

<b>MEETING</b>	<b>SCHOOLS FORUM</b>
<b>DATE:</b>	<b>25 OCTOBER 2013</b>
<b>TITLE OF REPORT:</b>	<b>HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT</b>
<b>REPORT BY:</b>	<b>INTERIM HEAD OF SUFFICIENCY AND CAPITAL COMMISSIONING</b>

**1. Classification**

Open.

**2. Key Decision**

This is not an executive decision.

**3. Wards Affected**

County-wide.

**4. Purpose**

To consider possible responses to the proposed changes to Herefordshire Council's School Transport Policy.

**5. Recommendation(s)**

**THAT: Schools Forum:**

- (a) **note the current consultation regarding changes to the home to school transport policy; and**
- (b) **request that the Schools Forum Budget Working Group fully explore the possible implications if the Council adopt a revised policy and report back with options in January 2014.**

**6. Key Points Summary**

- Herefordshire Council is facing significant challenges to its budgets and has to find substantial savings over the next three years. The Council has been reviewing its position on a range of services in line with the financial cuts that have to be made due to the national approach to local government finances. The Council's policy position is that it should provide services to the statutory minimum unless there is a clear reason to provide additional services. The Council's policy position is that it should also charge full cost recovery unless there is a clear reason to amend this approach.

- The proposed changes to the transport policies (nearest school only rather than nearest and catchment, and post 16 SEN transport) are being made because Herefordshire Council is providing more than it is statutorily required to do.
- The Council is consulting on changing the policy of free home to school transport entitlement to nearest school only, rather than nearest and catchment.
- The Council is looking to save approximately £250,000 per annum through this change.
- The home to school transport budgets have been maximised in the last ten years such that further efficiencies are extremely hard.
- Benchmarking data suggests Herefordshire is providing good value for money in terms of home to school transport.

## **7. Alternative Options**

- 7.1 Do nothing and individual or groups of schools work with the new council transport hub on the most appropriate transport solutions for their area.

## **8. Reasons for Recommendations**

- 8.1 Schools Forum members should consider the possible implications for schools and the possible use of the Dedicated Schools Grant should the policy be changed.

## **9. Introduction and Background**

- 9.1 Herefordshire Council has cut substantial sums from its budget over the past two years, but the challenge from central government is to cut even more over the next three years. Herefordshire's policy position is outlined above in the Key Points Summary. The Council is consulting on proposals to provide the statutory minimum in a range of its services, and to provide these in the most cost effective way.
- 9.2 The Local Authority is required to provide free transport to school for eligible pupils. The main eligibility criteria are associated with the distance from the school (two miles for primary and three miles for secondary). The Local Authority is currently consulting on changing its eligibility criteria to offer only the statutory minimum it is required to do (nearest school; rather than nearest and catchment).
- 9.3 In providing the transport to eligible pupils, vacant seats are often available. These are paid for by non-eligible pupils to help offset the cost. For example a bus could be 75% full with pupils who are eligible for transport, the remaining 25% of seats being taken by pupils whose parents pay. The number of pupils transported (riders) each year is given in the table below:

Year	<i>Riders Primary Schools</i>	<i>Secondary Schools</i>	<i>Special Schools</i>	<i>Post 16</i>	<i>Total Riders</i>
<b>04/05</b>	1201	3781	394	943	6319
<b>05/06</b>	1134	3707	360	992	6193
<b>06/07</b>	1087	3502	330	1074	5993
<b>07/08</b>	1058	3458	309	1105	5930
<b>08/09</b>	970	3305	309	1096	5680
<b>09/10</b>	969	3283	275	1062	5589
<b>10/11</b>	950	3172	287	1087	5496
<b>11/12</b>	917	3158	320	1101	5496
<b>12/13</b>	1007	3094	321	1214	5636

- 9.4 The school transport team, of approximately six staff (£200,000) devise the most efficient routes to transport the children and young people and contract transport firms from an agreed framework list. The routes and contracts are kept under continual review. The charges for vacant seats are reviewed annually. The Council has recently combined the children's wellbeing transport function with the public transport function to share expertise and staffing. The intention is that a more efficient use of contracts and transport approaches will result.
- 9.5 Other Councils have already adopted the nearest school only policy for entitlement to free school transport and charging for post 16 SEN. These include Worcestershire, Powys, Suffolk, Birmingham and Gloucestershire (for primary age children only).

## 10. Key Considerations

- 10.1 The largest budgets that have the most impact are:  
a) the costs of providing the transport, and  
b) the income from vacant seats (see columns B and C in the table below).
- 10.2 Column E shows the annual outturn. Up to 2010/2011 there were generally underspends in excess of half a million pounds. The budget allocations (column A) have generally decreased, being nearly half what they were in 2004/2005. Additionally, income (column C) has increased significantly. The net expenditure has decreased by nearly £1m since 2008/2009 but rose in 2012/2013 and is projected to rise again in 2013/2014.

<i>Year</i>	<i>A Budget Allocation £000</i>	<i>B Gross cost £000</i>	<i>C Income £000</i>	<i>D Net expenditure £000</i>	<i>E Outturn over/ (under)</i>
<b>04/05</b>	6217			4437	(1780)
<b>05/06</b>	5283			4695	(588)
<b>06/07</b>	5283			4910	(373)
<b>07/08</b>	5052			4462	(590)
<b>08/09</b>	5328			4712	(616)
<b>09/10</b>	5055	5179	671	4508	(547)
<b>10/11</b>	4871	5181	865	4316	(555)
<b>11/12</b>	3869	4300	697	3603	(266)
<b>12/13</b>	3739	4908	1046	3862	123
<b>13/14</b>	3544			<i>projected</i> 4011	467

- 10.3 The numbers of riders reflect changes in the population but since 2009/2010 the number of children and young people needing transport to special schools has risen considerably. The cost of providing transport for children with special educational needs (SEN) is generally higher than that for mainstream due the specialist nature of the transport and escort staff needed for the journeys.
- 10.4 Herefordshire is a large rural county where there are a high number of children and young people entitled to transport. Because of the rural nature some of the distances will be quite far. Consequently, Herefordshire would expect to have a high per capita cost for transport. The table below compares the planned expenditure on transport with other similar Authorities (DFE categorisation of statistical neighbours).

Area	2011/2012 per capita planned transport expenditure	2012/2013 per capita planned transport expenditure
England (average)	130	130
Herefordshire	186	177 (down)
Somerset	214	223 (up)
Devon	209	215 (up)
Shropshire	278	287 (up)
Cornwall	186	199 (up)
Suffolk	206	224 (up)
Norfolk	224	210 (down)
Wiltshire	194	190 (down)
Dorset	186	237 (up)
Gloucestershire	187	199 (up)
East Sussex	147	159 (up)

- 10.5 Herefordshire is above the national average, which might be expected, but is the second lowest of the statistical neighbours in per capita spend. Herefordshire was one of three similar Local Authorities to plan to reduce expenditure in 2012/2013 compared with 2011/2012.
- 10.6 Responses to the consultation so far have raised a number of concerns. These have included:
- The impact on individual children and families, and the potential increase in costs for families who are no longer eligible for transport.
  - The impact on schools and school budgets. The point has been made that a saving in a Council budget may result in a loss of income to schools if some pupils in the future go to other schools either within Herefordshire or to schools outside of Herefordshire, due to the changes in transport policy.

## **11. Community Impact**

11.1 The demographic nature of Herefordshire gives transport a high profile. Overall there are about 21,400 or 18% of children entitled to free transport. About 600 children (3% of the school population) currently get transport on the basis of living in a particular catchment area but have a nearer school. If the parents of the children affected chose to change school then it could create pressures for some other schools.

## **12. Equality and Human Rights**

12.1 The proposal to consult on changes is in line with the Council duties under Equalities legislation.

12.2 The Equality Duty 2010 has three aims (general duty):

- Eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation and other conduct prohibited by the act;
- Advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not;
- Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.3 The Public Sector Equality Duty (specific duty) requires us to consider how we can positively contribute to the advancement of equality and good relations, and demonstrate that we are paying “due regard” in our decision making in the design of policies and in the delivery of services.

12.4 In order for us to comply with this duty, full consultation and assessment will be required regarding these proposals.

## **13. Financial Implications**

13.1 The expenditure and income associated with home to school transport is detailed under section 10 of this report.

13.2 The Council’s financial position is such that it needs to reduce non-statutory expenditure.

## **14. Legal Implications**

14.1 The Council cannot delegate the responsibility for providing free school transport for those who are eligible.

## **15. Risk Management**

15.1 Changes to the policy, whenever they are introduced, may cause children to change school. This change may put some schools under considerable financial pressure.

## **16. Consultees**

16.1 The Council has been consulting on changes to the policy since early September and the consultation closes on 18 October 2013. There have been several meetings with the public and Head Teachers met with members of the Integrated Transport Unit and the Director of Children’s Wellbeing.

## **17. Appendices**

17.1 None.

## **18. Background Papers**

18.1 None identified.