

Meeting: Children, Families and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date: 24 February 2010
Subject: Follow up Report on Home to School Transport Policy
Report of: Deputy Chief Executive and Director of Children, Families and Learning
Summary: The report provides the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with the further information requested at its meeting on 2 February 2010.

Contact Officer: Sylvia Gibson, Assistant Director, Policy Planning and Commissioning
Public/Exempt: Public
Wards Affected: All
Function of: Executive

CORPORATE IMPLICATIONS

As identified in the report to the Children, Families and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee on Home to School Transport on 2 February 2010, attached to this report as Appendix A.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. That Members consider the additional information requested at the meeting on 2 February 2010.**
- 2. That Members provide Officers with comments, which will be reported to the Executive at their meeting on 9 March 2010, and to contribute to the development of the Policy.**

Background

- At its meeting on 2 February 2010 the Children, Families and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee received a report on proposed changes to the Home to School Transport Policy. Members raised a concern regarding the consultation process and requested that prior to submitting any comments to the Executive they be provided with an opportunity to receive the full consultation results for discussion. The Committee resolved (**Minute CFL/09/78 refers**) "that prior to the proposals being presented to the Executive, a Special meeting of the Children, Families and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee be scheduled after the consultation closing date and before the Executive meeting on 9 March 2010 to hold a further discussion in light of the consultation results."

Additional information requested

2. It was agreed that the public consultation period would be extended for a further week and close on 19 February 2010. The results of the consultation are to be tabled at the Children, Families and Learning Overview and Scrutiny Committee at the meeting on 24 February.
3. A financial Impact Evaluation of phasing in the proposed change to eligibility for free home to school transport to denominational schools was requested.
4. Clarification on Proposal 6, the requirement to support Asylum Seeking Children was requested.
5. Clarification on Proposal 7, the intention to provide independent travel support to children and young people with Special Educational Needs was requested.
6. The Committee wished to receive further information on the low income criteria, particularly on the working tax credit threshold.

Denominational Transport

7. (a) Consultation Process

The Consultation Process began on 8 January 2010 and was due to close on 12 February 2010. Following the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 2 February 2010, the consultation was extended by one week with a new closing date of 19 February 2010 to allow for further comments to be made by interested parties. A Consultation Questionnaire has been circulated widely and is available on the Council's Website.

All families with children at denominational schools received individual letters and copies of the consultation to their home address at the start of the consultation process.

Information was sent to all schools in Central Bedfordshire informing them of the proposals and of the consultation. Schools were asked to inform parents of the consultation and the web address.

Reminders were sent to schools following the Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 2 February 2010 requesting that they inform parents of the consultation if they had not already done so, and informing them of the revised closing date.

Letters were sent to Directors of Children's Services in Local Authorities where Central Bedfordshire children are currently attending denominational schools.

The consultation closing date was amended on the Council's website and the communication and press team informed of the changed date.

Members of the Committee will receive at the meeting a summary of the responses to the consultation questionnaire, together with a breakdown of other comments and letters received.

(b) Impact Evaluation: Phasing in eligibility to free school transport to denominational schools

Consideration has been given to the financial impact of phasing in the eligibility to free school transport to faith schools.

The financial model is based on current usage of denominational transport, phased out on the basis that when a child moves to the next phase of schooling his/her entitlement ceases. Currently for Central Bedfordshire schools this is at the end of Years 4 and 8. For Local Authorities who operate a two tier system this is at the end of Year 6. The model assumes that those children currently at Upper or Secondary schools will remain at their current school until Year 13.

The financial impact to the authority of phasing out entitlement to denominational transport is reflected in the additional budget required in each financial year.

Phasing in the proposal to withdraw entitlement over the seven year period indicated below would require compensatory savings to be identified in Children's Services budgets. The budget impact will reduce over the period with the greatest impact being incurred in 2010-11.

Financial summary of phasing out of denominational Transport

		Financial Year							Savings	
		10/11	11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16	16/17	In Yr	Cum
	Cost									625,670
Academic Year	10/11	(118,920)	(84,943)						(203,862)	421,808
	11/12		(102,936)	(73,526)					(176,462)	245,345
	12/13			(50,948)	(36,391)				(87,339)	158,006
	13/14				(52,996)	(37,854)			(90,850)	67,156
	14/15					(31,394)	(22,424)		(53,817)	13,338
	15/16						(7,781)	(5,558)	(13,338)	0
	Cum savings	(118,920)	(306,779)	(431,273)	(520,660)	(589,908)	(620,112)	(625,670)		
	Addt Budget Required	506,750	318,871	194,397	105,010	35,762	5,558	0		

Looked After Children and Unaccompanied Refugees and Asylum Seeking Children

- To avoid any doubt, Proposal 6 refers to Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children and is modified in the Executive Report.

Special Educational Needs Transport

8. The population of children with Special Education Needs defined in Proposal 7 of the original report are those where they fall into the legal definition of special educational needs according to the 1981 Act as amended by subsequent legislation. To avoid doubt, this is a different definition from those classified as Children Looked After or Children in Need, who are referred to in social care legislation under the broader term of Safeguarding.
9. The intent to specify the provision through the statement process was intended to help with monitoring and evaluation, and not to imply that pupils who travel to special schools would have to travel to school independently as a matter of course. As they move toward adulthood, independence training will become relevant but this would be a matter of individual evaluation on a case by case basis. To make it clear, the wording *parental support* will be modified to represent the intention that the statutory walking distance would be based on the child/young person being able to *walk accompanied by an adult or unaccompanied safely as they reach independence*. This is modified in the Executive Report.

Low Income Criteria and the Working Tax Credit Threshold

10. The low income criteria set out in the Education and Inspections Act 2006 and in the 2007 Guidance for Home to School Transport (DCSF) is as follows:
If the family receive:
 - free school meals;
 - maximum rate Working Tax Credit¹;
 - Income Support;
 - Income Based Job Seeker Allowance;
 - Child Tax Credit, if not entitled to Working Tax Credit (WTC) and annual income does not exceed £16,040;
 - Support under S6 of Immigration and Asylum Act 1999; and
 - Guaranteed element of State Pension credit.

Conclusion

13. The Committee is requested to consider the proposed changes to the Home to School Transport Policy and to give their comments to be fed back into the development of the Policy.

¹ When tax credits are awarded, or following a change in their household circumstances, HM Revenue and Customs issue a "tax credits award notice" detailing the breakdown and amount of the award. Part two of the award notice gives details of the full WTC elements. This is the maximum amount a customer can receive in WTC in any year. It then lists any reduction due and shows the net amount payable. It is therefore readily apparent from the award notice whether a person is receiving maximum WTC or a reduced sum due to income.

Appendices:

Appendix A: Report to Overview and Scrutiny on Home to School Transport on 2 February 2010