

## FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

**REPORT TO:**           **CABINET**

**DATE:**               **TUESDAY, 20 NOVEMBER 2012**

**REPORT BY:**       **DIRECTOR OF LIFELONG LEARNING**

**SUBJECT:**           **HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY CHANGES – POST 16 AND DENOMINATIONAL TRANSPORT**

### **1.00**   **PURPOSE OF REPORT**

To approve consultation on renewal of Home to School Transport Policies for Denominational and Post 16 transport.

### **2.00**   **BACKGROUND**

In the current financial climate all Local Authorities are looking for ways to meet efficiency savings. One option to review the provision and funding of discretionary services. Two areas of discretion within the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 relate to the provision of Post 16 transport and denominational transport. By changing existing policies in relation to these, there is likely to be scope to:

- release savings by no longer providing free transport to denominational schools for pupils who cannot demonstrate adherence to the faith of the school, and
- restricting free transport for some post 16 students. This would encourage more young people to be educated close to their home communities, improving the sustainability of local educational provision.

Research commissioned by the North Wales Transforming Transport Project and carried out by White, Young and Green Consultants in July 2011 identified that existing policies in relation to post 16 Transport and Denominational Transport differ across the region and should be subject to review.

### **3.00**   **CONSIDERATIONS**

Two proposals currently being considered are:

- (a) to no longer provide free transport to denominational schools for pupils where their admission is not based on faith grounds, i.e. where adherence to the faith of the school in question cannot be demonstrated, and
- (b) to provide free transport to post 16 students attending a first course of full time study at a school or college, subject to meeting the 3 mile distance criteria and providing the student is attending the nearest educational establishment offering the courses they

wish to study. Free transport will be provided to specified sites only.

The proposal in (a) supports the work carried out by a Lifelong Learning Scrutiny Task and Finish Group in 2010/11, when the Group scrutinised in detail the implications of this aspect of the policy in terms of parental preference and admissions to schools.

The current policy in respect of these aspects of discretionary provision is to transport all pupils to denominational schools who meet the distance criteria (2 miles for primary and 3 miles for secondary) irrespective of whether they can provide evidence (e.g. baptism certificate) and to transport all post 16 students who meet the 3 mile distance criteria to the nearest establishment offering the courses they wish to study, irrespective of how far the student wishes to travel. In recent years this has increasingly resulted in the provision of transport to education sites in Cheshire and sometimes in Lancashire. The procedure for introducing a policy change of this nature requires Cabinet approval for a period of consultation with affected stakeholders on the proposed policy change. After the consultation, Members will then be asked to approve the new policy with a sufficient notice period for the affected stakeholders before the new policy comes into force. To release savings for the financial year 2013/14, the new policy would need to come into force from September 2013.

An initial Project Plan showing the timeline and activities needed to achieve this has been drafted and has highlighted the need for sufficient organisational capacity and commitment over forthcoming months. Experience in other local authorities has shown that failure to invest sufficient resources to carry out the work from the start could result in major problems later in delivering change.

Under the 'Learner Travel Operational Guidance', changes to school transport policies should only be made at the start of a new academic year and there must be consultation with schools, parents and pupils before a decision is taken. Such changes can apply to all pupils affected including those already admitted to the school, subject to consultation. However, it is proposed in Flintshire that the changes be introduced in a "phased" approach, as new pupils enrol at a school or college.

#### **4.00 RECOMMENDATION**

That Cabinet commission consultation to renew the school transport policy for denominational and post 16 transport.

#### **5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

It is estimated that with a "phased" approach, efficiency savings of £70k could be achieved by reducing entitlement to free transport to denominational schools, rising to £100k in a full academic year. In order to identify accurately the consequences of a change in policy a detailed analysis would need to be carried out taking in to account where pupils live and trends in parental preference for particular denominational schools. The savings relating to post 16 transport are difficult to estimate at this early stage without detailed analysis being carried out on the impact of providing free transport to designated sites only but could be in the region of £30k part year and £51k

full year.

#### **6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT**

The anti-poverty impact will be included as part of the Equalities Impact Assessment. This will include any support the Council may decide to offer should the proposals be implemented such as, in respect of post 16, assistance for students in receipt of a full Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) or in the case of denominational transport, pupils in receipt of free school meals.

#### **7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT**

An Environmental Impact Assessment will need to be carried out during the process. Although these proposals are likely to result in fewer school transport vehicles, they could generate an increase in private car use.

#### **8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT**

A full Equalities Impact Assessment will need to be carried out during the process.

#### **9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS**

Staff with sufficient resources/capacity/skills to carry out the work within the tight timeframe will need to be identified. Additional capacity could be created by bringing in external support but that would incur a direct cost.

#### **10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED**

Extensive consultation is required with all stakeholders for a recommended 12 week period using a wide range of methods – electronic questionnaires, meetings and drop-in sessions if required.

#### **11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN**

None.

#### **12.00 APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 – Consultation template

#### **LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985** **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

None

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