



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNCIL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY 2022-2027 COMMITTEE

Minutes of the Hybrid meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny 2022-2027 Committee held on Monday, 18 March 2024 at 5.00 pm - Llys Cadwyn, Pontypridd / ZOOM.

This meeting was live streamed, details of which can be accessed [here](#)

County Borough Councillors – The following Overview and Scrutiny 2022-2027 Committee Councillors were present in the Council Chamber:-

Councillor B Stephens (Chair)
Councillor Sera Evans
Councillor S Emanuel
Councillor M Powell
Councillor G Warren

The following Overview and Scrutiny 2022-2027 Committee Councillors were present online:-

Councillor J Bonetto
Councillor Sheryl Evans
Councillor M Ashford
Councillor K Morgan
Councillor R Davis
Councillor S Morgans

Officers in attendance:-

Mr S Williams, Director for Highways, Streetcare and Transportation Services
Mr C Hanagan, Service Director Democratic Services and Communication
Mr G Roberts, Integrated Transport Manager
Ms S Daniel, Principal Democratic Services Officer

County Borough Councillors in attendance:-

Councillor K Johnson, Councillor C Preedy and Councillor G Stacey

Apologies for absence

Councillor J Edwards

74 Declarations of Interest

In accordance with the code of conduct the following declarations were made:

Councillor M Powell – personal interest “My daughter uses paid for Home to School Transport

Councillor K Johnson – Personal Interest “My Children will be affected by the proposals and I work for Transport for Wales”

Pre-Scrutiny REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY

The Service Director Democratic Services and Communications advised Members that they had the opportunity to undertake pre-scrutiny on the Review of the Council's Home to School Transport Policy, prior to consideration of the matter by the Cabinet.

The Director Highways, Streetcare and Transportation then gave Members an overview of the report and the proposals being considered in light of the significant financial challenges the Council are facing in the medium term. He reminded Members that the proposals had been subject to a public consultation exercise, which the Scrutiny Committee also provided a formal response to in December 2023 and advised of the key themes arising from the feedback.

Following presentation of the report, the Chair welcomed Councillor K Johnson to the meeting and invited him to address Members

Councillor Johnson began by expressing concerns about the proposal's widespread impact on many communities, particularly those without train services and facing reduced bus services. He raised concerns on the financial strain on families relying on the current provision who will now have to pay a daily bus fare or drive to school. He challenged the potential savings and stated this should be reviewed following risk assessments to assess safe routes. Additionally, he suggested delaying implementation until assessing PSVAR vehicle availability and considering forthcoming legislation empowering local authorities on bus fares and routes. Finally, he highlighted the contradiction with the Council's climate change agenda due to increased vehicular traffic.

The Chair thanked Councillor Johnson for his comments and invited Members of the Committee to ask questions and give their observations on the proposals. The comments and observations are summarised below:

Members acknowledged that the Council currently provides transport for pupils over and above what it is required to do under the relevant legislation and guidance and appreciated why this area was under consideration, noting how costs for providing the current level of provision had escalated in recent years.

Several Members felt that comparison with other Councils did not reflect the percentage of children eligible for transport, which is different in each Council area. Neither does it reflect the unique geographical or demographic circumstances of Rhondda Cynon Taf.

Having reviewed the results of the public consultation, Members also noted that the number of respondents, as well as the percentage of those who were against the proposals clearly demonstrates the strength of feeling in relation to the proposals. Members noted that the alternative options arising from consultation feedback in full or in part addressed some of these areas of concern, but noted that 'equity' of provision across all areas of education was important.

A number of Members felt strongly that the proposals would impose financial burdens on families already facing economic challenges which the Council, through other decisions, has prioritised protecting. Many Members commented

upon the importance of prioritising accessibility to education for all pupils, regardless of their socio-economic background.

Some Members believed that the financial burden created by this proposal, would go beyond families having to pay a daily bus fare. A Member reflected that the impact of the proposals on children's wellbeing, where children will potentially be starting their school day in wet clothing, equipment, PE kits etc, which would have an impact on attendance and could potentially hinder academic performance as they would start their day tired and potentially cold and wet.

A Member requested that the geographical layout of the County Borough be taken into account by Cabinet when considering this matter, noting that pupils residing in remote or rural areas may face significant difficulties in accessing education, which is already impacted by a reduced public bus service due to the reduction of bus grants.

A number of Members commented that the current public transport infrastructure is not sufficient to meet the needs of the residents, potentially having further impact on school attendance. As part of this discussion point, a Member noted that families could therefore resort to driving their children to school (where this is an option) resulting in a potential increase in traffic. The Committee discussed this point in the context of climate change.

The safety of children walking long distances to school was also raised by Members. Members raised concerns in respect of the location of some schools, near busy, inaccessible roads, with unlit paths and reduced proximity to bus stops or train stations. A member requested that Risk Assessments on safe walking routes should be undertaken prior to a decision being taken, to identify more specifically potential cost saving which could be achieved. In addition to this a Member also proposed that the Council postpone a decision until Welsh Government determine public transport reform proposals, would enable the Council to stipulate routes, timetables and fares, therefore ensuring that there is sufficient service in place to meet the needs of residents.

Members commented that the proposals may disproportionately affect certain groups with disabilities, Additional Learning Needs and sensory impairments, as well as other protected characteristics, potentially creating barriers to education. A Member specifically requested that Cabinet give careful consideration to the potential inequality this proposal could create, as part of a need to avoid the risk of judicial review or legal challenge. A member stated that the Council should also consider the requirement and availability of The Public Service Vehicles Accessibility Regulations (PSVAR) which applies to all new public service vehicles.

Concerns were raised that some of the options contained within the report could have an adverse impact upon the Welsh language in RCT, and the selection of education through the medium of Welsh by parents, thereby jeopardising the growth of Welsh speakers. It was felt this could also risk undoing the work the Council is undertaking as part of the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP). Members queried whether any potential savings would need to be reinvested into achieving the WESP objectives as a result of this proposal. Members noted that the Council has a duty to promote access to Education and Training through to medium of Welsh which they believed would be impacted by the proposals.

A number of Members of the Committee asked that Cabinet reconsider the proposed changes and delay any changes to the current policy until the impact and outcomes of the recommendations from the Welsh Government review of the Learner Travel Measure are known in addition to consideration of the outcome of the Children's Commissioner Response to the Welsh Government review and what bearing those concerns may have upon this area of policy in the future.

A Member moved a motion, which stated that this Committee reports to Cabinet that, having scrutinised the report, that Cabinet should not proceed with the proposals to change the Home to School Transport provision and that the existing provision should be retained. The motion was not supported by the majority of committee members. Cllr Sera Evans, Cllr K Morgan and Cllr M Powell were in support of the motion.

Following conclusion of discussions it was **RESOLVED** to:

1. Undertake pre scrutiny on the report (attached at Appendix A), thus providing Scrutiny with an opportunity to contribute to this matter; and

2. Authorise the Service Director Democratic Services and Communications to provide feedback to Cabinet on behalf of Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

76 Urgent Business

None

77 Chairs Review and Close

The Chair thanked all Officers and Members for attending and for their valuable contributions to the discussions which would be forwarded to Cabinet prior to them considering the matter.

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Chair.