

EDUCATION FOR LIFE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Education Transport MTFP - Responses to Points Raised at Special Education Scrutiny Meeting held on 19 June 2014.

- 1. The implications should the statutory distance allowance be adopted on the Pontllanfraith Ward as related to the location of the new school. Number of pupils and location of the pupils who would qualify and number of pupils and location of those who would fall outside that distance.**

Based on current pupils numbers, there are 355 pupils residing within the Pontllanfraith ward who would be eligible for free transport to the new school at Oakdale, based on the current policy. Current school transport policy for secondary school pupils provides free transport for pupils living 2 miles or more from their relevant school.

If the policy for transport was revised in accordance with statutory mileage limits (free transport for pupils residing 3 or more miles from their relevant secondary school), it is estimated 141 pupils would no longer qualify for free transport (40% of the current total).

However, it should be noted that pupils from the Springfield area currently attending Oakdale Comprehensive have transport provided based on a risk assessment of the walking route (which was identified as Medium Risk), even though the route is under the 2-mile limit. The walking route to the new school site would need to be reassessed and the risk considered – it is possible that a number of these pupils would continue to receive transport on this basis.

- 2. Clarification of what constitutes a hazardous route and the different levels of hazardous routes provided and their locations.**

Local authorities have a legal duty to assess the travel needs of pupils who walk to school. In the past, risk assessments have been undertaken to consider the relationship between pupils and traffic and includes route conditions (for example footway width; crossing points; traffic flows; visibility at crossing points; crossing facilities; sufficient school crossing patrols). Risk assessments enable local authorities to determine whether a route is 'available' (safe) to walk.

Where a route is deemed to be unsafe, the assessment process can determine what safeguards could be put in place to ensure that the route is or can become 'available' (safe) to walk.

Hazardous routes have been previously considered by members at Scrutiny meetings held on 21 December 2004; a Member 'away day' on 10 March 2005 and a follow-up report to Scrutiny on 12 June 2007, following a very detailed assessment of the individual routes involved. Each route was assessed on site and walked by a working group consisting of members and officers. The Council's Engineering Consultancy Group produced a report on each route.

Prior to the reviews being undertaken, it was agreed that:

- A clear evidence based set of criteria was established to determine risk factors
- A system was adopted to evaluate under distance routes that included a procedure for requesting that a route be evaluated against the agreed criteria; identifying those who should be involved in the assessment of routes, with defined roles and responsibilities.
- Standard methods for ongoing evaluation of under distance routes.

The criteria and evaluation system were developed and used by professional officers in Engineering Services. A scoring system was developed on the Total Risk and a T score allocated on the following basis:

Risk Category	Range of T scores	Comment
Negligible	0 to 3.9	This category should never warrant action
Low	4.0 to 5.9	Unlikely any action needs to be taken and a bus service is unlikely to prove an effective answer where action is needed. Action, if needed is likely to be low-key measures.
Medium	6.0 to 9.9	Action likely to be advisory, but not mandatory. This band is likely to contain any contentious cases.
High	10.0 to 14.9	Action required. Any score above 12 suggests a requirement for priority action, although a bus is not necessarily the solution.

The routes are summarised below by risk category:

Route	T Score	Assessment
The Rise to Coed y Brain Primary	1.4	Negligible
Llanfach to Abercarn Primary	2.8	Negligible
Wattsville to Cwmfelinfach Primary	3.2	Negligible
Hollybush to Markham Primary	3.1	Negligible
The Rise to Lewis Girls Comprehensive	4.1	Low
Croespenmaen to Rhiw Syr Dafydd Primary	4.2	Low
Pwyllypant to Coed y Brain Primary	4.4	Low
Penybryn to Lewis Girls Comprehensive	5.8	Low

Total cost of Negligible / Low risk routes: £91,000 (195 pupils).

Maescwmmer to Lewis Girls Comprehensive (via viaduct)	6.1	Medium
Tiryberth to Lewis Girls Comprehensive	6.7	Medium
Aberbargoed to Heolddu Comprehensive	7.1	Medium
Abertridwr to St Cenydd Comprehensive	7.2	Medium
Springfield to Oakdale Comprehensive	7.6	Medium
Plasyfelin to Bedwas Comprehensive (southern route)	7.1	Medium
Plasyfelin to Bedwas Comprehensive (northern route)	12.0	High
Fochriw to Rhymney Comprehensive	12.2	High
Maescwmmer to Lewis Girls Comprehensive (southern route)	12.7	High

Total cost of Medium / High-risk routes: £334,800 (648 pupils).

The report to Scrutiny in June 2007 endorsed the proposal that all medium and high-risk routes be formally supported with transport and those categorised as low or negligible risk be declassified and not supported with transport provided. In relation to low and negligible risk routes, it was further proposed to continue provision for existing pupils, but discontinue for all new pupils from September 2007. Note that the routes to Bedwas and Heolddu Comprehensives were additional routes introduced following the thorough review undertaken.

Members supported the proposal to provide transport for all medium and high risk walking routes, but did not endorse the proposal with regard to low and negligible risk routes and as such, transport has continued for both new and existing pupils residing in these areas.

The proposal to withdraw transport on routes identified as low / negligible risk was further considered by Scrutiny Committee on 24 November 2010, along with other proposals under the MTFP relevant at the time. The report raised concerns that continuing to transport over these routes left the Authority open to further claims from parents who claim discrimination and precedent. Members did not endorse the proposals.

The Welsh Government published revised Operational Guidance in June 2014 on Learner Travel, which incorporated a review of the Statutory Provisions relating to the Assessment of Walked Routes to School. This reiterates the legal duty that local authorities have to assess travel needs of pupils who walk to school and recommended the following provisions are considered:

i). Risk Assessment Procedure in Relation to Physical / Traffic Risks

Covers the relationship between learners and traffic. Includes route conditions; traffic flow / speeds; collision history; footpaths; crossing points; proximity of canals / rivers / ditches and embankments; lighting; planned changes in the area and level crossings. These parameters would have been considered in previous assessments of walked routes, although some areas of assessment now have more prescribed considerations.

ii). Risk Assessment Procedure in relation to Social Danger

In this context the Guidance covers the most common interpretations provided by children and young people and lists the following: stranger danger; danger(s) posed by paedophiles; danger(s) posed by criminals (muggers, thieves, murderers, kidnappers); anti-social behaviour (the presence of bullies or of alcoholics or drug addicts on walked routes to school; and physical manifestations, such as discarded needles or places where drug abuse / misuse takes place.

This is a new and potentially difficult area to assess and the Guidance makes it clear that there is an expectation that local authorities work in partnership with organisations / agencies to consider the risks. It also makes it clear that the views of pupils are an essential part of the process and the Minister has made this a top priority for local authorities.

The Guidance advises there are a variety of ways in which local authorities can help ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the safety of children and young people on the walked route between home and school, including:

- The provision of more school crossing patrols
- Traffic calming measures
- Encouraging walking buses
- Encouraging parents to accompany their children to school
- Encouraging parents to share the school run
- Providing kerb craft training
- Delivering wider provision of travel training
- Discussions in lessons or school assemblies
- Liaison with Police liaison officers, including Police Community support officers.
- Reducing speed limits around schools to 20mph and tackle pavement parking
- Promoting awareness, understanding and implementation of the statutory Learner Travel Code.

Whilst these mitigate the need to provide transport, local authorities have expressed concern that there will be an expectation from parents for additional transport to be provided. Whilst the physical / traffic risks are easily and consistently quantified, many of the social risks are based on perception and are subjective, rather than objective.

These additional considerations may be pertinent to the review of discretionary education transport policy, as some Councils have already been forced to consider them before implementing changes to policy. This may result in proposals to revert to statutory distances, for example, being challenged and full risk assessments will be necessary before policy changes can be implemented.

3. Officers make enquiries if the issues regarding transport/escort at Lewis Boys School are still relevant.

Mainstream contracts are due for renewal from January 2015. It is proposed that these are put out to tender with options to include / not include the cost of an escort. The new contracts are now established and the next step will be for officers to meet with the Headteacher to discuss and assess the risks and consider how these can be mitigated.

Escorts were introduced on the large bus routes to Lewis Boys, following significant health and safety concerns due to pupil behaviour on journeys to and from school. Operators raised serious concerns over pupils' behaviour, to the extent that some confirmed they would no longer be prepared to operate the contracts without an escort. Any changes to the current arrangements would therefore need to be discussed fully with the operators concerned and appropriate risk assessments undertaken.

The potential savings are significantly lower than previously indicated, due to the reduction in cost following the recent retender – the annual cost is £18.6k compared to £30k previously.

4. Post 16 Transport - the number of ways this can be provided be detailed and a cost break down provided.

The main report outlines the variety of ways post 16 transport is provided. This section considers in more detail some of the issues and solutions.

A comprehensive transport scheme, administered by Coleg Gwent exists throughout the former Gwent area, which makes use of the extensive bus network. The local authorities and Coleg Gwent jointly fund the scheme, but the level of funding varies between local authorities. This means that students from the four other local authorities participating in the scheme pay a flat fare per journey to travel. The current position is summarised below:

Local Authority	Price per Single journey
Blaenau Gwent	£0.80
Caerphilly	Nil
Monmouthshire	£0.80
Newport	£1.00
Torfaen	£1.00

Caerphilly makes a £376 contribution per student towards the cost of a season ticket to Coleg Gwent, which is around 63% of the total cost of the season ticket price, with the balance being met by the College. The other former Gwent authorities fund a lower contribution towards the scheme. The only charge passed on to students residing in Caerphilly is a £10 administration charge per term levied by the college to all students issued with season tickets.

Under Caerphilly's current policy, whereby the Council fully funds post 16 transport, the Council would be obliged to increase its contribution towards the Coleg Gwent scheme if financial constraints on Further Education funding caused the college to review its contributions to the scheme. This could expose the Council to additional costs of up to £200,000 (cost impact if all external funding was withdrawn). This area of transport policy is therefore a priority for review on the basis of both reducing current spend, but also to mitigate exposure to additional financial cost pressures in future.

Options

The table below summarises suggested options. The costs are indicative as the actual cost of transport varies considerably.

	Option 1: Discontinue all post 16 transport provision	Option 2: Provide travel grant towards the cost of transport, range based on £250 to £140 per year (as typical grants offered by neighbouring authorities)	Option 3: Introduce a cap on transport costs. Current average cost per student is £378 per year. Capping this at £350	Option4: Introduce a fixed parental contribution for all students
Potential saving	£850,000	£360,000 to £660,000	£77,000	£500,000
Impact on students	Severe – removal of transport would be a significant barrier to post 16 education. Alternative / direct public transport options might not exist, so access to schools / colleges might be difficult.	High - most existing transport provision would be maintained, but bespoke transport to establishments outside the county borough would cease (e.g. to Pencoed College). Financial impact on families significant.	Medium - most existing transport provision would be maintained, but bespoke transport to establishments outside the county borough would cease (e.g. to Pencoed College). Financial impact on families moderate.	Medium - all existing transport provision would be maintained. Financial impact on families moderate, but contributions would be equitable.
Equitable / consistent	Yes	No – would vary according to actual cost of providing transport.	No – would vary according to actual cost of providing transport. Some students would not pay any travel costs.	Yes – all students / families would contribute the same amount, regardless of the cost.

Estimated cost impact for students / parents	£300 to £585 per annum (£100 to £195 per term)	£154 to £445 per year (£51 to £148 per term) on £140 grant; £44 to £335 per year (£15 to £112 per term) based on £250 grant.	£0 to £235 per year (£0 to £78 per term).	£180 per year (£60 per term).
Other issues	Withdrawal of contract buses to Coleg y Cymoedd, Ystrad Mynach will result in increased costs for home to school transport contracts that operate as linked routes. The Council benefits from lower contract costs as each route to the college is linked to a school contract route that spreads the cost between both contracts. Withdrawing the college route would put full cost of provision on to the school route. The full savings would not therefore be realised.			

Cap the upper age limit for post-16 transport

The current policy provides for transport until the end of a student's chosen course, providing the student was under the age of 19 at the commencement of the course. In some cases, this means a student who has reached the age of 22 is still in receipt of free transport. Many authorities in Wales end the provision at the end of the academic year in which the student reaches their 19th birthday. Negligible savings, but would harmonise policy in line with other Councils and would be applied to options 2, 3 or 4 in the table above.

General issues / impact

Students will be disadvantageded by reduced equality of opportunity (cost of transport would be a barrier). This impact would be more severe on low-income families who could not afford the transport costs. To mitigate this, it would be possible to vary the level of parental contribution for those parents who meet the criteria for free school meals, or have a household income below a certain threshold. This would reduce the amount of total savings possible, but overall, fewer students would benefit / carry on their education after school leaving age. Could also impact on Further Education providers.

Local bus network – season tickets are a significant source of revenue that helps sustain the frequency and capacity of services provided in some areas of the county borough. The Coleg Gwent scheme in particular helps maintain the levels of service on the bus network in the Blackwood / Newbridge / Crosskeys and Risca areas.

The potential cost saving of discontinuing all post-16 transport excludes the cost of transport for students who share transport with pupils aged 11 to 16 years old on contract buses to schools with 6th forms. An average cost per seat of these arrangements has been used to estimate the potential savings / cost per student under the other options outlined in the table, but as post-16 students represent a minority of passengers travelling on each contract (around 15% overall) to the schools concerned, withdrawing eligibility for transport would not realise quantifiable cost savings.

5. Figures on any under-spend on the transport budget and which other budget allocations benefited from this under-spend and by how much.

i) Details of spend in recent financial years is summarised below:

2012-13

Spend Details:

• Cwmcarn Transport In Year projected u/spend	£239k	Agreed £400k
• Earmarked Transport (Cwmcarn up to £400k) towards Cwmcarn	£161k	to be utilised
• Spend (excluding Cwmcarn)	£6,103k	
• Equalisation Account Set Up	£162k	£27k x 6 days

Total **£6,665k**

BUDGET **£6,706K**

Reported Underspend 2012-13 **£41k**

2013-14

Spend Details:

• Cwmcarn Transport in Year	£417k
• Spend (excluding Cwmcarn)	£6,559k
Total	£6,976k

Funding Received in Year:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|---------|
| • Cwmcarn Funded Fully | (£417k) |
| • Release from Equalisation A/C | (£109k) |
| Total | (£526k) |

Net In Year Spend **£6,450k**

BUDGET **£6,450K**

NET 2013-14 **Break Even**

ii) Equalisation Account (Earmarked specifically for Education Transport)

Set – up at the end of 2012-13 to recognise the variation in the number of School Days in a financial year, due to when the 2-week Easter break falls.

195 days in an academic year. In 2012-13 187 days fell into the financial year, which was a big part of the reason for the underspend. In 2013-14 financial year the number of school days was 201. Consequently equalisation reserve set up for the 6 additional days (i.e. 6 days above the 195 days in an academic year.) Estimated daily cost of £27k – hence - £27k x 6 days = £162k set up in equalisation account (end 2012-13).

In 2013-14 and after taking account the budget reductions (see below), Education Transport was overspent by £109k (excluding the Cwmcarn issue that was fully funded separately), consequently £109k released from the reserve to cover this cost in 2013-14. This leaves a balance of £53k currently.

There are 194 days in the 2014 - 15 financial year.

iii). Budget Revisions

2013 -14 Budget Reductions for Transport utilised as follows:

- £33k Funding from the budget towards re-opening of Aberbargoed Library.
- £120k from the budget towards costs of Living Wage.
- £200k efficiency saving / recurring spend

2014 – 15 Budget Reductions for Transport:

- Budget reduced by £50k as part of MTFP efficiency savings. Outturn £167k over budget (around 2.5%) due to no snow days or days of industrial action. 194 school days in the financial year (equalisation does not apply) and increasing demand, but limited supply of taxis for ALN and Inclusion requests.

6. The cost and savings implication of providing free transport at 1.75 miles - Primary / 2.5 miles - Secondary against the statutory distance of 2 miles - Primary/ 3 miles - Secondary and the number of children affected.

The Council has a statutory duty to provide pupils aged 5 to 16 with free school transport to their nearest school if the walking distance between their home and nearest school is more than 2 miles (for primary education) or 3 miles (for secondary education). Caerphilly provides transport for pupils who attend their 'relevant' school and defines walking distances as 1.5 miles for primary education and 2 miles for secondary pupils. "Relevant" school is defined as the catchment or nearest school.

The proposal to Scrutiny on 19th June was to revert to statutory provision. It was estimated that this would save £400,000 once fully implemented. It was noted that the actual savings were estimated for the following reasons:

- The change in policy would reduce the number of pupils travelling overall, but this does not necessarily equate to direct cost savings (e.g. reduced vehicle capacity would not equate to direct cost savings).
- Revised guidance for the Assessment of Walked Routes to School – it is likely that any change to policy will encourage parents and pupils to raise concern over physical and social dangers on walking routes to some schools where pupils previously qualified for transport and request formal assessments. The Council will be obliged to consider these concerns and undertake assessments and this may result in the retention of transport on some routes.
- Would require an extensive review of current provision to match transport resources with reduced requirements.

Members requested that consideration be given to reducing the distances to 1.75 miles for primary pupils and 2.5 miles for secondary pupils. At this stage, it is only possible to estimate the potential savings for the reasons outlined above and on this basis, the annual savings should be around £200,000 per annum, affecting between 500 and 600 pupils.

Research has not identified any Welsh or English local authorities that offer transport to school on this basis.

7. Impact on parents should free transport to Faith, Post 16 and Welsh Medium Schools be removed.

The nature of the provision of transport for pupils and students attending Faith, Welsh Medium and Post 16 educational establishments means that often, more travelling is required to access them compared with English Medium Schools.

Secondary provision for Welsh Medium Education in the county borough is concentrated on two sites – one at Fleur de Lys and the developing site at Pontygwindy Road, Caerphilly. Whilst the new site at Caerphilly will reduce the distance necessary for many pupils to travel, many pupils in the county borough live significant distances from these schools.

With regards to Faith education, there is no Secondary provision in the county borough and most pupils travel to Cardinal Newman in Rhydyfelin or Bishop Hedley in Merthyr Tydfil.

Post 16 education is available at certain schools or a number of Colleges of Further Education. Transport is assessed based on the nearest establishment offering a student's chosen course.

The impact on parents of pupils attending Faith, Welsh Medium or post 16 Educational establishments is generally more significant compared with pupils receiving English medium education as journeys often involve considerable travelling distances. Whilst public transport would be an alternative option for some pupils and students, for many making the journey would involve a number of changes and increased journey time.

Other impacts include:

- Some families could be disadvantaged by reduced equality of opportunity (cost of alternative transport would be a barrier). This impact would be more severe on low income families who could not afford the transport costs.
- Post 16 – fewer students able to benefit / carry on their education after school leaving age. Could also impact on Further Education providers.
- Reduced choices of available Education.
- Attendance levels – withdrawal of bespoke / direct transport would could lead to reduced attendance levels.