

Report to: **Scrutiny Committee for Children's Services**

Date: **20 June 2007**

By: **Director of Children's Services**

Title of report: **Progress report on action following the Scrutiny Review of Home to School Transport**

Purpose of report: **To update the Scrutiny Committee on Home to School Transport**

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is recommended to note the content of the report.

1. Financial Appraisal

1.1 The home to school transport budget for 2005/06, the year of the review, was £8m. Some of this expenditure was identified as 'discretionary' and savings could be made by changes of policy. The decisions reached by Cabinet on 5 June 2007 will result in the following reductions in the cost of transport: -

Transport to denominational schools - £300,000 per annum over a five year period accruing at a rate of approximately £60,000 per year, further detailed analysis being required to determine the exact profile of the target savings,

Assistance to non designated schools - £36,000 per annum mostly from 1 September 2008 with the balance by 2010/11. In addition, up to £50,000 per annum income may be obtained by charging parents whose children currently travel free on hired vehicles.

2. Supporting Information

2.1 The Committee will recall that a scrutiny review of home to school transport took place in 2005/06 and a full report was made in August 2006. The review was undertaken by Cllr St Pierre, Cllr Ost and Cllr Mrs Tidy. At the time the Board completed its work the County Council decided to carry out a Best Value executive review of all passenger transport and the evidence compiled by the review board was passed to that executive review.

2.2 The Executive Review Board received the report at their meeting on 12 December 2006. The Board also held a witness session on 9 January 2007 which was attended by both Councillors Ost and Mrs Tidy. The purpose of the session was to consider draft reports for Cabinet on transport to denominational schools and assistance given to parents of children attending non designated schools. These policies had been identified by the Scrutiny Board as areas where the County Council could make savings by changing the existing policy. Following the witness session the Executive Review Board recommended to Cabinet that consultation takes place on possible changes to these policies. Cabinet authorised the consultation exercises at their meetings on 30 January 2007 and 13 March 2007.

2.3 Consultations took place in February/March related to transport to denominational schools and April/May in respect of assistance to non designated schools. Full reports were made to Cabinet on 5 June 2007 and as a result the following policies will come into force from September 2008 -

transport to denominational schools

- i) children from low income families attending denominational secondary schools receive free transport in accordance with the Education and Inspections (E&I) Act 2006 but with no upper distance limit applying (subject to religious qualification);

- ii) children from other families attending denominational secondary schools will qualify for limited assistance provided they live more than three miles from the nearest denominational school or the designated school, subject to qualification on religious grounds;
- iii) children qualifying for support under (ii) will be required to contribute towards the cost of transport, the charge being half that related to the vacant seat scheme;
- iv) children from low income families (children eligible for free school meals, etc) as defined in the E&I Act attending primary schools continue to be entitled to free transport based on a two mile minimum distance (subject to religious qualification); and
- v) children attending a denominational school in July 2008 will continue to receive assistance based on the current policy and if their circumstances change entitlement will be determined based on the current policies.

assistance to non designated schools

The current policy of providing assistance with transport where children do not attend the designated school is ceased except for children in Years 10 and 11 at that time.

2.4 Since the review took place the Education and Inspections Act 2006 has been passed. The Board had considered the expected legislative changes as part of their review. The changes of significance in the Act are the requirements for Local Authorities to provide free transport to children from low income families, to attend denominational schools up to 15 miles from their home (subject to religious qualification), and also to attend any of three suitable secondary schools closest to their home, where these schools are more than 2 (and less than 6) miles away.

2.5 In April 2007 the Secretary of State produced guidance on home to school transport. This followed a consultation exercise. This provides guidance as to how the Secretary of State expects Local Authorities to carry out its functions in respect to home to school transport. A copy of the guidance can be located at www.teachernet.gov.uk/publications

3. Conclusion and Reason for Recommendation

3.1 The Scrutiny Committee is asked to note the progress made on the report.

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Local members: All

BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

Report of Scrutiny Board entitled 'Scrutiny review of Home to school Transport'

The following reports to Cabinet

30 January 2007 Executive review of Passenger Transport – interim report on denominational home to school transport

13 March 2007 Executive review of Passenger Transport – second interim report: payment of mileage allowances where children do not attend the designated school

5 June 2007 review of Passenger Transport – report on denominational home to school transport

5 June 2007 review of Passenger Transport – report on assistance with transport where children do not attend the designated school