

# REVIEW OF DISCRETIONARY POLICIES APPLICABLE TO HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT

## PROGRAMME AREA RESPONSIBILITY: EDUCATION

CABINET

15TH JULY, 2004

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### Wards Affected

Countywide

### Purpose

To consider the discretionary policy on transport for pupils seeking denominational education.

### Key Decision

This is a key decision because it is likely to be significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in Herefordshire in an area comprising one or more wards. A notice was sent in accordance with Section 15 of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements)(Access to Information) Regulations 2000 to the Chairman of the Education Scrutiny Committee.

### Recommendations

**THAT Cabinet consider the view of Education Scrutiny Committee that there should be no change to the current policy.**

### Reasons

The current policy ensures that all children offered a place at an aided school can access the school regardless of transport cost, and consequently the schools remain fully inclusive.

### Considerations

1. At the conclusion of the cross-cutting best value of transport, the Education Scrutiny Committee was asked to review the discretionary policies applied in the following areas:
  - (i) Boarding Points.
  - (ii) Year 10/11 students whose home address changes.
  - (iii) Travelling times.
  - (iv) Vacant seats for all age groups.
  - (v) Public Service Route Subsidy.
  - (vi) Transport for Under 5s.
  - (vii) Transport for Children with Special Educational Needs.
  - (viii) Post 16 Transport

- (ix) Denominational Transport.
2. On the first six items the Committee recommended no change. In areas 7 & 8 minor changes were recommended, which the Cabinet Member has agreed to introduce.
  3. On denominational transport the Committee also recommended that there should be change. This followed a debate on the report of the working party set up to undertake the review. The part of the report dealing with denominational transport is set out below:

**(i) Current policy on Denominational Transport:**

The current policy offers free transport for children, over the age of 8 who live more than 3 miles from school and under the age of 8, 2 miles from school, who have been admitted to a school on **denominational grounds**.

At present 686 (65 primary and 621 secondary) pupils benefit from this policy at the total cost to the LEA of £435,000. The main benefactors are the pupils who attend the two aided high schools. In the primary sector all but three aided schools serve as a local school with clearly defined catchment areas. The Bishop of Hereford Bluecoat High School admits over two thirds of its pupils on non-denominational grounds.

In other LEAs the policies vary but include:

- Free provision for pupils living more than 3 miles from Home to School.
- Free provision for pupils living more than 3 miles but under 6 miles for primary pupils and 3 to 10 miles for secondary pupils.
- All relevant parents make a contribution of between £200 and £300 per child per school year for denominational transport.

**(ii) Options considered by the Working Party:**

- a. **Maintain Status Quo:** The current policy reflects the voluntary understanding reached between the Church and State School in the 1944 Education Act and the expressed desire to enable all pupils to have access to denominational education, without the constraint of transport cost. It is anticipated that the current number of beneficiaries would remain approximately the same as at present, with costs increasing in line with inflation within the transport industry.
- b. **Remove any form of subsidy.** Such a change would reflect a significant shift in the current arrangements relating to state/church provision of school places. It would mean that the admission to a church school beyond the boundaries of the catchment area of the provided school would be treated on the same basis as any other admission by parental preference. The parents would then be responsible for transport to the school. In the discussion of this option the question of equality of opportunity has been raised bearing in mind that it could be perceived as making denominational places available only to the pupils whose parents could afford the transport costs.

If such a change were to be made it would be introduced in annual steps as each new cohort joined the school. Full implementation would be achieved in 5 years for high schools and 7 years for primary schools. On full implementation it has been estimated that savings of the order of £235,000 could be achieved. This is

less than the gross cost of the existing policy as some students would be entitled to transport to their provided school.

- c. **Seek Parental Contributions** in line with the charges for vacant seats. This option was considered as a compromise, acknowledging the role of the church and state in education provision and ensuring a reasonable level of transport costs without the full cost falling on the Council Tax payer. It has been estimated that a saving of £110,000 could be produced in the full year of operation.
- d. Offer free transport for pupils living beyond 3 miles but within 6 miles of their chosen primary school and 12 miles of their high school. Pupils living beyond the defined distance would be able to claim free transport if they take full responsibility for transport to a pick up point or along an approved route. Some English LEAs do operate similar policies. It is a compromise, which avoids the high cost to the LEAs of long journeys, but at the cost to parents who happen to live at longer distances from the denominational schools. This would produce a saving, which is difficult to predict accurately but it is thought it could be in the order of £115,000.

**Consultation:**

The response from consultees to these options was as follows:

Option	In Favour	
1. Maintain Status Quo	7	16%
2. Remove any form of subsidy	12	28%
3. Seek Parental Contributions	18	42%
4. Free transport with mileage limits	6	14%
5. Other option		
<b>Total</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100%</b>

The working party noted that the majority of consultees who responded favoured change. They also considered the form and degree of change against the following factors:

- extent to which any charging would increase the use of cars;
- degree to which pupils would be denied access due to cost;
- parity between schools;
- ease of administration;
- legal issues.

The working party has concluded that the options for the future should be between 1, 2 and 3 but given the limited number of responses and no clear pattern there was a reluctance to make a particular recommendation it was therefore proposed to and invite the broader membership of the Scrutiny Committee to consider options 1, 2 or 3.

**Risk Management**

The maintenance of the existing policy avoids the two aided high schools being used solely by parents who could afford transport costs, and should minimise use of cars by parents, but it is at the cost of £435,000 to the authority.

## **Consultees**

All schools, dioceses, LSC, surrounding LEAs, Colleges, teaching and support staff unions.

## **Background Papers**

Report to Education Scrutiny Committee.