

Report To: Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 30th of Sept 2014

Lead Member / Officer: Councillor Eryl Williams

Report Author: Head of Customers and Education Support

Title: Home to School Transport Eligibility Policy

1. What is the report about?

1.1 This report is to seek approval to implement pick up points for secondary school pupils and to clarify the existing policy.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1 The current transport budget is overspent and in the budget setting process Members requested that it be reviewed. This paper seeks approval to introduce central pick up points for secondary school pupils only. Further reviews will be undertaken as directed by Members.

3. What are the Recommendations?

The recommendations for Cabinet are:-

- (i) To amend the existing policy to introduce central pick up points for all secondary school pupils;
- (ii) To note the full policy in appendix 1 which in summary will provide free transport to the nearest suitable secondary school from a designated pick up point;
- (iii) To allow existing secondary school pupils to continue to access free transport for the remainder of their existing statutory school life from a central pick up point;
- (iv) To note there is no change to transport for primary pupils;
- (v) That Cabinet agrees, that the recommendations above be implemented immediately in accordance with the Council's call in procedure rules contained in the constitution in light of the circumstances set out in the paragraph 4.1 below;
- (vi) Cabinet requests that the Welsh in Education Strategic Group review the language categorisation of all schools and present a report to Scrutiny

4. Report details.

Consultation Process

4.1 Consultation on the proposed new policy was published on 11th August 2014. The new policy must be adopted by 1st October 2014 to ensure the regulations are met. This is in accordance with regulation 4 of The Learner Travel Information (Wales) Regulations 2009.

“If a Local Authority decides to change or remove the discretionary transport provision it provides, it must publish the information before the 1st October of the year preceding the academic year in which the changes will come into force.”

- 4.2 There are no specific requirements regarding consultation of this nature and the decision was taken for proposals to be published on Denbighshire County Council’s website and social media pages with a hard copy distributed directly to every parent of a child who currently receives School Transport. Copies of the consultation documents were also distributed to relevant officers and all Elected Members by e mail.
- 4.3 The following stakeholders received either a hard copy or were emailed a link to the Denbighshire County Council website;
- *Conwy County Council; Flintshire County Council; Wrexham County Council*
 - *The Church in Wales Diocese of St Asaph and the Wrexham Roman Catholic Diocesan Authority;*
 - *Headteachers; School Business & Finance Managers*
 - *Chairs and Clerks of Governors of all schools;*
 - *All Denbighshire County Councillors;*
 - *Relevant Assembly Members and Members of Parliament;*
 - *Relevant Internal Staff;*
 - *City, Town and Community Councils;*
 - *Welsh Strategic Group.*
- 4.4 All feedback submitted during the notice period had to be made in writing or by email. In total 68 items of feedback have been received.

Central pick up points

- 4.5 The implementation of central pick up points in the primary sector would result in savings of about £30k as detailed in Appendix 2. There will be approximately 352 pupils affected by this change. The small saving is reflective of the fact that there are many hazardous routes leading to many of our primary schools so we would still be required to offer some sort of transport to pick up points on some routes. It is therefore recommended that we do not introduce central pick up for primary school pupils.
- 4.6 The implementation of central pick up points in the secondary sector would result in savings of about £272k as detailed in Appendices 3 & 4. There would be approximately 232 pupils affected by this change. It is therefore recommended that we introduce central pick up for secondary school pupils.

Timescales for implementation

- 4.7 The implementation of central pick up points is the only change in the policy. This would come into effect from 1st September 2015 for all secondary school pupils, if adopted.

- 4.8 It is recommended that a transitional period is introduced, where pupils who are not attending their nearest school (due to historic anomalies), will remain eligible for transport to their existing school to prevent disruption to their education. Central pick up points will still apply for these pupils. Members need to be aware that new applications from siblings will be unsuccessful under the new policy.

Policy & Process

- 4.9 It should be noted that current Home to School Transport Policy is silent in many areas and has resulted in the historic anomalies being present in the current system. The policy is now transparent and every attempt will be made to ensure parents are clear of the transport implications when applying for school places.

- 4.10 All the consultation responses have been made available to Cabinet Members. The main issues raised are as follows:

1. Category 1 schools should be treated as the only Welsh medium option when assessing eligibility for transport.

The current policy includes category 1 & 2 schools so the impact of this is significant as it would result in a high number of pupils in the category 2 schools (Dinas Bran and Brynhyfryd) becoming eligible for transport to the nearest category 1 schools. There are currently 339 pupils in the Welsh stream at Ysgol Brynhyfryd and 107 pupils in the Welsh stream at Ysgol Dinas Bran. This could potentially have a detrimental impact on future roll numbers and transport costs if adopted.

2. Timescales for consultation

There are no specific requirements regarding consultation. A decision was taken to publish proposals during the school holidays and write directly to parents with children currently receiving free transport in order to ensure a longer period of consultation. We have received 68 responses and consider that extending the consultation period would not identify any other issues.

3. Central pick up points

Feedback has been positive in relation to pick up points for secondary school pupils providing the relevant risk assessment processes are in place to maintain the safety of the child. Risk Assessments will be undertaken in line with the Learner Travel Measure.

4. Concessionary Seats

The information for parents has previously been ambiguous resulting in inconsistent decisions and advice. This is now clear and where a child is not eligible but there are spare seats on the bus they can apply for a concessionary pass to allow them to travel to their choice of school. It is proposed that this will be limited to a 12 month period with a reasonable charge being made to cover administration costs. This charge is currently £50 per term.

4.12 The timeline in Appendix 5 outlines the full process undertaken for the review.

4.13 The flowchart in Appendix 6 outlines what the new process for transport eligibility will be.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

5.1 The proposal supports the priority of **“Improving Education”** whilst also ensuring that cost effectiveness and value for money are maintained

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1 The proposal will have a direct impact on the Passenger Transport Service. It is estimated that there will be a saving in the region of £303k as summarised in the table below. The full details of the proposals are shown in Appendix 2 – 4.

			Cost per day £	Potential Saving per day £
Appendix 3	Removal of Secondary Home to pick up point taxis	per day	671.50	671.50
		per year	127,585.00	127,585.00
Appendix 4	Removal of Secondary Home to School taxis	per day	1,298.49	762.99
		per year	246,713.10	144,968.10
Appendix 5	Removal of Primary Home to School taxis	per day	3,057.94	160.75
		per year	581,008.60	30,542.50
Total Cost/Saving per day			5,027.93	1,595.24
Total Cost/Saving per year (190 days)			955,306.70	303,095.60

6.2 Please note that these savings may be subject to change depending on the outcome of the review of hazardous routes.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) undertaken on the decision? The completed EqIA template should be attached as an appendix to the report.

7.1 The EqIA undertaken in relation to the new policy demonstrates that no group is disproportionately disadvantaged as a result of these changes

7.2 The full EqIA can be found in Appendix 7.

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

8.1 Full consultation has been undertaken with all stakeholders detailed in 4.3 above.

8.2 As part of the consultation, the proposals and feedback received to date was discussed with Elected Members at both Full Council and Communities Scrutiny. Scrutiny Members recommended the following:

- (i) Central pick up points should be implemented for secondary school pupils only
- (ii) Consultation could have been longer however they did not feel that this would have generated any other issues to those already raised
- (iii) Categorisation of Welsh Medium (Category1) and Bilingual (Category 2) Schools should remain as it is currently with both being treated equally for Welsh Medium purposes and support all schools to develop along the bilingual continuum.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

- 9.1 Elected Members agreed to review the Transport Policy at the Freedoms and Flexibilities Members Workshop held in June this year. It was explained that as the service is currently overspending the review would aim to make savings in order to help bring the service into a break-even position. As such the possible savings identified in Section 6.1 will be kept within the service in order to rectify the ongoing budget deficit. The position will be monitored closely and any savings over and above that needed for the service to break-even will be identified as corporate savings in future budget rounds

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

- 10.1 There is a strong possibility that the proposal could result in adverse publicity for the Council. To minimise this risk the Council will seek to ensure clear communication with all stakeholders.
- 10.2 The risk of not adopting the new policy is that the budget will continue to be overspent and we will not have a clear policy to manage new applications.

11. Power to make the Decision

- 11.1 School Standards and Organisations (Wales) Act 2013
Education Act 2002
Learner Travel Information (Wales) Regulations 2009
Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008