



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2022/23

**CLIMATE CHANGE, FRONTLINE
SERVICES & PROSPERITY SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

26th OCTOBER 2022

**REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF
FRONTLINE SERVICES**

Agenda Item No: 7

School Transport

Author: Geraint Roberts – Integrated Transport Manager

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

The purpose of this report is to provide Members of the Climate Change, Frontline Services & Prosperity Scrutiny Committee with an update on the Council's School Transport provision.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Acknowledge the contents of this report and
- 2.2 Consider whether they wish to scrutinise in greater depth any further matters arising from the report.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council provides school transport for approximately 9,100 mainstream learners, 930 Additional Learning Needs (ALN) learners, and 2,100 College students each day. This transport is provided through

the provision of contracted coaches, minibuses, taxis, and public transport season tickets.

- 3.2 The Council operates one of the most generous school transport policies in the country. As a result of these generous policies, the Council delivers the largest school transport service in the country, costing in excess of £15M each year.

4. UPDATE / CURRENT POSITION

- 4.1 The Council's Integrated Transport Unit (ITU) has recently undertaken its annual "September Planning" task, following the start of the new school academic year. The return to school each year presents a number of challenges, including the addition of approximately 180 Primary School students, and 1,250 Secondary School students on to school transport.

- 4.2 Work on the return to school in September begins in March each year, with significant planning and communication taking place between the ITU and colleagues within Council's Education Directorate, Schools, Parents, and Elected Members.

- 4.3 It is because of this embedded planning and proven process management that the ITU was able to declare a situation of "business as usual" by the Thursday of the first school week. This means that the level of outstanding Customer Relation Management (CRM) communications had reached a normal level, and that the majority of communications received were of a general nature, and not directly related to the new school year.

- 4.4 In addition to the beginning of the school year in September, the ITU is currently experiencing a number of operational challenges due to the current state of the transport industry. The main challenges being the volume of work being carried out on the highway network, the severe shortage of drivers, and the significant increase in operating costs being experienced by contractors since March 2022 i.e. fuel, driver wages, maintenance costs, etc. However, despite these challenges the ITU continues to maintain the level of service required to meet its service demands.

- 4.5 The following table demonstrates how the ITU schedules its contracted transport provision to ensure the most efficient use of available resources.

Number of learners carried by contracted bus	9,523
Number of school bus routes	199
Number of buses in operation	172
Average number of learners per vehicle	55
Number of learners carried by minibus/taxi	969
Number of minibus/taxi routes	237
Average number of learners per minibus/taxi	4
Number of learners carried by public transport	1,589

5. FUTURE PLANS

- 5.1 The ITU will continue to work with our operators to ensure we have a sustainable supply chain to deliver statutory and discretionary school transport services.
- 5.2 Operationally, the ITU is currently focussing on the re-location of 6th forms from Pontypridd High, Hawthorn High, and Cardinal Newman R.C Comprehensive school to Bryncelynnog Comprehensive school. A number of options are currently being considered; however, this will be influenced by the overall number of students that choose to attend Bryncelynnog Comprehensive School over the other options available i.e. Coleg y Cymoedd.
- 5.3 School transport bus fleets are contracted from operators, mainly local SME's based in RCTCBC. Fleet profiles are generally older than public transport fleets and they are typically in their final stage of usage – i.e. their primary purpose has ceased and they have been converted for schools use.
- 5.4 Their daily mileage is low, they all have diesel engines, and therefore they represent a huge challenge for carbon reduction. RCT has worked with the Cardiff Capital Region Transport Authority (CCRTA) to commission a study on decarbonising school transport. It shows that there is no business case to replace these vehicles with new ULEV coaches and it will be some time before the market generates second hand vehicles. Retrofitting options may evolve in the short-medium term.
- 5.5 RCT will continue to work with CCRTA and government to identify any opportunities to reduce the carbon impacts of school transport.

6. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 There are no negative or adverse equality or diversity implications associated with this report.

7. CONSULTATION

- 7.1 There are no consultation implications aligned to this report.

8. FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 8.1 The following provides a breakdown of the Council's contracted Mainstream Transport spend.

Overall daily bus cost	£43,328.56
Overall annual bus cost	£8,232,426.40
Average daily cost per bus route	£217.73
Average daily cost per bus	£251.91

Average daily cost per learner carried by bus	£4.55
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Overall daily minibus/taxi cost	£31,455.27
Overall annual minibus/taxi cost	£5,976,501.30
Average daily cost per minibus/taxi	£132.72
Average daily cost learner carried by minibus/taxi	£32.46

Overall daily public transport season ticket cost	£5,148.13
Overall annual public transport season ticket cost	£900,922.75
Average daily cost per learner carried via public transport	£3.24

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 9.1 The Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 places a statutory duty on Local Authorities to assess the travel needs of learners in its area and to provide free school/college transport to those learners of compulsory school/college age who live beyond a safe walking distance of 2 miles or 3 miles from their nearest suitable primary and secondary school/college respectively.
- 9.2 Beyond the statutory minimum, the Council has determined that when assessing entitlement on the basis of safe walking distance, to use the discretionary powers afforded to it under the provisions of the Measure to make a more generous provision to learners.
- 9.3 As a consequence of this policy position, free travel is provided for nursery and primary school learners who live 1.5 miles or further from their nearest suitable school, and for secondary and post 16 learners who live 2 miles or further from their nearest suitable school/college.

10. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES/SIP

- 10.1 The delivery of home to school transport services support and promote the Council's Corporate Plan priorities for People – are independent, healthy and successful; Places – where people are proud to live, work and play and Prosperity – creating the opportunity for people and businesses to: be entrepreneurial and fulfil their potential and prosper.
- 10.2 These in turn support the seven well-being goals of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015. This proposal contributes to the Well-being Goals and is consistent with the five ways of working, as defined within the sustainable development principle in the Act.
- 10.3 In securing enhancements to the Council's home to school transport funding, the Council is able to continue to deliver and manage its statutory and discretionary transport obligations in an integrated and efficient manner, in a way that makes the best and most sustainable use of our resources.

- 10.4 Long-term resourcing of home to school passenger transports contracts in relation to this specialised service provision allows for more effective and predictable resource / financial commitments going forward. The uplifted funding would help to prevent a loss of transport provision, thus contributing to the well-being of our communities.
- 10.5 Collaboration with transport operators enables a more effective, efficient and inclusive service which delivers greater benefits to the community, increasing their resilience and providing feelings of security, safe in the knowledge that the Council will provide a consistent home to school transport service. Children will continue to benefit from reliable access to community schools and other education establishments. Communities will become more cohesive and regenerated, as new homes are built and jobs created, fueling network growth and use.
- 10.6 Home to school transport services are a vital lifeline to thousands of students across the County Borough, ensuring they can safely attend schools, colleges and special education needs centers. A reliable transport service to and from educational settings helps our children achieve their aspirations, improving their life chances, and preventing and removing themselves and their families from poverty. Continued service delivery makes services more attractive to use, reducing the need for private transport at peak times, contributing to better air quality and improving the local environment.
- 10.7 Collaboration and engagement with operators, understanding each other's needs and challenges, involves working together towards a shared goal. This allows operators to deliver, and the Council to manage, a sustainable and effective home to school passenger transport services which will increase user satisfaction and be of long-term benefit to all.

11. CONCLUSION

- 11.1 The ITU continues to successfully manage its schools transport service having delivered an excellent return to school for September 2022.
- 11.2 The supply chain is facing serious challenges which are anticipated to continue into the next financial year, impacting on contract costs and availability of resources.
- 11.3 Early engagement between the Council's Education Department and the ITU is enabling the evolving transport demands associated with the Council's 21st Century Schools programme to be planned for and accommodated.