

<b>Meeting:</b>	<b>General overview and scrutiny committee</b>
<b>Meeting date:</b>	<b>17 January 2017</b>
<b>Title of report:</b>	<b>Update on home to school transport provision</b>
<b>Report by:</b>	<b>Assistant director education and commissioning</b>

## Classification

**Open** – Report and Appendix 2

**Exempt** – Appendix 1 is exempt by virtue of paragraph 2 “Information which is likely to reveal the identity of an individual” of the Access to Information Procedure Rules set out in the constitution pursuant to Schedule 12A Local Government Act 1072, as amended.

## Key Decision

This is not an executive decision.

## Wards Affected

Countywide

## Purpose

To receive an update on the impact of the revised education transport policy which became effective from September 2015.

## Recommendation(s)

**THAT:**        **the committee determine, having regard to the findings of the impact assessment outlined in the report, whether there are any recommendations for the executive to consider.**

## Alternative options

- 1        The committee could recommend that further actions be recommended to the executive for consideration. The information contained in this report suggests that this is not required. Any additional actions would need to be assessed against the resources available to deliver the action and the likely benefit of doing so.

## Reasons for recommendations

- 2 To monitor the impacts of the implementation of the transport policy changes.

## Key considerations

- 3 On 19 December 2013, Cabinet agreed a revised home to school transport policy; having regard to the subsequent recommendations of the general overview and scrutiny committee, in March 2014, Cabinet decided the implementation date for the policy changes would be amended to September 2015.
- 4 The key changes to the revised policy were that free transport will only be provided to the nearest school, subject to the statutory walking distance criteria and with an exception provided in relation to those pupils whose nearest school was in Wales, who would be offered free transport to their nearest Herefordshire school. Post 16 special educational needs (SEN) students now have to pay a contribution towards the provision of transport assistance.
- 5 The findings of a review of the impacts of the revised policy are outlined in appendix 1.
- 6 The key statistics lifted from the appendix are:
  - a. In September 2014, there were 1,646 transfers to secondary school, in September 2015 there were 1,667 and in September 2016 there were 1,618. Of these in 2014, a total of 402 were entitled to free transport, in 2015 there was a total of 359 and in September 2016 there was a total of 334 – therefore the number of year 7 eligible mainstream pupils in receipt of free transport has reduced by 68 when compared to September 2014. It is not yet possible to analyse the impact, if any, upon eligible reception class pupils as not all children have yet either taken up their place at school or applied for free transport (most parents will take their reception aged child to/from school until they are settled).
  - b. The number of mainstream pupils paying for a vacant seat has again increased by a similar amount (96), compared to September 2014, generating additional annual income (a net cost saving) of £76,000. Of these, 76 were additional year 7 and 20 were additional reception pupils.
  - c. There are nine post 16 SEN students paying the equivalent of the vacant seat contribution towards their transport costs. This charge was introduced in September 2015 for new entrants to the system and at that stage 13 students were paying a contribution. This reduction in paying students was not anticipated, given that by 2016 the charge applies to all post 16 SEN students. However, the overall number of post 16 SEN students seeking transport via the council has dropped from 63 in September 2015 to 26 in September 2016. This reduction in demand is enabling savings to be realised on contract costs for SEN transport. Contract cost reductions for this service area are running at around £40,000 in the year.
  - d. At the time that the council was considering introducing the policy change to nearest school only, a number of claims were made that this would result in pupils choosing to apply for schools out of county with the impact that Herefordshire schools would be affected by a loss of students. It should be

noted that at September 2014 (prior to the policy being introduced) the county saw a net positive import of 36 pupils. Members will be interested to note that, despite the concerns raised around the policy change, as of September 2016, the county now has a net positive import of 76 students. This suggests that the policy change is not having a significant impact on pupils choosing to apply for schools out of county.

- e. A number of secondary schools (Bishop of Hereford's Bluecoat School , John Kyrle High School and Sixth Form Centre, John Masefield High School and Sixth Form Centre, Weobley High School and Wigmore School) might have expected to receive fewer preferences for their schools as a direct consequence of the change in education transport policy. However, the total number of places offered, 796, is an increase of 46 compared to September 2014. There is no evidence of any negative impact on other schools.
- f. Analysis of year 7 applications for September 2016, indicates that 660 of these pupils would have an automatic entitlement to free transport as their nearest school is further than three miles away. Interestingly, 26% of this group have chosen to attend their catchment school even though they would be entitled to free transport to another nearer school and 39% have chosen to attend a school which is neither their nearest or catchment school. Only seven appeals against the outcome of the revised education transport policy have been received. The number of appeals (4% of the potential total) is a significant reduction on last year (20%).
- g. The process of reviewing the specification for contracted school transport services is ongoing and opportunities, particularly at the start of each new school year, are being explored to reduce operating costs and realise savings as a result in reducing demand for entitled transport. The current round of reviews, relating to the new school year, has resulted in changes or cancellation of 10 contracts (out of 134) with an estimated saving of around £85,000. Our anticipation is that the rate of savings will increase over the next two years as the full impact of the policy change can be realised through service planning and students with an entitlement under the old policy will not need to be provided with free transport.
- h. Transport implications arising from change in policy. There are no reported consequences upon the school travel network, including buses, taxis and cars, across the county as a result of the change in policy. Congestion continues to occur, particularly outside schools, where insufficient drop off/pick up space exists.

## **Community impact**

- 7 The change in implementation date for the agreed policy changes has provided additional planning time for children, young people, parents/carers, schools and transport providers to prepare for the changes, whilst still ensuring that the council continues to direct its resources at the agreed corporate priorities.

## **Equality duty**

- 8 Public sector equality duty (PSED) implications of the policy changes were explored when Cabinet took the decision in December 2013 (see appendix 2); the changes to the timing of the implementation, with the slower phasing, further mitigated some of

the impacts and allowed parents and schools to consider options. To date we have received no information to suggest that there are either any unintended consequences or this has had a more negative and therefore inequitable impact upon certain families/geographies.

## **Financial implications**

- 9 Implications for savings/revenue generation resulting from the policy change are identified in the body of the report. There are no direct financial implications arising from this report.

## **Legal implications**

- 10 The council is required under section 508B of the Education Act 1996 (“the Act”) to make and provide free of charge, such home to school travel arrangements as they consider necessary having regard for the Department for Education statutory Home to School Travel and Transport Guidance, 2014 which was considered when the revised policy was introduced.
- 11 Our current policy meets with this requirement.

## **Risk management**

- 12 The delayed implementation date and phasing has mitigated the risks identified by allowing parents and schools additional planning time and the rolling out of various alternative transport options. In addition, there have been no further risks identified.

## **Consultees**

- 13 None in relation to this report..

## **Appendices**

Appendix 1 – Policy change impact analysis (exempt)

Appendix 2 – Equality Impact Assessment – home to school/college transport

## **Background papers**

- None identified.