport costs to mainstream schools. This is because children who choose to attend their local school instead of their denominational school will still qualify for transport assistance.
- 3.19 It is difficult to give exact numbers as we do not know if parents will opt for a local school or continue to make alternative arrangements to a denominational school.
- 3.20 The majority of children will have access to a local school which will not require the provision of transport. Most children will have a place at a local primary school where transport is not required. As an example children in Bath and Keynsham who attend St Mary's and St John's will not require transport to their local school. Children in Paulton, Peasedown, Radstock and Midsomer Norton who attend St Benedict's will also not require transport to their local school. There may be a small number of children in rural areas who will require transport on hazardous route grounds. In most cases this small number of children will be accommodated within existing transport.
- 3.21 For Secondary Schools most children attending St Mark's receiving transport live in Bath and will not require transport as they will have an alternative school[s] within the statutory walking distance.
- 3.22 In respect of St Gregory's School some children who live in the North East Somerset area will qualify for transport to their local school. Across the year 7 to 11 year groups at St Gregory's from September 2013 we have identified 58 children across 5 schools who would qualify for transport if they had opted for their local school.
- 3.23 If in future the same pattern was repeated and none of the children could be accommodated within existing vehicles we could end up running 5 additional

vehicles. The cost will be approx. £60,000 which will need to be offset against the eventual total saving of £238,000 giving a net saving of £178,000.

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 28th January 2013. [See Appendices 1 & 2]. 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 asked the Cabinet to explore and implement changes in respect of the fare paying scheme and denominational transport.
- 5.3 The report was considered by Cabinet on the 10th April and the decision as shown in paragraph 1.2 was taken.
- 5.4 The decision was called in and was considered by the Early Years, Children and Youth Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel on the 9th May 2013. The call in was upheld.
- 5.5 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.
- 5.6 A 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. There is no statutory requirement for a Council to provide transport to faith schools.
- 5.7 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. 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. In September 2007 the Council introduced a charging policy for children qualifying for denominational transport.

5.8 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.

5.9 As identified in the financial implications of the report there could be up to 60 children who will require school places across 5 secondary schools if denominational transport is withdrawn. These children should be able to be accommodated at their local school. Even if their local school is currently oversubscribed they will receive higher priority under the admissions criteria than children who apply from outside the area.

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 3].

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.

Contact person	Kevin Amos Tel 01225395202 E mail: Kevin_Amos@bathnes.gov.uk
Sponsoring Cabinet Member	Councillor Dine Romero
Background papers	
Please contact the report author if you need to access this report in an alternative format	