
Report To:	Education & Communities Committee	Date:	11 March 2014
Report By:	Corporate Director Education, Communities & Organisational Development	Report No:	EDUCOM/24/14/AE
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Subject:	Transport Policy Review		

1.0 PURPOSE

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek Committee approval to continue the interim transport arrangements for St Columba's High School with a view to reviewing mileage limits and/ or introducing charging by August 2015.

2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 Inverclyde Council operates a very generous transport policy, whereby secondary aged children who live more than 2 miles from their local school receive free transport and primary aged children who live more than 1 mile away from their local school receive free transport. This is more generous than most local authorities and lies well within statutory requirements of 3 and 2 miles respectively.
- 2.2 Concerns were highlighted about the transport arrangements for St Columba's High School. During the School's recent decant, all pupils received free transport, in line with authority decant guidelines. Prior to the decant, a number of routes had been declared unsafe for historical reasons.
- 2.3 Following the decant and on completion of the School's rebuild to a new location, Safer Communities officers re-assessed walking routes. They assessed that a number of these historically unsafe routes were safe.
- 2.4 Parents and members (cross-party) were concerned that some of the newly assessed and designated safe walking routes were not safe and also that the re-application of the transport policy could result in increased placing requests from associated primaries to other secondary schools.
- 2.5 The key issues identified by parents centred round a range of safety and transport concerns. This included:
- Excessive flooding on a specific route
 - Young people walking close to a reservoir
 - A very busy junction with no crossing patrollers at certain times
 - No direct bus routes: Pupils would have to go to the centre of Greenock to get public bus to school
 - School roll viability
- 2.6 As an interim response, the decision was taken to maintain free transport for the routes causing concern. The interim arrangements were agreed by the Policy & Resources Executive Sub Committee on 12 June 2013 and are currently due for review.
- 2.7 Officers have looked extensively at a range of different options. These options have

included: terminating arrangements, introducing charging for all school transport below the statutory limits, revising mileage limits and amending policy.

- 2.8 Officers have explored all options at length and, taking into account the medium term affordability, recommend a strategic review of the current transport policy should take place which would include options for charging. It would be proposed that officers develop proposals for consideration by February 2015 and implementation from August 2015.
- 2.9 During 2014/15 a cross-service steering group and parental consultation group will be formed to consider mileage limits and charging policies.
- 2.10 In light of this recommendation, Committee are asked to retain the current interim arrangements until the consultation can be carried out and the policy reviewed. The annual recurring cost is outlined in the financial implications in 6.1.

3.0 RECOMMENDATION

- 3.1 Officers are seeking Committee approval to continue the current arrangements until mileage limits and/or appropriate charging proposals can be considered by February 2015.

Albert Henderson
Corporate Director Education, Communities and Organisational Development

4.0 BACKGROUND

4.1 Issues

Inverclyde Council operates a very generous transport policy, whereby secondary aged children who live more than 2 miles from their local school receive free transport and primary aged children who live more than 1 mile away from their local school receive free transport. This is more generous than most local authorities and lies well within statutory requirements of 3 and 2 miles respectively. The generous policy takes account of topography and adverse weather circumstances pertaining to this particular geographical location. Any transport policy is based on parental responsibility for ensuring a child arrives at school safely. Free transport does not negate this responsibility.

4.2 The background to this issue centres on St Columba's High School and the relocation of the School to the former site of Gourrock High School. Prior to completion of the rebuild project, St Columba's High School had been decanted to the former site of Greenock High School on Inverkip Road. During any decant situation all pupils receive free transport. St Columba's High School had been decanted for 4 years, with all pupils receiving transport during this time.

4.3 Prior to decant, decisions had been made by officers in the late 1990s to deviate from policy and grant free transport to areas they deemed which were situated within the 2 mile walking limits. It has been stated that these routes had been declared unsafe but there is no documented evidence to back up this view.

4.4 On completion of the new St Columba's High School current officers requested that colleagues in Safer Communities undertake a new assessment of safe walking routes. This is routine procedure when a school has been relocated. A number of the routes previously declared unsafe were now deemed to be safe e.g. a path running parallel to Clydeview Academy has now been paved and lit, and an area described as being excessively prone to flooding has been assessed as safe.

4.5 Officers communicated with parents to tell them about the application of policy and entitlements to free transport. This was met with multiple concerns being raised by parents and members around route safety, historical decisions, volume of traffic, appropriate public transport and the risk of increased placing requests to schools located at a closer distance to some families from certain associated primaries.

4.6 In response to these concerns officers met with parents and made site visits on numerous occasions. Officers also arranged a multi-agency assessment of the routes causing concern. This multi-agency assessment included the police. The routes were declared safe by this forum but parental and member concerns remained high.

4.7 In response to a range of concerns the interim decision was taken to maintain free transport for the routes causing particular concerns.

4.8 As an interim response, the decision was taken to maintain free transport for the routes causing concern. The interim arrangements were agreed by the Policy & Resources Executive Sub Committee on 12 June 2013 and are currently due for review.

5.0 PROPOSALS

5.1 Officers have looked extensively at a range of different options. These options have included: terminating arrangements, introducing charging for all school transport, revising mileage limits and amending policy.

5.2 Officers have explored all options at length and, taking into account the medium term affordability, recommend a strategic review of the current transport policy should take place which would include options for charging. It is recommended that this matter be reported back no later than February 2015 and implemented from August 2015.

- 5.3 During 2014/15 a cross-service steering group and parental consultation group will be formed to consider mileage limits and charging policies.
- 5.4 In light of this recommendation, Committee are asked to retain the current interim arrangements until the consultation can be carried out and the policy reviewed. The annual recurring cost is outlined in the financial implications in 6.1.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS

6.1 Financial

Financial Implications

Cost Centre	Budget Heading	With Effect from	Annual Net Impact	Virement From (if applicable)	Other Comments
Inclusive Education	School Transport	August 2014	£155,000		£65,000 funded by SEMP one-off cost budget and £90,000 funded by Education Core Budget

6.2 Legal

The policy is currently set well with within a legislative context related to transport for pupils in Scotland. The current deviation from the policy may be challengeable and could have the effect of creating anomalies. However, it is likely that any such challenge could be successfully defeated in the light of the proposal to carry out a full strategic review.

6.3 Human Resources

None.

6.4 Equalities

N/A.

6.5 Repopulation

No implications.

7.0 CONCLUSION

- 7.1 Committee are advised to continue with the interim transport arrangements for a period of 12 months. During this time a cross-service steering group and parental consultation group will be formed to consider mileage limits and charging policies. Officers will return to Committee with revised recommendations by February 2015.

8.0 SUPPORTING PAPERS

- 8.1 N/A.