

FLINTSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

REPORT TO: **CABINET**

DATE: **TUESDAY, 23 APRIL 2013**

REPORT BY: **DIRECTOR OF LIFELONG LEARNING**

SUBJECT: **HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY CHANGES**
 - POST-16

1.00 PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.01 To consider the outcome of the consultation on proposed changes to the discretionary post 16 home to school transport policy.

2.00 BACKGROUND

2.01 The Council recognises the value and role of post 16 providers. The policy review has identified changes intended to produce a fair, equitable and sustainable transport policy. There is potential through changed policy, to encourage more young people to choose local providers promoting the sustainability of local post 16 educational provision.

2.02 In November 2012, Cabinet agreed to commission consultation to renew the discretionary school transport policy. The consultation was carried out from 1 March to 12 April 2013. A copy of all the responses received has been placed in the Members' Library.

2.03 The completed consultation related to both post 16 and denominational transport changes. This report considers the outcome of the consultation in relation to post 16 transport only.

3.00 CONSIDERATIONS

3.01 Proposed changes

Free transport for post 16 students is provided under the existing policy to the nearest educational sites offering the combination of courses that the student wishes to follow, and this has resulted in recent years in the provision of transport to sites in Cheshire and Lancashire. The proposals for changing the post 16 transport policy relate to reducing the number of sites to which free transport would be provided. No other changes are being proposed. The wording proposed for the revised policy is:

To provide free transport to post 16 students living in Flintshire 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. These sites are:

- All Secondary School sites within Flintshire offering post-16 courses
- Chester Catholic High School, Coleg Cambria sites at Connah's Quay, Northop, Wrexham and Llysfasi (for land based courses only), Prestatyn High School, Rhyl 6, St Brigid's School, Ysgol Glan Clwyd, St Asaph.

This would result in free transport no longer being provided for new students from September 2013 to any sites not listed above, such as any sites in Conwy, Chester and Cheshire West and Cheshire East, Lancashire, etc. Transport currently being provided to these sites for any Flintshire students in Year 12 would continue for Year 13.

3.02 Consultation

Following the Cabinet decision in November 2012 a range of strategies were implemented to maximise participation in the consultation exercise. This included extensive advertising on the Council's web site and the use of paper and electronic questionnaires as well as individual letters targeted at those stakeholders likely to be affected. Letters were sent to parents of Year 11 pupils, as this is the cohort likely to be affected first by any discretionary policy changes. Consultation was also targeted at all headteachers and colleges including those out of county.

A total of 194 responses were received during the consultation period on the proposed changes to post 16 transport. The responses to the questionnaire were as follows:

How strongly do you agree with the proposed changes to post 16 transport

Strongly Agree	24 responses -12.4%
Tend to Agree	3 responses -1.5%
Neither Agree or Disagree	14 responses – 7.2%
Tend to Disagree	11 responses – 5.7%
Strongly Disagree	122 responses – 62.9%

Out of those who strongly disagree, a number of the comments showed either a misunderstanding of the proposal or a need for re-assurance or clarification. Issues raised included:

- The proposals will adversely affect choice

Response: Whilst it is recognised that in a small number of cases the proposed change to the provision of free transport may determine whether a student chooses to study a course at an out of county site, it is considered that given the wide range of courses offered at educational sites within Flintshire that students will be able to access an extensive range of courses. In a time of demographic change, it is important that the local authority supports the sustainability of local provision.

- Cost of travel to access chosen courses

Response: It is the responsibility of families to ensure that young people are able to access education. The local authority supports access to post 16 education by providing transport to the nearest suitable provider of a course if it is above three miles. It is not a current or proposed requirement for the local authority to transport to alternative providers. Additionally, the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA) is available to help with education costs for families on low income. Students can be awarded up to £30 per week, depending on household income (£23,078 or less per annum) and the number of dependent children.

- A query has also been raised as to whether any spare seats on a school contract arising following the implementation of the proposed policy would be sold on a termly basis to non-entitled students. Under the Transport Policy, spare seats can be sold on a termly basis to non-entitled pupils on a school transport contract subject to payment of a fee (currently £55 per term).

Response: It is not intended to operate this scheme for post 16 students as this would incur administrative and enforcement costs and may prevent officers reducing the number of vehicles on a route when passenger numbers fall.

In order to clarify these and other queries raised, the Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) produced alongside the consultation has been updated and is available on the Council's website. A copy has also been placed in the Members' Library.

3.03 Comments received from Deeside College:

- "The College has worked successfully with Flintshire County Council over many years to provide students with an extensive, flexible and cost effective network of transport. This approach has supported many young people across Flintshire entering or continuing with Post 16 education. Particular aspects that should be considered as part of the review are detailed below:

- The College recognises the considerable pressure to make savings on public spending and to provide services that can be delivered more efficiently and cost effectively. The provision of free transport to students aged 16 and under 19 attending full time study at the College, is essential to encourage participation and prevent transport being a barrier to young learners.
- The review should also consider maintaining free transport for students for the length of their full time study, up to and including courses at level 3, even after the age of 19. This is particularly important for students who commence full time study before the age of 19 and progress to the second year of a course or to a higher level course from an Entry, Level 1 or Level 2 programme.

Response: - At present transport continues if a student is in the last year of study and has reached the age of 19. If free transport was to be extended to all students beyond their 19th birthday, this would incur additional costs.

- The proposed changes suggest that free transport is limited to students attending a first course of full time study at a school or college. At the age of 16, students often do not have the maturity or necessary information, guidance and advice to make an informed decision regarding their future studies. Students should not be disadvantaged if they subsequently change their study pathway, particularly if this is due to inconsistencies in course/career information and the lack of consistent impartial advice, particularly in Year 11.

Response: Whilst it is recognised that some students may wish to change their study pathway and begin a second course of study, under the present policy there is no obligation for transport costs to be met by the Council. If the Council was to extend entitlement it would incur additional costs.

- In assessing which educational establishment to provide free transport to, it is important to continue to assess the range of courses suitable to the abilities, aptitudes and requirements of an individual student, not merely the closest educational establishment. The quality of the provision and responding to the Welsh Government's policies, initiatives and targets, including the Transformation agenda, are also important considerations to ensure the best learning experience possible."

Response: under the current policy, transport is provided to the nearest educational establishment offering the courses a student

wishes to study. If the policy was amended to provide transport to a site which is not necessarily the nearest to a student's home address, this could incur significant additional costs.

- Some respondents commented that it would be unfair to stop free transport for students who have already started their post 16 courses at the sites under consideration for discontinuing free transport.

Response: The consultation paper confirmed that provision for such students will continue until the end of their course in Year 13.

3.04 Proposed changes to the proposals as a result of the consultation feedback

As a result of the feedback the implications of no longer providing free transport to the current Yale College site in Wrexham were reviewed. Given the location of Yale College and accessibility of courses for many Flintshire students, it is felt that transport to this site should continue where it is the nearest provider. This proposed amendment would reduce the efficiency savings originally estimated. However, monitoring of student numbers throughout the year will take place to ensure efficient use of vehicles.

Yale College will be subject to a merger with Deeside College to form Coleg Cambria, which may result in more flexible provision of the curriculum.

4.00 RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.01 That the proposed changes to the Home to School post 16 transport policy as detailed in paragraph 3.1 of the report be approved.

5.00 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.01 Savings relating to changes to the post 16 transport policy were originally estimated at £30k part year and £51k in a full year. These figures were based on no longer providing post 16 transport to out of county sites including Yale College. Any proposed change to this situation would reduce the level of estimated savings.

6.00 ANTI POVERTY IMPACT

- 6.01 To help with education costs, the Education Maintenance Allowance is available to support families on low income.

7.00 ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

7.01 The proposals are likely to result in a small reduction in school contract vehicles.

8.00 EQUALITIES IMPACT

8.01 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been completed in respect of the proposed changes to the transport policy. This has been updated to reflect the results of the consultation exercise. A copy is in the Members' Library.

9.00 PERSONNEL IMPLICATIONS

9.01 No direct implications.

10.00 CONSULTATION REQUIRED

10.01 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.

11.00 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN

11.01 Consultation was carried out from 1 March to 12 April 2013. A copy of all responses received has been placed in the Members' Library.

12.00 APPENDICES

12.01 None.

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

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