

## **REVIEW OF THE COUNCIL'S HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY**

### **Frequently Asked Questions?**

#### **What is the proposed change in Home to School Transport service delivery?**

Currently, the Council provides Home to School Transport to all pupils who live 1.5 miles away from their primary school and 2 miles from their secondary school. This is above the statutory legal requirement set out by Welsh Government.

If the service change is approved, the Council will provide Home to School Transport to all pupils who live 2 miles or more away from their primary school and 3 miles or more away from their secondary school.

This service change would put the Council's transport policy in line with Welsh Government's statutory distance eligibility criteria and statutory walking distance policy, which 18 of the 22 Councils in Wales currently adopt.

#### **What is the Council's statutory duty for providing Home to School Transport?**

In line with Welsh Government policy, the Council must.

- Assess the travel needs of learners in its area.
- Provide free home to school transport for learners of compulsory school age attending primary school who live 2 miles or further from their nearest suitable school.
- Provide free home to school transport for learners of compulsory school age attending secondary school who live 3 miles or further from their nearest suitable school.
- Assess and meet the needs of children "looked after" in its area.
- Promote access to Welsh medium education.
- Promote sustainable modes of travel.

#### **How will pre-compulsory school age children (under 5's) be impacted by the proposals?**

- Under Welsh Government guidance, there is no statutory provision for Councils to provide free school transport to non-compulsory aged learners (aged 3 until end of term in which a child turns 5) attending education through English or Welsh Medium.
- Despite this, the Council will continue to provide free school transport on a discretionary basis for pupils that reside 2 miles or further from a safe walking distance to their catchment or nearest suitable school. This will be at the beginning and end of the normal school day and not at lunchtimes.

### **How will changes affect pupils attending Welsh Medium primary education?**

- Under the new proposals the Council will continue to provide free transport for Welsh Medium primary school pupils that reside 2 miles or further from a safe walking distance to their nearest suitable school.
- As part of the Council's discretionary provision, learners will continue to be able to select their nearest 'suitable school' in accordance with their choice of English or Welsh Medium language.

### **How will the changes affect pupils attending Welsh Medium secondary education?**

- Under the new proposals the Council will continue to provide free transport for Welsh Medium secondary school pupils that reside 3 miles or further from a safe walking distance to their nearest suitable school.
- As part of the Council's discretionary provision, learners will continue to be able to select their nearest 'suitable school' in accordance with their choice of English or Welsh Medium language.

### **How will the changes affect pupils attending a primary Faith School?**

- Under the new proposals the Council will continue to provide free transport for primary Faith School pupils that reside 2 miles or further from a safe walking distance to their nearest suitable school.
- This is over and above the Council's statutory requirement and learners will continue to be able to select their nearest 'suitable school' on a discretionary basis, in accordance with their preferred religious denomination.

### **How will the changes affect pupils attending a secondary Faith School?**

- Under the new proposals, the Council will continue to provide free transport for pupils attending a secondary Faith School that reside 3 miles or further from a safe walking distance to their nearest suitable school.
- This is over and above the Council's statutory requirement and learners will continue to be able to select their nearest 'suitable school' on a discretionary basis, in accordance with their preferred religious denomination.

### **What do the changes mean for those attending post-16 education?**

- There is currently no legal duty to provide free or assisted transport arrangements for non-compulsory school age children.
- However, under the new proposals the Council will continue to provide discretionary transport for post-16 learners selecting education

through English or Welsh Medium, that reside 3 miles or further safe walking distance to their nearest suitable school or college.

### **Why is this service change being considered?**

- The Council must set a legally balanced budget each year so that we can continue to provide vital services. This means that the Council must review areas where the service provided goes beyond our statutory legal requirement.
- For almost 10 years, the Council has provided over 9,000 learners with access to free school transport on a discretionary basis. This means that the Council currently provides discretionary transport for more learners than almost every other Welsh Council's Home to School Transport operations.
- However, this also means that the Council's Home to School Transport costs have increased from £8 million in 2015 to over £15 million for the 2023/24 financial year.
- The suggested proposal would deliver savings amounting to £2.5 million in a full year, meaning the Council would continue to provide some discretionary provisions amounting to £4.4 million per year.

### **When would the service change come into effect?**

- Following Cabinet approval during the Cabinet meeting on Monday 20<sup>th</sup>, the proposals are now subject to consultation. Any changes will be subject to future Cabinet agreement and would be implemented from September 2025.

### **What if a child is in receipt of Home to School Transport because their route to school is unsafe?**

- If a child does not have access to a safe walking route to school, free transport will continue to be provided.

### **My child is currently eligible for free transport but is now no longer entitled due to the proposed service changes, what are my options?**

- To continue attending the same school using alternative methods of transport i.e. walking, cycling, using public transport, carsharing etc.
- To consider other schools within your catchment area for transfer, for instance to a Welsh Medium, Faith or English Medium School.

### **Why are you not proposing the introduction of a charge (means-tested or otherwise) for all pupils living beyond the statutory distances and who might choose to travel on Council funded school transport to their catchment or nearest suitable school or college?**

- Legislation will soon require any coach/bus used on a scheduled service to provide wheelchair access. That legislation will apply to transport for learners provided by Local Authorities on a discretionary basis where the Local Authorities collect a fee from the learner (i.e. make a charge or sell surplus seats). At this time all buses must be what the UK Government describes as either fully or partially compliant with the legislation by 1 August 2025 (immediately before any amended Home to School Transport policy would be implemented).
- There is currently a significant lack of buses that meet the legislative requirements within the marketplace. Due to the additional time required to operate scheduled school bus routes, and the geographical restrictions along these routes, e.g. a bus with wheelchair lift requires a road to be flat without incline, it is also not practical to operate such vehicles on school contract routes.
- As a result of this legislation the option of charging for transport under the statutory distance has not been proposed as a workable option.

### **How does parental preference of a school affect entitlement to free home to school transport?**

- If you choose to place your child in a school other than the nearest suitable or catchment school, then you are required to organise and pay for the cost of transport to the chosen school.

### **My child has Additional Learning Needs, what does this mean for their transport eligibility?**

- The Council's current policy in relation to Additional Learning Needs/disabilities transport would remain unaltered under the proposal as transport is based upon their individual need as well as by distance criteria.

### **How can I participate in the consultation process?**

- Following Cabinet's decision to initiate a consultation upon this proposal, a six-week consultation period will take place with pupils, parents/carers, transport providers, key stakeholders and other interested parties who are likely to be affected by the proposal.
- The consultation will be from November 27, 2023 to January 8, 2024.
- The consultation includes an online questionnaire that can be found on the Council's website [here](#).
- Letters will be distributed to parents/carers via school messaging systems, and an appropriate consultation will also be undertaken with all staff (and their Trade Union representatives) potentially impacted by the proposal.
- The results of the consultation will be fed back to the Cabinet in the New Year.

### **How will I know the distance from my home address to the school address?**

As part of the consultation, maps will be published [here](#) on the Council's website providing further details.