

**Report to:** Performance Scrutiny Committee

**Date of Meeting:** 28<sup>th</sup> January 2016

**Lead Member / Officer:** Lead Member for Education/Head of Education

**Report Author:** Head of Education

**Title:** Primary School Transport

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**1. What is the report about?**

1.1 To provide clarification on the policy relating to Primary School Transport.

**2. What is the reason for making this report?**

2.1 In view of a recent assessment of School Transport in the Rhuddlan and Dyserth area, and walk to school routes from Rhuddlan, Education Support was requested to provide clarification regarding Primary School Transport.

**3. What are the Recommendations?**

3.1 That Members consider the information provided herein and support the fair and consistent application of the policy.

**4. Report details**

**4.1 Background**

4.1.1 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 September 2015. The changes to the Policy were limited to the provision for Secondary school transport only.

4.1.2 As part of this process Education Support and the Passenger Transport section were instructed to ensure that the policy was consistently applied.

**4.2 Legislative Background to the School Transport Policy**

4.2.1 The Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 provides the legislative basis for providing schools with transport. Within this Measure Local Authorities are required to provide free school transport to the nearest suitable school for:

- Primary School pupils if they live more than 2 miles away from a school; or
- Secondary School pupils if they live more than 3 miles away from school.

4.2.2 If pupils live under these distances then under Legislation they are reasonably expected to walk to school, providing there is a safe walk route available to them. If a safe walk route is not available then the Local Authority will provide free school transport to their nearest suitable school.

4.2.3 If parents express a preference for admission to a school which is not their nearest suitable school then the Local Authority will not provide free transport; however, parents may pay for concessionary seats on transport provided (within the Authority's closed school contracts); if seats are available.

4.2.4 On a discretionary basis the Local Authority will also provide free school transport to nearest Welsh medium school or Faith based school if this is a parental preference.

#### 4.3 **Assessment of Transport Services to Ysgol Dewi Sant**

4.3.1 An example of how the Policy is being consistently applied is shown in this recent assessment of transport from the Dyserth and Rhuddlan areas to Ysgol Dewi Sant.

4.3.2 Denbighshire Passenger Transport section arranges all the Authority's school transport. They are required to ensure that the services provided are efficient, cost effective, risk assessed and relevant for the numbers of pupils transported.

4.3.3 In regard to transport from Dyserth and Rhuddlan to Ysgol Dewi Sant, transport had been provided for primary learners who live more than two miles from their nearest suitable school; however, it is noted that no one in Rhuddlan attending Ysgol Dewi Sant falls within this category.

4.3.4 This existing service was therefore provided free for those who qualify and the operator made a nominal charge for those who wish to use the service as they live closer than 2 miles.

4.3.5 From the regular assessments undertaken by Passenger Transport, it became apparent that the number of qualifying students on this service had significantly reduced over recent years and it was now carrying just three learners plus a passenger assistant.

4.3.6 In applying the Policy correctly regarding 'nearest suitable school', it is noted that the numbers on this service from Dyserth had reduced since Ysgol y Llys is their nearest Welsh Medium primary school and not Ysgol Dewi Sant.

4.3.7 In terms of ensuring policy equity and consistency, and also in terms of costs it was difficult to justify a bus service when so few were entitled to use it. Making these changes therefore gave opportunity to review this service. The current service was costing £26,600 p.a. and by changing it to a taxi service for the three who qualify (who live beyond Rhuddlan) the Authority can save up to £21,000 p.a. which, over a five year contract term, equates to over £100,000.

4.3.8 It is recognised that parents in this area may not be satisfied with the changes made, and have raised concerns that the service will not carry a Passenger Assistant; however, other options have been explored with the school and the local bus service providers, but these have been unsuccessful. Assessments have also been undertaken on potential walk routes to school from the Rhuddlan area to ensure a safe walking route is available.

#### 4.4 **Assessment of the School Walk Routes in Rhuddlan**

4.4.1 As Rhuddlan is within the 2 miles distance to Ysgol Dewi Sant, Education Support had been asked questions by Local Councillors regarding the potential walk route to school to ensure it is safe. If there was a safe walk route which could be defined then this would assist the families in this area who may have been impacted by the changes to the service mentioned.

- 4.4.2 Previous assessment of the whole route between the centre of Rhuddlan and Ysgol Dewi Sant / Rhyl High School had indicated that the only part of the route that could give potential concern is the crossing of A547 at Bryn Cwybr. On previous visits in 2013 the traffic flow was such that it was deemed safe because there were adequate gaps in traffic to allow pedestrians to cross without undue delays.
- 4.4.3 Previous assessments were conducted by Denbighshire's Safer Roads Officer and the School (Transport) Support Officer and the route was also walked with Cllr A. Roberts and Town Councillor Mr A. Smith in October 2013.
- 4.4.4 A re-assessment of this walk route was required to be undertaken following significant changes in on-site vehicular movements. In the intervening period between 2013 and October 2015 highway remedial works had been undertaken on the bridge in Rhuddlan. The works included the signalisation of Rhuddlan Bridge, in order to maintain its structural integrity. Following the aforementioned works, this has had a significant impact on vehicular flows using the A548 between Bryn Cwybr roundabout and the roundabout at the top of Rhuddlan known locally as 'Golf Club Roundabout'.
- 4.4.5 Therefore 3 site assessment visits were made on 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> December 2015 to re-examine this walk route. Assessments were carried out by the School (Transport) Support Officer, accompanied by the School Support Manager or the Road Safety Engineer. Traffic volumes were recorded and the available number of adequate gaps in the traffic for pedestrians to safely cross the road were counted. This assessment followed the Guidance provided by Welsh Government in the Learner Travel Operational Guidance, June 2014.
- 4.4.6 Traffic flows were found to be very variable across different days, but on 10<sup>th</sup> December 2015 the traffic flows were such that there was a significant build-up of slow moving traffic leaving Rhuddlan and heading towards the Bryn Cwybr roundabout. Traffic on this one carriageway would make it difficult for pedestrians to see and safely assess when it was suitable to cross the two lanes of traffic.
- 4.4.7 Denbighshire's Safer Roads Officer also assessed the area near to the current pedestrian / cycle crossing at Bryn Cwybr to determine whether there was adequate space to alter the crossing to improve it. It was concluded that there would be sufficient space to create a central refuge of adequate dimension for pedestrians or cyclists to safely wait until a suitable gap in one lane of traffic allowed them to cross. This assessment also followed Highways Guidance regarding the appropriate size, design and correct positioning of the central refuge.
- 4.4.8 A meeting at site was held on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2015 with Denbighshire's Safer Roads Officer, the School (Transport) Support Officer, Cllr A. Roberts, Cllr A. Davies & the Head Teacher of Dewi Sant. Cllr J. Chamberlain Jones had wished to attend but was otherwise engaged. On site Denbighshire's Safer Roads Officer and the School (Transport) Support Officer confirmed that the route was not presently available as a walking route and that free transport would be available for all eligible pupils until such time as the improvements were completed.

4.4.9 All parties at this meeting indicated they were satisfied and agreed with the outcome of the assessment. The Authority will also work with schools in the New Year to help encourage parents and children to walk to school or cycle, once the route is available. Consideration will also be given to creating a walking bus and this suggestion was positively received by the Head Teacher of Dewi Sant. The Authority will also publicise the safe walking route once available, to discourage pupils and parents from crossing further up at the Cwybr roundabout.

4.4.10 Free transport was arranged and this started from 5<sup>th</sup> January 2016 for eligible learners living in Rhuddlan and attending Rhyl schools. Parents of all eligible pupils were contacted by email or letter offering them the opportunity to apply for this free transport from 5th January 2016. To date 22 pupils have taken up the offer and all but 1 of these are attending Ysgol Dewi Sant. The other 1 is at Blessed Edward Jones.

4.4.11 Preparations are proceeding to make the improvements to the crossing and the route will then be re-assessed. If the walking route is available as a safe route after this assessment then transport will cease, with minimum 2 weeks' notice to parents. It is expected that work will be completed around Easter 2016. A map of the junction in question is shown in Appendix 1.

4.4.12 The correct application of the Policy in regard to the Rhuddlan and Dyserth example highlights the issues involved in adhering to the 'nearest suitable school' policy, and the resolution processes which the Authority follows.

4.4.13 It is also noted that no specific changes are coming into force from January 2016 as suggested, and the application of 'nearest suitable school' and the assessments by Public Transport are part of the normal processes in place.

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

The services described herein are all in support of the priority of "Improving Education".

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

Remedial measures to the junction are anticipated at no more than £30,000 against substantive full term contract costs of £26,600 p.a.

**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.**

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?**

Consultation was undertaken with the Local Councillors, the School and parents.

**9. Chief Finance Officer Statement**

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.

- 10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?**  
Possible adverse publicity in the removal of the service and in adverse public comments and complaints. The Council would respond as required whilst ensuring that the Policy is being correctly applied.

- 11. Power to make the Decision**  
The Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008

Scrutiny's powers with respect to this matter are outlined in Article 6.3.2(c) and 6.3.3(ch) of the Council's Constitution.

### **Appendix 1**

See attached PDF map

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