
Home to School Transport Policy 25/26

Committee considering report:	Executive
Date of Committee:	25 July 2024
Portfolio Member:	Councillor Heather Codling
Report Author:	Gabrielle Mancini, Service Director-Transformation
Forward Plan Ref:	EX4528

1 Purpose of the Report

- 1.1 To introduce the proposed Home to School Transport policy for the academic year 2025/26. The proposed policy is being brought forward at this early stage as it must be ready when admissions open for the 25/26 academic year in September 2024.

2 Recommendation

- 2.1 That the Home to School Transport policy for 2025/26 is approved for publication.

3 Implications and Impact Assessment

Implication	Commentary
Financial:	There are no substantive changes to the policy so in and of itself there are no new financial implications attached to the new policy.
Human Resource:	None
Legal:	<p>There are no substantive changes to the policy so in and of itself there are no new legal implications attached to the new policy.</p> <p>Legal Services have been part of the project board on Home to School Transport so legal implications have been considered throughout the development of the policy.</p>
Risk Management:	There are no substantive changes to the policy so in and of itself there are no new risks attached to the new policy.

Property:	None			
Policy:	Local policy using national statutory guidance on the delivery of school transport set out in the Education Act 1996.			
	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equalities Impact:		x		No substantive changes made, although the readability of the policy has been enhanced.
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		x		No substantive changes made, although the readability of the policy has been enhanced.
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		x		No substantive changes made, although the readability of the policy has been enhanced.
Environmental Impact:		x		No substantive changes made, although the readability of the policy has been enhanced.
Health Impact:		x		No substantive changes made, although the readability of the policy has been enhanced.
ICT Impact:		x		No impact as this is a policy document
Digital Services Impact:		x		No impact as this is a policy document

Council Strategy Priorities:	x			The Home to School Transport project forms part of the Transformation Programme approved by Executive in September 2023.
Core Business:	x			The Home to School Transport project forms part of the Transformation Programme approved by Executive in September 2023. It is likely that other workstreams within this project will lead to reductions in the cost of delivering this service.
Data Impact:		x		None
Consultation and Engagement:	<p>Project board includes officers from Education, Transport, Legal, Finance and Communications.</p> <p>Briefing for administration members in March 2024.</p> <p>Corporate Board and Operations Board, April 2024</p>			

4 Executive Summary

- 4.1 The cost of delivering statutory school transport services has risen significant in recent years for a number of reasons including rising demand, increased complexity of need and contractual inflation.
- 4.2 As part of the Transformation Programme, the Council has agreed to undertake a project to review the arrangements for delivering these services in order to bring down cost and increase efficiency. The basis for this project was a report written by an appointed consultant which identified possible avenues for investigation.
- 4.3 One of the suggestions was to undertake a review of the policy, which has now been carried out. Although the existing policy did not diverge from statutory minimum provision, there were still opportunities to enhance its accessibility and readability through changes to structure and graphic content, as demonstrated in the new draft policy at Appendix A.
- 4.4 Work on the project to date has also identified that the Council is making a number of provisions outside of its policy and that there are further opportunities to investigate these and to present savings options to members. These include establishing Service Level Agreements with alternative providers, introducing additional walkable routes, undertaking more frequent package reviews and revising procurement processes. The proposals as outlined suggest that officers should continue to look at these options after the draft policy for 2025/26 is published.

5 Supporting Information

Introduction

- 5.1 Each year, the Council must publish details of eligibility for, and delivery of, its school transport services. The document at Appendix A sets out West Berkshire Council's proposed Home to School Travel Policy for the 2025/26 academic year and describes how the Council fulfils its duties and exercises its discretionary powers under the Education Act 1996. It does so by explaining:
- the criteria for eligibility for travel support for pupils to their school for children and young people of compulsory school age (5-16 years old), young people in further education aged 16 to 19 and SEN 19 to 25
 - how parent/carer(s) can apply for travel support and how decisions are made
 - how parent/carer(s) may appeal against decisions that they believe do not comply with this policy.

Background

- 5.2 West Berkshire Council provides home-to-school transport assistance for almost 2000 local young people. Whilst a small percentage of this provision is undertaken in-house, by schools, and through provision of Personal Transport Budgets, mileage allowances and public transport passes, a significant part is contracted out to external companies. The policy and budgets for the service are overseen by Education Services and the operational delivery by the Transport Services Team in Environment Services.
- 5.3 The service has a budget of over £3m each year but forecast pressure in 2023/24 of circa £1m. This is following impacts of higher (and more bespoke) demand (including a rise in Education Health Care Plans), reduced supply (i.e. contractors and their staff exiting the market due to covid and more lucrative occupations), and increased costs (fuel being the most high-profile, but parts shortages have driven up other costs).
- 5.4 In November 2022, Education Services were tasked by Budget Board to bring in consultants funded by transformation resources to deliver options to save 15% on the HTST budget. A report was subsequently prepared which detailed a number of proposals for realising efficiencies, which included revision of the policy.
- 5.5 After its publication, it was decided that this consultancy work would form the basis of one of the projects which would be included in the Transformation Programme, with the new Service Director- Transformation acting as project sponsor. A multi-disciplinary project board was subsequently formed and work commenced to review the consultant's recommendations and to identify opportunities to reduce the cost of this service.
- 5.6 Analysis of the existing policy was undertaken and it was determined that the Council did not diverge from statutory minimum provision. As such, the decision was undertaken to revise the wording of the policy to ensure it was as accessible and easy to understand as possible; however, no grounds were made to make substantive changes to the policy's content as it already reflects the statutory minimum provision. As such, a formal public consultation is not required.

- 5.7 As part of this work, however, it was identified that the Council was making a number of provisions outside of its policy and that there are further opportunities to investigate these and to present savings options to members. These include establishing Service Level Agreements with alternative providers, introducing additional walkable routes, making better use of personal budgets, undertaking more frequent package reviews and revising procurement processes. It is therefore suggested that members consider these and officers then continue to look at these options through the deployment of additional resource on an invest to save basis after the draft policy for 2025/26 is published.

Proposals

- That the Home to School Transport policy for 2025/26 is approved for publication.
- That further work continues to identify ways to reduce the cost of delivering school transport by formalising Service Level Agreements with alternative providers, improving walkable route availability, making better use of personal budgets, reviewing procurement processes and by introducing regular package reviews.

6 Other options considered

- 6.1 Declining to publish a new policy at this time is a possibility as no substantive changes are being proposed. This is not recommended as guidance suggests reviews of the policy should be undertaken regularly and this has not been done since 2018.

7 Conclusion

- 7.1 West Berkshire Council is required by law to provide home-to-school transport to a prescribed cohort of young people as set out in the Education Act 1996. The local implementation of this statutory responsibility is laid out in the Council's Home to School Transport policy, which is published each year to align with annual school admissions.
- 7.2 The proposals within this paper suggest that the 2025/26 draft policy should be published and that further work is undertaken to identify ways to reduce the cost of delivering this service through the deployment of additional resource within the Transport Services Team. It is recommended that these proposals are allowed to proceed in order to meet the objectives of the project as laid out within the Transformation Programme.

8 Appendices

- 8.1 Appendix A – Draft Home to School Transport Policy 25/26
- 8.2 Appendix B - EQIA
- 8.3 Appendix C - Data Protection Assessment

Subject to Call-In:

Yes: No:

- The item is due to be referred to Council for final approval
- Delays in implementation could have serious financial implications for the Council
- Delays in implementation could compromise the Council's position
- Considered or reviewed by Scrutiny Commission or associated Committees, Task Groups within preceding six months
- Item is Urgent Key Decision
- Report is to note only

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