

<b>SUBJECT:</b>	<b>Home to School Transport Policy 2025-26</b>
<b>MEETING:</b>	<b>People Scrutiny Committee</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>23<sup>rd</sup> July 2024</b>
<b>DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED:</b>	<b>All</b>

## **1. PURPOSE:**

- 1.1 The Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 sets out the legal responsibilities for the provision of school transport. Within the legislation they place a duty on local authorities to review their transport policy on an annual basis. The policy needs to be confirmed by the 1<sup>st</sup> October and will apply from the start of the proceeding academic year. This ensures that parents and guardians applying for school places are aware of their eligibility for school transport before they submit their applications.
- 1.2 Public consultation on proposed changes to the 25-26 home to school transport policy commenced on Friday 12<sup>th</sup> July and will conclude on the 23<sup>rd</sup> August. The feedback from the consultation will be presented to Cabinet on 11<sup>th</sup> September to determine if any of the options will be adopted for the 25-26 policy. The purpose of this report is to provide People Scrutiny Committee with an opportunity to consider the consultation options so that their views can be considered by Cabinet.

## **2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 That Scrutiny Committee consider the consultation options and provide their feedback for consideration by Cabinet.

## **3. KEY ISSUES:**

- 3.1 The legal responsibilities placed on Local Authorities to provide free home to school transport are prescribed in the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008. Welsh Government have recently concluded a review of the obligations set out in the Measure and published their findings and recommendations in March of this year. Their review concluded that “given the fundamental reform that Welsh Government are planning for the structure of the bus industry, and with the Welsh Government facing significant challenges around budget pressures there should be no immediate amendment to the legislation which underpins Learner Travel in Wales”.

- 3.2 The Learner Travel Measure places the following legal duties on Local Authorities to:
- Assess the travel needs of learners in their authority area.
  - Provide free home to school transport for learners of compulsory school age attending primary school who live 2 miles or more from their nearest suitable school.
  - Provide free home to school transport for learners of compulsory school age attending secondary school who live 3 miles or further from their nearest suitable school.
  - Assess and meet the needs of 'looked after' children in their authority area.
  - Promote access to Welsh medium education.
  - Promote sustainable modes of transport.
  - Where learners are not entitled to free transport, local authorities have the power to provide transport on a discretionary basis.
- 3.3 The Measure also places a duty on all local authorities to undertake an annual review of the transport policy which sets out how the statutory responsibilities and any discretionary policies that are being applied. The transport policy should be agreed prior to the 1<sup>st</sup> October for application in the proceeding academic year.
- 3.4 Currently Monmouthshire exceeds the statutory requirements and provides the following discretionary transport:
- Learners of compulsory school age attending a maintained primary school who live 1.5 miles or more from their nearest suitable or catchment school.
  - Learners of compulsory school age attending a maintained secondary school who live 2 miles or more from their nearest suitable or catchment school.
  - Learners aged 4 attending a maintained primary school who live 1.5 miles or more from their nearest suitable or catchment school
  - Learners attending their nearest or catchment Welsh medium school who meet the distance criteria or 1.5 miles for primary and 2 miles for secondary
  - Learners attending their nearest or catchment faith school who meet the meet the distance criteria of 1.5 miles for primary and 2 miles for secondary.
- 3.5 Currently the Council provides home to school transport for 2,828 learners travelling to 54 different educational establishments. The cost of this provision has increased year on year and the average cost per learner equates to £2,894. To ensure that we continue to mitigate escalating costs we undertake on-going route reviews to ensure that we maximise vehicle occupancy levels, operate our own transport provision and undertake competitive tender processes for externalised contracts. The in-house service has continued to increase the number of routes operated due to the lack of bids or where the cost of in-house provision is lower than that offered by the external market.
- 3.6 Following a review of the current transport policy a consultation exercise has commenced which considers three options which if adopted would align our provision with our statutory responsibilities and provide additional opportunities for the application of personal transport budgets.

- 3.7 **Option 1.** This proposes that the distance eligibility criteria for primary aged learners would revert to the statutory distance of two miles. An assessment of those currently receiving transport has determined that if this policy were to be adopted it would impact 70 mainstream learners. 53 faith learners and 10 Welsh medium learners all of which would no longer be eligible to receive transport as they live between 1.5 and 1.9 miles of their school. The potential financial saving if this option were to be adopted is circa £300k per annum. Appendix 1 outlines the potential impact on learners at a school level.
- 3.8 **Option 2.** This proposes that the distance eligibility criteria for secondary learners would revert to the statutory distance of three miles. If this option were to be adopted it would impact 167 mainstream learners who live between 2 and 2.9 miles from their school. There would be no impact to Welsh medium or faith learners as they travel out of County to attend their nearest suitable school. The potential financial saving is circa £365k per annum. Appendix 1 outlines the potential impact on learners at a school level.
- 3.9 An assessment of the potential environmental impacts of adopting option 1 and option 2 has been undertaken, the details of which are below.

Option	Emissions if all learners losing transport travelled to school by car	Emissions for journeys between 1.75 and 2 miles for primary and 2.5 and 3 miles for secondary learners
Option 1	33.06 tonnes	11.11 tonnes
Option 2	60.75 tonnes	16.16 tonnes

The above table provides the potential gross emissions which may arise if all learners impacted by the options choose to travel to school by private car. The reduction in home to school transport emissions which would arise due to the reduced number of contracts would mitigate these emissions and we will continue to support active travel opportunities. We have recently undertaken a tender exercise for socially necessary public bus services and used the opportunity to improve opportunities for secondary learners to access public buses to travel to and from school through timetable changes. We will continue to work with operators and evaluate feedback to identify any further opportunities to improve this provision to reduce the need for private car journeys.

- 3.10 **Option 3** proposes that where the Council is unable to secure an affordable external operator, or if it is the best financial option, parents or guardians will be offered a personal transport budget (PTB) to transport their children to and from school. The Council currently offers PTBs in limited circumstances and this proposal seeks to broaden their use. The proposal does not seek to make PTB's mandatory in the circumstances outlined in the option and should parents / guardians decline the offer, the Council will provide transport. Where an offer of a PTB is accepted, the Council will pay the parent / guardian 45p per mile and £10/hour for the return journey, to be assessed by the Commissioning team.
- 3.11 Consultation on the three options commenced on the 12<sup>th</sup> July, emails were sent to existing users, schools, operators and stakeholders and they were signposted to the

webpage, consultation document and on-line survey. At the time that the report was prepared we had received 155 survey responses. Hard copies of the surveys are also provided where requested. Following the conclusion of the consultation on 23<sup>rd</sup> August the feedback will be compiled and considered by Cabinet on 11<sup>th</sup> September.

#### **4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):**

Please see attached assessment.

#### **5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL**

5.1 All of the current discretionary transport arrangements were reviewed and a number of options considered. Options 1 and 2 have been taken forward for consultation as the proposals, if adopted, would align the Councils home to school transport policy with our statutory responsibilities. Option 3 would broaden the use of PTBs with the consent of parents or guardians.

#### **6. REASONS:**

6.1 The Councils current home to school policy currently exceeds its statutory responsibilities and last year cost £7,704,231 to deliver. The challenging financial circumstances facing the Local Authority have necessitated a review of its service models, particularly where we are exceeding our statutory responsibilities.

6.2 Welsh Government have concluded that due to financial constraints and the forthcoming bus reform bill they are not proposing any changes to the existing statutory requirements. A review of the home to school transport policies has indicated that Monmouthshire is one of the few Local Authorities that has not adopted statutory distances, in particular 18 Local Authorities have adopted 2 miles for primary aged learners and 19 for secondary aged learners.

5.3 Where learners do not have access to an available walking route, the Council will continue to provide home to school transport. Discretionary transport will also be provided where learners have evidenced medical conditions which prevent them from being able to walk to school.

5.4 It is recognised that the proposals will cause concern for those parents whose eligibility for free home to school transport will be lost, should option 1 or 2 be implemented. The Council has a responsibility to promote sustainable travel and we will continue to work with schools to improve opportunities for active travel and the implementation of school streets and with bus operators to maximise opportunities for learners to access public transport.

#### **6. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**

7.1 The cost of home to school travel in 2023-24 was £7,704,231 which was an overspend of £729,912 against the allocated budget. The budget for 24-25 is £7,779,910 and forecasts have already identified a potential budget pressure.

7.2 If option 1 were adopted we would expect to realise savings in the region of £300k and option 2 would generate savings of circa £365k.

**7. CONSULTEES:**

Public consultation

**8. BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

[Learner travel in Wales analysis and evaluation: recommendations report December 2023 \[HTML\] | GOV.WALES](#)

[Home to School Transport Consultation - Monmouthshire](#)

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## Appendix 1 – Impact of Options 1 and 2 at a School Level

School	Primary		Secondary	
	Total	No below statutory limit	Total	No below statutory limit
Archbishop Rowan Williams	53	29		
Brynmawr Foundation School			4	3
Caldicot			387	89
Cross Ash Primary	89	2		
Chepstow Comprehensive			187	44
Caerleon Comprehensive			30	7
Crickhowell High School			116	3
The Dell	49	24		
Deri View Primary	12	5		
Castle Park Primary	1	-		
Dewstow Primary	2	1		
Durand Primary	2	-		
Goytre Fawr Primary	22	2		
Gilwern Primary	38	9		
King Henry VIII			298	9
Llanvihangel Crucorney	9	2		
Llanfoist Fawr	13	7		
Llandogo Primary	22	-		
Llantillio Pertholey Primary	10	3		
Magor Church in Wales	6	3		
Monmouth Comprehensive			550	12
Our Lady St Michaels	11	1		
Overmonnow Primary School	8	1		
Pembroke Primary School	1	1		
Rogiet Primary	51	1		
Raglan Primary	71	3		
Shirenewton Primary	64	8		
St Albans RC High			54	-
St Briavels Parochial CofE Primary	2	-		
St Josephs RC High School			43	-
St Marys RC Primary	8	2		
Trellech Primary School	82	5		
Undy Primary School	7	-		
Usk Primary School	88	14		
West Monmouth School			5	-
Ysgol Gyfun Gwynllyw			90	-
Ysgol Gyfun Gwent IsCoed			54	-
Ysgol Gymraeg YFenni	86	6		
Ysgol Gymraeg YFfin	29	4		