

HERTFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

CABINET

MONDAY 22 APRIL 2002 AT 2.00 P.M.

Agenda Item No.

7

REVIEW OF HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT

Report of the Director of Children, Schools and Families

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Executive Member:- Robert Gordon

1. Purpose of report

- To summarise the outcome of recent consultation
- To provide comments to enable the Cabinet to decide on its home to school transport policy for the academic year beginning September 2003.

2. Summary

2.1 Consultation involved distribution of approximately 20,000 copies of the proposals to schools, parents and other interested parties in conjunction with the review of secondary admission rules. 913 response forms and 63 letters have been received. These indicated a high level of support (82%+) for the proposed policy and phasing-in arrangements.

2.2 A majority of respondents (62%) agreed or largely agreed with the proposal to phase out of assisted denominational transport but particular concern was expressed about this by :-

- 50 parents in the Hemel Hempstead area who look to Townsend School on non-faith grounds
- the Governing Bodies of Townsend and the John Henry Newman schools

3. Conclusions

3.1 There is general support for implementation of the proposed policy and arrangements to phase it in.

1. Background

- 1.1 The proposals for a revised Home to School Transport Policy (5-16) were circulated to all schools, statutory consultees and parents of Year 5 children along with the statutory proposals for secondary admission rules. The documents were also posted on the Hertsdirect website and information and opportunities for discussion were provided at a series of 10 public meetings (attended by approximately 900 people).
- 1.2 The main changes proposed from existing policy were to :-
- (a) Phase out the current community policy and replace it with arrangements to assess the safety of every route.
 - (b) Phase out assisted transport to faith schools for children who do not qualify on faith grounds.

It is proposed that any changes are gradually phased in so that all children currently receiving free or assisted transport (and siblings who join their school while they are on roll) would continue to receive transport as at present.

- 1.3 The consultation process ran from 4 February to 15 March. 913 questionnaire responses were received on the following basis :-

<i>Interest group</i>	<i>No. responses</i>
Parents	805
Schools	62
Other Statutory Consultees	15
Local Council Members	22
Not stated	9
TOTAL	913

- 1.4 The pattern of response from the questionnaires included with the consultation document indicated that more than 80% of respondents agreed or largely agreed with all aspects of the proposals other than the phasing out of assisted denominational transport. This proposal received support from 62% of respondents. A more detailed analysis is attached as Appendix 1. A summary of the responses is as follows :-

Question	No. of responses	% agreeing or largely agreeing
1. Do you agree with the principles behind the transport policy?	903	88.93%
2. Do you agree with the proposed transport policy?	890	82.28%
3. Do you think that the community policy should be replaced by arrangements based on distance and safety?	862	84.80%
4. We currently provide free and assisted transport to faith schools when children do not qualify on faith grounds. Do you think that this should be phased out?	866	62.47%
5. Do you agree with the proposal to phase in the new policy and to allow children and their siblings who currently receive free transport or assisted transport, to continue doing so?	874	85.24%

- 1.5 Comments made on the response forms are analysed in Appendix 2.
- 1.6 In addition to questionnaire response forms, 63 letters were received. These expressed concern about :-
- Transport being given to children attending a faith school (4 letters)
 - The safety of a number of routes (59 letters).

Officers have set arrangements in place to meet representatives of the communities concerned and to review the safety assessments of routes as necessary. Procedures will also be established to keep route safety under review and look at local solutions as necessary within the proposed policy (e.g. use of crossing patrols, liaison with Environment over lighting arrangements etc).

2. Proposals

On the basis of the consultation responses, the Cabinet may wish to consider adopting the proposals as consulted on. These are attached as Appendix 3.

3. Financial implications

It is anticipated that these policy changes will produce incremental annual savings eventually rising to approximately £460,000 per annum after 5 years.

Previous Reports referred to by the author :-

- Home to School Transport : Resources Panel 10 January 2002
- Home to School Transport : Resources Panel 20 March 2002

Appendix 1

Separate Excel document

**APPENDIX 2
ANALYSIS OF COMMENTS MADE**

LETTERS

Written by	No	Comment
Hertfordshire School	2	Concerned with transport not necessarily being given to children attending a faith school
Parent	2	
Local Council Member	1	The route from Knebworth to Heathcote is unsafe
Hertfordshire School	1	
Parent	55	
Parish Council	1	Concerned that the route from Woolmer Green Parish to nearest schools is unsafe
Parent	1	The route from Little Wymondley to nearest schools is unsafe

QUESTIONNAIRE COMMENTS

(a) Most frequent issues raised

- Children should have free transport to their allocated school (51)
- Eligibility should be same for faith and co-educational schools (49)
- 3 miles is too far for a child to walk (36 responses)
- If you do not qualify on faith grounds it does not necessarily mean that you are not religious (32)
- Concern about the proposals regarding Knebworth (19)
- Concern about congestion (13)
- It is sensible to phase the policy in (9)

(b) Analysis if individual comments

Response	Comment	No.
Agree		
	3 miles is too far for a child to walk	6
	Faith should not be an issue when calculating eligibility the school is suitable or it is not	6
	Sensible for the policy to be phased in	6
	Safety should be given the highest priority	3
	If a parent makes a preference for a church school then the parent should pay for transport	3
	All children should be offered free transport	2
	Children should have free transport to their allocated school	2
Concerned about the consultation document not acting on the key issues outlined	1	

Response	Comment	No.
	Excluded children should not be offered free transport	1
	If a parent makes a preference for a church school then the parent should pay for transport	1
	The current policy is not consistent when assessing transport	1
	Sceptical that this new policy will be implemented effectively	1
	What is the definition of a suitable schools	1
	Parent who do not have transport should be given consideration	1
	If you do not qualify on faith grounds this does not necessarily mean you are not religious	1
	The popular schools should be closed	1
	The route should be taken into account when assessing whether or not a route is safe	1
	It is not appropriate for siblings to also be offered free transport	1
	Changes to the home to school transport policy are not currently necessary	1
Largely Agree		
	3 miles is too far for a child to walk	15
	Children should have free transport to their allocated school	6
	Concerned that the proposals will increase congestion	6
	Faith should not be an issue, when calculating eligibility, the school is suitable or it is not	6
	All children should be offered free transport	4
	Concerned about the consultation document not acting on the key issues outlined	4
	Changes in eligibility with regard for transport should come at the end of Primary education	4
	This is unfair on those entering the system, there should be a standardised date for introducing the policy	4
	Generally disagrees with the new proposals in relation to faith schools	3
	Sensible for the policy to be phased in	3
	Concerned about the proposals with regard to Knebworth	2
	Nearest school is not necessarily the most suitable school	2
	Safety should be given the highest priority	2
	Does not agree with funding transport to faith schools	2
	This policy must be consistent	2
	All parents should pay for transport	1
	How do you know which is the nearest suitable school	1
	Public bus routes should be changed to allow for the changes in the proposals	1
	The County Council should offer free transport if we were unable to offer the parent their first ranked school	1
	The County Council would not need to provide free transport if children were offered places at their local school	1
	If a parent makes a preference for a church school then the parent should pay for transport	1

Response	Comment	No.
	Excluded children should not be offered free transport	1
	The policy needs to take into account the route taken	1
	What is the definition of a safe route	1
	What is the definition of a suitable school	1
	Will cause many local issues	1
	Would have liked to have had more information about the proposed transport policy	1
	More work should be undertaken to ensure that routes are 'safe'	1
	This would only work well with one admitting authority	1
	Children should be treated equally, either all children have free transport or no children have free transport	1
	Does this policy apply to all faith schools	1
	This policy may be open to abuse	1
	Would like Letchworth to qualify for free transport due to the proposed closure of Norton	1
	If a parent makes a preference for a church school then the parent should pay for transport	1
	The County Council seem to be limiting parent's choice	1
Disagree		18
	3 miles is too far for a child to walk	11
	Children should have free transport to their allocated school	11
	Faith should not be an issue, when calculating eligibility, the school is suitable or it is not	10
	This is unfair on those entering the system, there should be a standardised date for introducing the policy	9
	It is not appropriate for siblings to also be offered free transport	7
	All children should be offered free transport	6
	Concerned that the proposals will increase congestion	6
	Concerned about the proposals with regard to Knebworth	6
	This policy must ensure that the community is preserved	4
	Safety should be given the highest priority	4
	This policy may be considered as unfair	4
	If a parent makes a preference for a church school then the parent should pay for transport	3
	If you do not qualify on faith grounds this does not necessarily mean you are not religious	3
	Children should have free transport to their allocated school	3
	There is no need to change the current policy	3
	All children attending a faith school should be offered free transport	2
	Public bus routes should be changed to allow for the changes in the proposals	2
	The new proposals still seem to be unfair	2
	Concerned about the consultation document not acting on the key issues outlined	2
	There is no safe route for children to walk to school	2

Response	Comment	No.
	Faith should not be an issue, when calculating eligibility, the school is suitable or it is not	2
	Free transport should also be provided for children attending their nearest single sex school	1
	Parents were told that Redbourn children would be given free transport to school when the secondary school closed	1
	Villages will be further disadvantaged by these rules	1
	This policy seems to be a cost cutting exercise	1
	The County Council seems to be limiting parents choice	1
	Concerned about the consultation document not acting on the key issues outlined	1
	Parent who do not have transport should be given consideration	1
	Parents who want their children to go to a faith school should have transport provided	1
	The County Council should not make Hertfordshire children travel outside of their local area	1
	The consultation document is trying to cover up the main changes in the policy	1
	The current transport services should be expanded upon not reduced	1
	What is the definition of a suitable school	1
	The County Council should offer free transport if we were unable to offer the parent their first ranked school	1
	Does not agree with Radlett children not being offered free transport	1
	Parents should have the option of paying for a service for the children	1
	The Council should increase council tax so that the current policy can continue	1
	Children should be treated equally, either all children have free transport or no children have free transport	1
	The County Council seems to be limiting the parent choice to school	1
	The introduction of this policy may discourage parents from send their children to the school	1
	All children should be given free transport to a faith school	1
	The route should be taken into account when assessing whether or not a route is safe	1
	Parents who can not afford to pay for transport should be given free transport	1
	All parents should pay for transport	1
	This is a weighted question	1
Strongly Disagree		
	Children should have free transport to their allocated school	29
	Faith should not be an issue, when calculating eligibility, the school is suitable or it is not	18
	If you do not qualify on faith grounds this does not necessarily mean you are not religious	14

Response	Comment	No.
	Concerned about the proposals with regard to Knebworth	11
	There is no need to change the current policy	10
	Children who have not been baptised should not be discriminated against	5
	The introduction of this policy may discourage parents from send their children to the school	5
	3 miles is too far for a child to walk	4
	The new proposals still seem to be unfair	4
	Safety should be given the highest priority	4
	Children should be treated equally, either all children have free transport or no children have free transport	4
	All children attending a faith school should be offered free transport	3
	This policy seems to be a cost cutting exercise	3
	Assisted travel scheme should always be made available to parents	3
	The proposals contradict the County Council's 'green policy'	2
	There is no safe route for children to walk to school	2
	Will cause many local issues	2
	This policy must ensure that the community is preserved	2
	If a parent makes a preference for a church school then the parent should pay for transport	2
	This relates to the ethos of the school	2
	It is not appropriate for siblings to also be offered free transport	2
	This is unfair on those entering the system, there should be a standardised date for introducing the policy	2
	Concerned about the proposals not acting on the key issues	1
	Concerned that the proposals will increase congestion	1
	Disagrees with the secondary consultation document limiting choice	1
	Safety should be given the highest priority	1
	The County Council should not make Hertfordshire children travel outside of their local area	1
	The County Council should provide a greater range of schooling in Hertfordshire	1
	This policy must be consistent	1
	Public bus routes should be changed to allow for the changes in the proposals	1
	By introducing this policy the ethos of the school would change	1
	Does this policy apply to all faith schools	1
	The County Council seems to be limiting the parent choice to school	1
	All children should be reassessed	1
	All parents should pay for transport	1

APPENDIX 3

5-16 HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY

Free transport will be provided for

- (a) All children attending their nearest suitable school or educational placement where the distance from home to school is over the statutory walking distance.
 - more than 2 miles from home for children aged under 8
 - more than 3 miles from home for children aged 8 and over
- (b) All children attending their nearest suitable school which is less than the statutory walking distance where it is considered unsafe for the child, accompanied as necessary, to walk along it with reasonable safety.
- (c) All children attending their nearest maintained faith school providing religious education in accordance with the parent's beliefs which:
 - i) for children aged under 8
 - is between 2 and 8 miles from home, or
 - if further than 8 miles involves a journey of 45 minutes or less;
 - ii) for children aged 8 or over
 - is between 3 and 15 miles from home, or
 - if further than 15 miles involves a journey of 75 minutes or less;
- (d) Children with a Statement of Special Educational Needs specifying the need for free transport
- (e) Children in Years 10 and 11 who have moved house, live more than three miles from their school and are in an examination year
- (f) Children in public care who have moved home during the course of the academic year or need to attend a particular school for continuity. In these cases the provision will be considered as part of an integrated review of the child's needs in time for the beginning of the next academic year.

Free transport may also be provided for the following reasons:-

- (a) **Medical**
 - (i) Children with a temporary medical condition which requires transport to continue attending a particular school;
 - (ii) Children allocated a place at a school on long term medical grounds, regardless of the distance from home to school.

(b) **Social Circumstances**

Children in cases where extreme social circumstances would otherwise prevent them from attending school. These cases would include:

- where a family of the child attending a school is temporarily re-housed due to domestic violence or circumstances such as flooding or fire;
- where the child's family is living in temporary bed and breakfast accommodation following repossession;
- where a child is allocated a place at a school on long term social grounds.

(c) **Exclusion**

Children who have been excluded from school for whom transport is required for attendance at a new school or Education Support Centre.

(d) **Respite Care**

Children who are provided with respite care because of their social and developmental needs.

Assisted Travel Scheme

Assisted transport will continue to be available where there are spare seats on vehicles providing free transport within the County Council's transport policy. A standard scale of charges will be applied. The availability of seats will be reviewed on a termly basis and it may be necessary to re-allocate seats these seats to children who qualify for free transport.

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