

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: LIFELONG LEARNING OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE
DATE: THURSDAY, 14 MARCH 2013
REPORT BY: DIRECTOR OF LIFELONG LEARNING
SUBJECT: SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

To seek Members' views on proposed changes to discretionary school transport policy, namely post 16 and transport to denominational schools.

2.00 BACKGROUND

On 20 November 2012, Cabinet agreed to commission consultation to renew the school transport policy for post 16 and denominational transport. The Council recognises the value and role of faith based education and access to post 16 education and the proposed changes are intended to produce a fair, equitable and sustainable transport policy.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

Under the current policy, free transport is provided for post 16 students who are in full time education, living in Flintshire and who live over 3 miles from the nearest educational establishment offering the courses they wish to study. Transport is provided irrespective of how far the student wishes to travel. Free transport is also provided for pupils to attend their nearest denominational school, subject to meeting the distance criteria of 2 miles for primary and 3 miles for secondary schools, irrespective of whether pupils can provide evidence of adhering to the faith in question (e.g. baptismal certificate).

In respect of transport to denominational schools, it is proposed that for new admissions from September 2014, free transport is no longer provided for pupils whose admission to the school is not based on faith grounds. Consultation with individual schools will take place to confirm the admission criteria under which pupils are admitted, and suitable evidence of adherence to the faith of the school such as a baptismal certificate or a letter from a priest may be requested. This proposal 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 school.

In respect of free transport for post 16 students, it is proposed that from September 2013 free transport is provided for students living in Flintshire and attending a first course of full time study at a school or college, subject to meeting the three mile distance criteria and also providing the student is attending the nearest educational establishment offering the courses they wish to study. It is proposed that free transport is provided to the following sites only:

All Secondary School sites within Flintshire

Blessed Edward Jones Catholic High School, Chester Catholic High School, Deeside College sites at Connah's Quay, Northop and Llysfas (for land based courses only), Prestatyn High School, St Brigid's School, Ysgol Glan Clwyd.

Free transport is already provided to these sites for many students and it is proposed that this continues, subject to the student meeting the criteria above. In recent years there has been an increase in the number of students travelling to educational sites outside Flintshire, such as in Cheshire and sometimes in Lancashire, and it is proposed that free transport to such sites is no longer provided.

The changes for post 16 transport would be implemented at the start of the 2013/14 academic year (ie September 2013) for new students. In respect of changes to denominational transport, it is proposed that the changes be introduced in a "phased" approach from September 2014, as new pupils are admitted into Year 7. The changes would not therefore affect existing pupils.

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. Consultation with all stakeholders commenced on 1 March and will continue until 12 April. All responses received will be collated in to a report for consideration by Cabinet on 23 April.

4.00 RECOMMENDATION

That Scrutiny considers the proposed changes to the school transport policy.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is estimated that efficiency savings of £70k could be achieved by "phasing" in a reduction of entitlement to free school transport to denominational schools, rising to £100k in a full academic year.

Savings relating to post 16 transport are estimated at £30k part year and £51 in a full year. It is difficult to identify accurately the consequences of a change in policy as this is dependent upon parental/student preferences, where students live, which courses they wish to access, etc.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

The Anti-Poverty Impact Assessment is included as part of the Equalities Impact Assessment.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

An Environmental Impact Assessment will be carried out. 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 has been carried out.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

If the changes to the policy are agreed, this will result in additional work to check eligibility when pupils apply for school transport at the start of primary and secondary school. This will be contained within existing resources.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

Full consultation must be carried out prior to any changes in policy being agreed, to involve all stakeholders likely to be affected by any change: schools, parents, pupils, diocesan authorities.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

Consultation is currently underway.

12.00 APPENDICES

None.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION ACT) 1985 BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

None.

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