
Report To:	Education and Communities Committee	Date:	3 September 2019
Report By:	Corporate Director Education, Communities and Organisational Development	Report No:	EDUCOM/71/19/TM
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Subject:	Update on review of school transport in Inverclyde		

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to update members of the Education and Communities Committee on the review of school transport in Inverclyde, following the report to committee in May 2019.
- 1.2 The report provides members with a summary of the consultation events held with parents in June 2019 and is seeking approval for further work to be undertaken to move towards equity in the school transport policy in Inverclyde.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 A report was considered by the Education and Communities Committee in May 2019 which outlined several proposals to revise the school transport policy in Inverclyde.
- 2.2 The report was in the particular context that School Estate Management Plan (SEMP) funding, currently used to provide enhancements to the current policy in respect of providing free transport to non-qualifying pupils, will no longer be available from June 2020. Continuation of this aspect of the policy will result in a £375,000 cost pressure to the Council.
- 2.3 In considering the report in May 2019, the Education and Communities Committee agreed the following:
- (i) That approval be given for officers to hold a series of events to seek views on the introduction of passes for relevant pupils who qualify for free school transport; and
 - (ii) That consideration of the item be continued for a further report to include the feasibility of:
 - o proposals for the devolution of financial decision-making concerning equitable school transport, based on the individual needs of all school communities across the area, as part of phase 2 of the Council's participatory budgeting development; and
 - o the provision of a transport grant of £6.90 (now £7.25) per week based on the current weekly bus pass costs, to all high school pupils who live 1-2 miles of their school, entitlement to the grant being automatic for pupils in receipt of free school meals or upon identification of individual circumstances by Education staff.

2.4 In addition to the recommendation to pursue the introduction of bus passes for pupils who qualify for free school transport under the current policy, the Committee also considered the following recommendations which are carried forward to this report :

- the use of the global information measuring system (GIS) to accurately measure acceptable walking routes to schools, including the adoption of the most appropriate access points to school premises;
- the review of the transport policy on an annual basis. This will include any changes to safe routes, use of public service routes and uptake of any subsidised transport;
- arrangements for particular schools affected by proposals; and
- funding sources for increased revenue costs.

2.5 Feedback from parents during the consultation period highlighted issues in relation to current public service bus routes, perceptions of safety, bus timetabling and space on routes. However, if the Council was in a position to address these concerns and offer bus passes where appropriate, this would be a feasible option for those pupils who are entitled to free school transport under the policy.

2.6 The provision of a grant for pupils in receipt of free school meals who live between 1 and 2 miles from their school will result in an additional cost pressure of around £65,000 - £70,000 per year (based on current figures). The report considers two options for the funding and implementation of this proposal in paragraph 5.2. The CMT recommendation is that the authority maintains the current transport policy in respect of pupils in receipt of free school meals who live between 1 and 2 miles of their school with the option for schools to fund any additional provision above policy through alternative funding sources

It is not recommended at this time to take forward proposals for the devolution of financial decision-making concerning equitable school transport as part of phase 2 of the Council's participatory budgeting development for the reasons detailed in paragraph 5.3 of this report.

2.7 Arrangements and timescales for those schools most affected by the recommendations in this report, are detailed in paragraph 6 of this paper. This includes the particular arrangement for a subsidised bus for St. Columba's High School where there is no public bus service between parts of the catchment area and the school.

2.8 At this stage in the process, it is not possible to accurately assess the reduction in budget pressure the revised policy will bring as much will depend on the value of current bus contracts, school roll, uptake of subsidised transport and the implementation of provision for pupils in receipt of free school meals.

3.0 RECOMMENDATIONS

3.1 It is recommended that the Education and Communities Committee:

1. approves the phased introduction of bus passes from January 2020 for secondary school pupils who qualify for free school transport where routes are currently provided by service buses and where it is more cost effective than providing a dedicated school bus;
2. approves the revised arrangements for school transport from session 2020/21 as set out in paragraph 6.1;
3. agrees to the use of global information measuring systems (GIS) to accurately measure qualifying distances and acceptable walking routes from home to school;
4. approves the annual review of the school transport policy, taking into account any revisions to acceptable walking routes and uptake of subsidised transport;
5. refers the increased revenue costs for providing subsidised transport for St.

Columba's High School where no alternative public service routes is available from August 2020 to the Policy and Resources Committee for inclusion in the 2020/23 revenue budget process;

6. approves the option for secondary schools to fund any additional provision above policy, through alternative funding sources, for their pupils in receipt of free school meals who live between 1 and 2 miles of their school; and
7. notes that proposals for the devolution of financial decision-making concerning equitable school transport as part of phase 2 of the participatory budgeting process, are not taken forward at this time.

Ruth Binks

Corporate Director Education, Communities & Organisational Development

4.0 BACKGROUND

- 4.1 A review of school transport has taken place in the context of a decision by the Education and Communities Committee in January 2017 to continue with the current arrangements for school transport. Within this report was a continuation of the preferential travel arrangements for some pupils which was funded through the School Estate Management Plan (SEMP). These preferential travel arrangements provided free school transport to a number of pupils who in effect are not entitled under the current policy. From June 2020, this funding will no longer be available which will result in a budget pressure to the Council in the region of £375,000.
- 4.2 In this context, and in the context of providing equitable free school transport across the school estate and to reduce costs associated with the policy, a report was considered by the Education and Communities Committee in May 2019 which proposed issuing bus passes to eligible secondary school pupils to be used on public service buses. Eligibility for a free bus pass would be restricted to those who live over two miles from their catchment school. Inverclyde Council is currently only one of five local authorities in Scotland who currently do not offer a bus pass scheme for school transport.
- 4.3 The report in May 2019 also made provision that where an existing public transport route does not exist, the Council will continue to provide a bus service. Pupils who are not entitled to free public transport but still wishing to be transported will be able to use this bus for a weekly contribution to the Council amounting to no more than the value of a weekly bus pass (currently £7.25 per week).
- 4.4 Issuing of bus passes to those entitled to free school transport will be pursued, on a phased basis, over the 2019/2020 school session. Phasing will be informed by consideration of where there are bus services available; where there is availability of routes; and where current contracts allow for changes to be made. Work is ongoing with Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) and current public service transport providers to inform the implementation of the revised policy.
- 4.5 The service is currently using GIS to accurately assess acceptable walking routes to schools; bus routes, stops and timetables to ensure that implementation of the revised policy is based on the most up-to-date information available. There will be a requirement to revisit the policy each year as more routes become available and as school rolls change.
- 4.6 Further to the provisions set out in the May 2019 report, the Education and Communities Committee agreed that:
- (a) that approval be given for officers to hold a series of events to seek views on the introduction of passes for relevant pupils who qualify for free school transport; and
 - (b) that consideration of the item be continued for a further report to include the feasibility of:
 - I. proposals for the devolution of financial decision-making concerning equitable school transport, based on the individual needs of all school communities across the area, as part of phase 2 of the Council's participatory budgeting development; and
 - II. the provision of a transport grant of £6.90 (now £7.25) per week based on the current weekly bus pass costs, to all high school pupils who live 1-2 miles of their school, entitlement to the grant being automatic for pupils in receipt of free school meals or upon identification of individual circumstances by Education staff.

Progress in considering the proposals put forward at the May 2019 Committee is detailed in section 5 below.

5.0 CURRENT POSITION

5.1 Feedback from events to seek views on the introduction of passes for relevant pupils who require free school transport.

- 5.1.1 Five evening consultation events for parents of secondary school pupils took place in June 2019 and were led by the Education, Communities and Organisational Development Directorate Management Team. Despite letters being issued to parents, there was a very low attendance rate at each of the events. Comments were also received by email with 12 items of correspondence being received during the consultation period.
- 5.1.2 While some parents welcomed the use of bus passes, particularly given that they could be used to support attendance at after school activities and used at weekends, concerns were raised around the current availability of public bus services at certain times of the day, the reliability of public bus services, perceptions of safety in respect of younger children walking to and from bus stops and limited spaces for pupils on some routes. During the events, a few parents asked the Council if it would consider issuing passes for trains where this would be more convenient and the service will take this forward if it is cost-effective to do so.
- 5.1.3 The table below provides a list of the main concerns raised by parents and what the Council could do to alleviate concerns / mitigate risk (in addition to carrying out necessary risk assessments) where it can:

Concern	Potential action
In some cases, there may be the requirement for children to change buses in the town centres	The service would not consider bus passes for these pupils
Some buses on routes are small and would not have the capacity to take on large numbers of pupils	The service would work with existing bus companies to ensure that buses of sufficient size are used to reflect demand on the route. On more popular routes, there may be a requirement to 'stagger' or allocate bus times for pupils.
Some younger children are not used to travelling on public transport	The service would consider offering guidance and building this in to the primary to secondary transition programme
Will drivers on service buses be subject to the PVG scheme	We will work with transport providers, through SPT, to ensure this is the case before passes on these routes are agreed
Timetables on some routes would get pupils in too early or too late	We will only allocate passes to pupils on routes where there is sufficient time for them to walk from the bus stop to school.
Safety of pupils waiting, walking to and from bus stops that differ from current pick up points	Acceptable walking routes to and from bus stops will be used. In addition, the service would consider the capacity of each stop to cope with large numbers of pupils. However, pupils already walk to and from bus stops for school transport and it is likely that in many cases, it is the same bus stop.
What happens when a child misses the bus or the bus does not turn up?	The service could develop, in partnership with schools and bus providers, a simple protocol for these events. Similarly, provision will have to be made in terms of not marking pupils 'late' where the service bus is at fault.
Disruption to families, particularly those who work, in terms of change to routine in the mornings or evenings	While the service will try and accommodate family circumstances, it will not be possible to plan for every eventuality and there will be disruption for some families.

5.1.4 Taking these concerns into account, officers would need to address any concerns through taking a phased approach to the implementation of bus passes on certain routes.

5.2 Feasibility and implications for proposals for the devolution of financial decision-making concerning equitable school transport, based on the individual needs of all school communities across the area, as part of Phase 2 of the Council's Participatory Budgeting development.

5.2.1 The service considered the feasibility of devolving financial decision-making as part of the Council's participatory budgeting (PB) development. There is currently no additional budget within the Council to enhance transport beyond the current policy due to the £375,000 budget pressure. We would not therefore be able to take this proposal forward at this time. Nevertheless, as PB becomes more developed across the Council, there may be opportunities for communities to become more involved in setting local priorities for PB, with school transport potentially being one option.

5.2.2 Although it is not recommended that the PB option is progressed at this time, option b (ii) below does make provision for school communities to make decisions regarding transport which meets the needs of their school communities beyond that of Council policy.

5.3 Feasibility of the provision of a transport grant of £6.90 per week (now £7.25) based on the current weekly bus pass costs, to all secondary school pupils who live 1-2 miles of their school. Entitlement to the grant being automatic for pupils in receipt of free school meals but also provided on identification of individual circumstances by Education staff.

5.3.1 The additional cost associated with providing a bus pass or transport grant to every secondary school pupil in receipt of free school meals who lives between 1 and 2 miles from their school would be in the region of £65,000 – £70,000 per year, based on current school roll figures). This cost to the Council would be in addition to any subsidy required to provide transport to specific schools where a bus route does not exist. There is no funding in the directorate budget allocated to this and the directorate would have to remove funding from elsewhere or cease a service to meet the cost. This is in addition to any savings proposals being taken forward as part of the 2020/23 budget process. To give the Committee a flavour of the saving that would have to be made to meet the costs, this would equate to the removal of 10% of the DMR budget for all schools (both primary and secondary). The impact of this on schools would be significant because this is the budget used for curricular resources for pupils. Schools have already had a 5% reduction in DMR allocation through the 18/19 budget process. This saving would be difficult to progress.

5.3.2 An alternative approach, rather than increasing the savings pressure on schools would be to allow each school community to identify if they wish to take forward the grant and if so, the funding they would be prepared to allocate to this. Whilst this approach could create different approaches across the authority, it would give school communities the opportunity to prioritise areas for spend and give them the flexibility to do so. Based on current school rolls, the approximate financial impact to each school if they were to progress would be as follows:

- St Columba's High School £20,000
- Clydeview Academy £10,000
- Notre Dame High School £18,500
- Inverclyde Academy £5,500
- St Stephen's High School £5,300
- Port Glasgow High School £4,400

5.3.3 Pupil Equity Funding is allocated to schools to raise attainment and close the poverty related attainment gap and the funding is based on free school meal entitlement. Schools also have control over their DMR budget and this will increase with the head teachers' charter and school empowerment. If schools decided to support the attendance and raise the attainment of any child in receipt of free school meals by enhancing the current transport policy, it would be an acceptable allocation of either school DMR or PEF to do this.

The CMT recommends this alternative approach and this is the option taken forward in recommendation 6 of this paper.

5.3.4 The service was also asked by members to consider the provision of free bus passes for other pupils who have, other than being entitled to FME, particular circumstances as identified by education staff. Current policy ensures that any child with an identified additional support need is provided for through the current transport policy. In addition, schools already use their discretion to support pupils with transport issues if this is required.

6.0 SPECIFIC ARRANGEMENTS FOR SCHOOLS FOR 2020/21 AFFECTED BY THE RECOMMENDATIONS IN THIS REPORT

6.1 Whilst all schools with transport requirements will be affected by the proposals set out in this paper, some will have changes to their provision. The table below provides further information.

School	Revised arrangements
St Columba's High School, Gourock	<p>It is recognised that there is no direct bus route from the Braeside or Bow Farm areas of Greenock. This has been a long-standing concern for families of pupils who live in these areas.</p> <p>The current preferential transport arrangements would continue for the school year 2019/20.</p> <p>From the beginning of school session 2020/21, the Council will continue to fund a dedicated bus service from both Braeside and Bow Farm areas. Pupils choosing to use the service will be required to pay the cost of a weekly bus pass (currently £7.25 per week) with the Council subsidising any shortfall between the income received and the cost of the bus service.</p> <p>An annual review of uptake will be carried out which may have an impact on the service provided.</p> <p>This change will affect approximately 292 pupils.</p>
Inverkip Primary School	<p>The provision of an acceptable walking route would remove the necessity to provide school transport for 58 pupils from August 2020.</p>
Clydeview Academy, Gourock	<p>The current preferential transport arrangements will continue in academic session 2019/20.</p> <p>The revised policy will apply from August 2020 with only those pupils who live beyond 2 miles from the school either being eligible for free transport on a dedicated bus service or being issued with a bus pass to be used on an available public service route.</p> <p>This change will affect approximately 142 pupils.</p>
Notre Dame High School, Greenock	<p>The current preferential transport arrangements will continue in academic session 2019/20.</p> <p>The revised policy will apply from August 2020 with only those pupils who live beyond 2 miles from the school either being eligible for free transport on a dedicated bus service or being issued with a bus pass to be used on an available public service route.</p> <p>This change will affect approximately 37 pupils.</p>

6.2 Appendix 1 outlines the full costs of the current school transport provision in Inverclyde. A further report will be submitted to a future meeting of the Education and Communities Committee with detailed expected costs of providing subsidised transport and any reduction to the budget pressure of £375,000, should the recommendations be agreed.

7.0 CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

7.1 Although consultation with chairs of parent councils has taken place, advice from legal services is that there is no requirement, in terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, for further consultation in terms of the implementation of the proposals set out in this report.

The service will, however, ensure that agreed proposals and implementation timeline will be communicated to schools, parents and other stakeholders affected by the policy.

8.0 IMPLICATIONS

8.1 Financial Implications - One off Costs

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	Budget Year	Proposed Spend this Report £000	Virement From	Other Comments

Financial Implications - Annually Recurring Costs/ (Savings)

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact £000	Virement From (if applicable)	Other Comments

8.2 **Human Resources**

N/A.

8.3 **Legal**

N/A

8.4 **Equalities**

An equalities impact assessment has been carried out for this report.

8.5 **Repopulation**

N/A.

9.0 BACKGROUND PAPERS

Education and Communities report May 2019
 Outcome of Statutory Consultation on School Transport Review Education Committee
 January 2017.

Education, Communities and Organisational Development

Mainstream School Transport Costs

	£
Primary	290,473.42
All Saints	6,350.08
Ardgowan	22,450.88
Kilmacolm	54,517.86
Moorfoot	28,369.22
Newark	30,417.06
St Andrew's	38,417.32
St Michael's	17,482.52
St Ninian's	78,056.40
Whinhill	14,412.08

	£
Secondary	655,423.26
Clydeview	29,347.88
Inverclyde	285,488.87
NDHS	89,251.77
PGHS	129,264.66
St Columba's	116,972.80
St Stephen's	5,097.28

	£
SEMP	373,434.97
Clydeview	96,270.97
Inverkip	36,213.36
St Columba's	240,950.64