

Report To: Communities Scrutiny

Date of Meeting: 5th November 2015

Lead Member / Officer: Cllr Eryl Williams/Jackie Walley, Head of Customers & Education Support

Report Author: Jackie Walley, Head of Customers & Education Support

Title: Schools Transport Policy

1. What is the report about?

1.1 This report is to provide additional information regarding revision of the School Transport Policy, as requested at Communities Scrutiny on Sept 10th 2015.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

2.1 At the Freedom & Flexibilities Workshop on 17th June 2014 Elected Members gave approval to undertake a review of the existing School Transport policy. This process resulted in a revised Policy which was implemented from Sept 2015. On Sept 10th the Scrutiny Chair requested, as an urgent item, the Head of Customers and Education Support attend to discuss recent concerns raised by Members.

3. What are the Recommendations?

3.1 That Members consider the additional information provided herein.

4. Report details

4.1 At the Communities Scrutiny meeting on 10th Sept 2015 Members requested the following supplemental information be provided:

- A timeline of events outlining the decisions and consultations made throughout the process of revising the Schools Transport Policy.
- Confirmation of the appeals process.
- Description of the 3 mile rule for free Secondary school travel, with a clear explanation of how hazardous routes are considered within the policy.
- A clear explanation of the concessionary policy.

4.2 Timeline

Appendix 1 attached contains the timeline of events covering the initial decisions made and the consultation exercise undertaken with parents/carers who had previously received transport. Appendix 2 attached also contains a copy of the consultation letter sent to parents and carers.

4.3 Appeals Process

The appeals process as outlined in Section 7 of the Schools Transport Policy is shown below:

7.1 The parent, guardian or carer will normally be notified in writing within 15 working days of an unsuccessful application. The refusal will provide details of their right of appeal.

7.2 The parent, guardian or carer can put their appeal in writing to admissions@denbighshire.gov.uk stating their reasons for appealing against the decisions.

7.3 An Independent Officer will consider the appeal against the Home to School Transport Policy and make a decision based on the information provided.

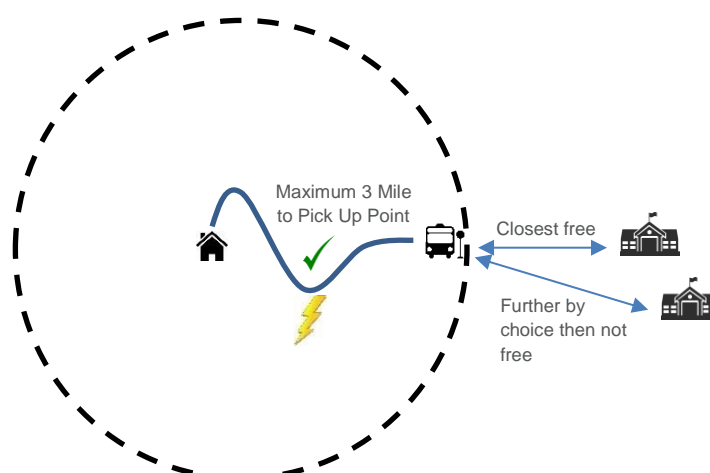
7.4 The parent, guardian or carer will be notified of the outcome of their appeal in writing within 5 working days of their appeal being received, provided no further information is required to support the decision. Following this decision there are no further grounds for appeal.

In terms of this process followed, an 'Independent Officer' will be a Denbighshire Officer who was not involved in the assessment of the application. The appeal process will consider whether the Policy has been applied correctly and inform the appellant of that decision. If the appellant so wishes they can then appeal to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales, and their contact details are provided as required.

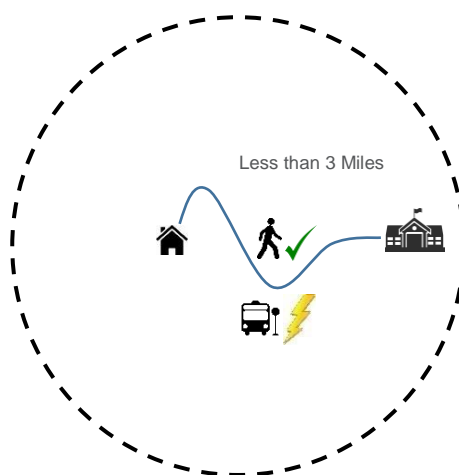
4.4 The 3 Mile Rule for Secondary School Transport

If the nearest suitable school is over 3 miles walking distance then free school travel is required to be provided. It is noted that the measurement of walking distance is not necessarily the shortest walking distance by road. It is the shortest route by which the child, accompanied as necessary, may walk in reasonable safety. The pick-up points will therefore be provided within 3 miles of home with free travel to the nearest suitable school. The policy outlines that it is the parents/carers responsibility to make arrangements to take their children to the pick-up point irrespective if the journey between the home and pick-up point is designated as hazardous.

Furthermore it is noted that if parents/carers choose to send their children to a school which is not the nearest suitable school then free transport is not provided.



If the nearest suitable school is within 3 miles of home, transport is not provided unless the route is designated hazardous. Where it is designated as hazardous transport to school will be provided free of charge from an appropriate pick-up point.



4.5 The Concessionary Transport Policy

Within the new Policy section 4.12 covers Concessionary Transport, the extract of which is shown below:

Concessionary Transport

The Authority will consider concessionary transport if a learner does not qualify for free transport against any of the criteria detailed in this policy but could be placed on an existing contract transport route that has empty seats. The following circumstances would however apply:

- (a) A reasonable charge per term will be applied. We will review this annually**
- (b) Concessions may be withdrawn at short notice when seats become unavailable**
- (c) Concessionary passes cannot be issued at short notice at the start of the academic year as it is necessary to identify whether there are surplus places on contract vehicles**
- (d) Concessionary fares cannot be offered where public transport runs alongside school transport**

In terms of the process followed, Denbighshire's Transport section will regularly audit the take up of free places to ensure we achieve the highest capacity possible on the transport provided.

- 5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?
- 5.1 The changes to the School Transport Policy have supported 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 has had a direct impact on the Passenger Transport Service. It is potentially delivering savings in excess of £200k. The full breakdown of estimated savings were provided at the Full Council meeting on Sept 11th 2014.
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 original EqIA undertaken on the Policy revision demonstrated that no group is disproportionately disadvantaged as a result of these changes. This report was provided at the Full Council meeting on Sept 11th 2014.
8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?
 - 8.1 A full consultation was undertaken with all stakeholders regarding the Policy changes; the findings of which were presented to Cabinet on the 30th of September 2014.
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 2014. 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 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 As previously identified, the proposal has resulted in adverse publicity for the Council and in adverse public comments and complaints. The Council is responding to these whilst ensuring that the Policy is being correctly applied.
11. Power to make the Decision
 - 11.1 School Standards and Organisations (Wales) Act 2013
Education Act 2002
Learner Travel Information (Wales) Regulations 2009