

THE VALE OF GLAMORGAN COUNCIL

CABINET: 24TH FEBRUARY, 2020

REFERENCE FROM CORPORATE PERFORMANCE AND RESOURCES
 SCRUTINY COMMITTEE: 5TH FEBRUARY, 2020

“ WITHDRAWAL OF DISCRETIONARY FUNDING FOR FARE PAYING SCHOOL TRANSPORT SERVICES (WHICH DO NOT CATER FOR PUPILS WHO QUALIFY FOR FREE SCHOOL TRANSPORT) (REF) –

Cabinet, on 16th December, 2019, had referred the report to the Scrutiny Committee for consideration. The report advised of the results of the Consultation undertaken on Fare Paying School Transport services between 2nd April, 2019 and 28th May, 2019. The consultation outlined the proposed withdrawal of funding for fare paying school bus services, which were currently provided at the discretion of the Council.

After due consideration of the consultation responses received, the report sought Cabinet approval for the withdrawal of funding of Council supported fare paying school bus services with effect from 1st September, 2020. This would assist in meeting the savings that the Neighbourhood Services and Transport Department was expected to make and help to support the Council in funding statutory free school transport for pupils who qualified by virtue of distance from school and availability of walking routes.

The Head of Neighbourhood Services and Transport stated that the report had no implications with regard to the provision of free home to school transport for entitled children, which would be maintained as existing. Furthermore, the officer wished to highlight that the current provision of fare paying school transport was not consistently available across the Vale of Glamorgan and it was therefore not offered to all pupils within the Authority.

The report outlined which services and schools could be affected by the withdrawal of funding for fare paying school transport and the current average numbers of fare paying pupils only using those services as below:

			AM	PM
P97	Peyton Travel	Llansannor CiW	1	1
P122	Peyton Travel	Llangan Primary	0	0
P125	Watts	Ysgol St. Curig / St. Baruc	10	15
P132	Creigiau	Ysgol Pen y Garth	18	18
P133	Peyton Travel	St. Josephs	0	10
P138	Watts	St. Illtyd		
P139	Creigiau	Ysgol Pen y Garth	21	25
351	Peyton Travel	St. Athan Primary	45	45

S2	Watts	Pencoedtre High / Whitmore High / Ysgol Bro Morgannwg	37	30
S10	Watts	Pencoedtre High	57	55
S14	Watts	Pencoedtre High / Whitmore High / Ysgol Bro Morgannwg	29	42
S40	Peyton Travel	Llantwit Major Comprehensive	5	5
S49	Watts	St. Richard Gwyn	44	44

The officer noted, however, that some of these services may remain in place should commercial operators decide it viable to continue services without subsidy from the Local Authority.

The officer then advised Committee that the budget for this service currently stood at approximately £242k and that she anticipated that a saving of approximately £165k could be achieved , with the remaining funds to be transferred into the Education Transport budget in order to provide transport for pupils who qualified for free school transport and who had been allocated to fare paying services.

A Committee Member remarked that in his view, the consultation undertaken had not been thorough enough and that another round of clarification would be necessary to ensure full awareness of what would happen to pupils affected by the proposal. The Member also queried why the saving of £165k had not been highlighted in the report regarding the revenue budget, to be discussed subsequently on the same agenda. The Committee Member further remarked that he had particular concerns in relation to equality issues which could arise for pupils living in rural communities and attending Welsh medium schools as these pupils often had to travel further outside their local communities to attend their nearest appropriate school. The Council therefore needed to ensure it was not making it more difficult for pupils to attend Welsh medium schools and prioritise the identification of safe Active Travel routes between communities in the Vale of Glamorgan.

With regard to the Committee Member's concerns in relation to the thoroughness of the consultation undertaken, the officer responded that each school that could potentially be affected by the proposal had been consulted and that the consultation survey issued to the public had been widely publicised. With regard to the Committee Member's query in relation to the inclusion of the anticipated saving of £165k in the revenue budget report, the officer replied that this saving had been part of the service area's budget for the preceding financial year and had therefore not been included in the report currently under discussion.

The officer then addressed the Committee Member's concerns regarding equalities issues that could potentially arise from the proposal by advising that the fare paying school transport services currently provided by the Local Authority were distributed randomly across the Vale of Glamorgan and only provided for some communities and not others. This could be interpreted as discriminatory. Moreover, the officer stated that it was often the case that pupils who travelled outside of their local community to attend specific schools were doing so as a result of a parental preference for the school in question. The officer continued by advising that with regard to the identification of safe Active Travel routes between communities and

schools, officers had walked proposed routes and had assessed them according to Welsh Government guidance. The officer also noted, however, that if parents of pupils who were living less than the statutory 2 or 3 miles away from their chosen school (and therefore did not qualify for free home to school transport) did not feel that the Active Travel route identified by the Local Authority was safe, they could apply to the Local Authority for the provision of free home to school transport. The officer then reminded Committee Members that if routes were considered to be commercially viable, operators may opt to continue to run some of the services that would be affected by the proposal.

The Committee Member considered that in advance of Cabinet's decision on this proposal, he believed further work on the identification of safe Active Travel routes would need to be undertaken. He also highlighted that for many pupils attending Welsh medium schools, attending their nearest catchment school often required them to travel outside of their local communities, rather than it being a matter of parental preference. The officer in response stated that that any parents concerned about the safety of Active Travel routes between their communities and children's schools could apply for free home to school transport but they would need to approach the Local Authority in the first instance. She also noted that parents, through the consultation process, had been advised that the service could potentially be withdrawn.

In highlighting to the officer that Ysgol Sant Baruc would be relocating from its current site, the Member asked whether this had been accounted for by the proposal, to which the officer confirmed that the matter would be looked at collaboratively with the Education team.

Another Member queried why the report referred to figures in terms of what the Local Authority "could" save, to which the officer replied that figures outlined in the report were estimates and could vary due to fluctuations in prices the report provided the current likely figure.

In referring to the revenue budget report to be discussed subsequently on the same agenda, a Member sought clarification as to why a figure of £135k of the Neighbourhood and Transport Services' budget had been ringfenced for education transport given the proposal under discussion, to which the officer responded that this figure had been allocated to ensure that no further changes would take place to provision, for instance with regards to the provision of transport to pupils in Post 16 education.

Another Member raised concerns regarding a safe walking route identified within his own Ward between Ystradowen and Llansannor Primary School, and stated that given the increased amount of traffic in the area since the route had been identified as safe, it was felt locally that the route was no longer safe and he therefore requested of the officer that this route be assessed for a second time, to which the officer responded that she could request that this take place.

The Chairman remarked that he had concerns regarding the proposal's potential impact on climate change, and whilst he acknowledged that the intention of the proposal was to encourage Active Travel to schools he feared that the actual

unintended consequence of the proposal could be that there would be an increased number of pupils being transported to school via car. He therefore asked the officer if it would be possible to look at greater publicisation of the safe Active Travel routes to schools, although he did acknowledge that this posed some difficulty to the Local Authority as it was not possible for the publicised routes to account for every location in which Vale of Glamorgan residents lived. The Chairman also suggested that if parents whose children did not qualify for free home to school transport wanted to apply for the route to be assessed due to a perceived lack of safety of their Active Travel route to school, also that the criteria for this should be publicised more widely.

Having regard to the Chairman's concerns, the officer confirmed that the proposal would aim to encourage Active Travel between home and the school and for parents and children to reassess how they were travelling, and also suggested that the reduction in the number of buses on the roads that could occur as a result of the proposal might have a positive impact on issues arising from climate change.

In responding to the query regarding the publicising of the criteria for parents who wished to apply for free home to school transport due to unsafe Active Travel routes, the officer advised that guidance in relation to this had been issued by Welsh Government and could easily be accessed <https://www.valeofglamorgan.gov.uk/en/living/transportation/Active-Travel.aspx> and it had also been included in an education booklet distributed to parents. Furthermore the Local Authority would also offer advice if approached by parents.

Having considered the report and there being no further questions, it was subsequently

RECOMMENDED – T H A T the Committee's comments regarding the proposal and consultation be forwarded to Cabinet as below:

- The position regarding the anticipated savings to be made by the proposal and this year's revenue budget could have been made clearer within the report;
- The proposal risked discriminating against pupils from rural areas and those attending Welsh medium schools, due to their need to often travel further outside their local communities to attend school;
- A second assessment of the safety of the Active Travel route between Ystadowen and Llansannor Primary School be undertaken;
- Committee Members had concerns regarding the proposal's impact on climate change due to the potential of an increase in the number of cars on the road following the withdrawal of bus services, although acknowledged that the proposal did aim to encourage Active Travel between home and school;
- Information regarding the safe Active Travel routes between home and school should be more widely publicised
- The criteria applied in instances wherein parents wished to apply for free home to school transport due to a perceived lack of safety of identified Active Travel routes be more widely publicised.

Reason for recommendation

To ensure that the views of the Committee are considered prior to a final decision being taken by Cabinet on the future of fare paying school transport services.”