

PROPOSED WITHDRAWAL OF DISCRETIONARY TRANSPORT TO MAINSTREAM SCHOOLS

SUMMARY

- 1 At its last meeting, the Commission received a report detailing the results of the first phase of a review into Mainstream School Contract Service Provision. The report also noted that the intention was that the second phase of the review would be completed by late Spring 2009 and that the results of this final part of the review would be reported back to members in due course.

Since the conclusion of the first phase of the review, a number of severe budget pressures have become evident. The provision of transport to mainstream designated schools for pupils travelling under 2 or 3 miles has been proposed as one area where significant additional budget savings could result if such services were to be withdrawn completely. The emergence of these proposals has resulted in the second phase of the review being postponed until the political situation has been clarified.

At the time of writing, officers consider that it is prudent to provide members with details of the current proposals relating to this service area and the potential implications associated with them. It is acknowledged that the situation may be subject to change at short notice.

RECOMMENDATION

- 2 To note the proposed measures.

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

- 3 Appendix 2 is a briefing note detailing the budget proposals, the schools and pupils likely to be affected and the actions proposed to be taken by officers.

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Background papers:	None
List of appendices:	Appendix 1 – Implications Appendix 2 – Briefing Note -Proposed Withdrawal of Discretionary Transport to Mainstream Schools

IMPLICATIONS

Financial

- 1.1 If implemented in their current form, the proposals will result in an overall saving of £280,000 per annum.

It is envisaged that a proposed service saving of £165,000pa would be realised in 2009/10, with an additional £85,000pa in 2010/11; in addition, with effect from 2010/11 the loss of a post would result in a further saving of £30,000pa.

Legal

- 2.1 None. Statutory provision of free transport for entitled pupils would continue to be provided.

Personnel

- 3.1 Removal of subsidised supported mainstream school bus services as proposed is likely to result in the eventual loss of between one and two posts currently located in the Procurement & Operations Team of the Council's Integrated Passenger Transport Group.

However the group is still developing its role in terms of taking on transport procurement and management of services across the council and any decisions on changes to posts will need to be taken in the light of any additional responsibilities that the Group takes on from other areas of the Council. Work on revising the Group staffing structure will be carried out during 2009/10 and staff will be kept fully informed.

Equalities Impact

- 4.1 The rationale for the proposals is based on both budgetary and equality grounds; the current pattern of provision to a limited number of schools could be perceived as inequitable. The proposed removal of services will address this issue.

Corporate objectives and priorities for change

- 5.1 This proposal contributes towards the Council's Corporate Priority of providing excellent services and value for money.

Proposed Withdrawal of Discretionary Transport to Mainstream Schools

Background

Historically Derby City Council, and previously, Derbyshire County Council, provided school transport where children would find it difficult to get service buses. However, this historic pattern of provision of subsidised buses to some schools and not to others could be seen as inequitable. In addition, severe pressures on the Council's 2009/10 budget have emerged recently, leading councillors to seek opportunities for areas where savings can reasonably be considered. Discretionary (i.e. non statutory) bus services to mainstream schools are one of the areas under consideration.

To date, there have been a number of discussions on this issue and the general agreement is that the situation is complicated. The following is a summary of the current position.

1) St Benedict Catholic School

The use of the terms 'statutory' and 'discretionary' with regard to transport to faith schools is difficult; as it could be argued that all of the transport is discretionary.

However in relation to St Benedict it can be confirmed that the budget **proposals** are based on:

- **Continuing** to provide subsidised bus services for those pupils who **live more than 3 miles** from St Benedict and are attending the school on religious grounds (the Council introduced a charge for this transport for year 7 pupils last year; so from Sept 2009 pupils in years 7 and 8 will be making advance payments for bus travel if they wish to use it). There are currently around 500 pupils that are transported on this basis (some are still free; around 50 year 7 pupils make a contribution).
- **Removing** the bus services that are provided to assist those pupils that **live less than 3 miles** from St Benedict; on current year's figures this is likely to affect around 220 pupils.

2) Other Schools

There are other schools affected by the proposals, namely three Catholic primary schools – St Joseph's, St George's and St John Fisher; and three secondary schools - Bemrose Community School, Derby Moor Community Sports College and Littleover Community School.

For these schools, the proposal is that the Council will remove transport for pupils up to the age of 8 who live less than 2 miles from their nearest suitable school and for pupils over the age of 8 who live less than 3 miles from their nearest suitable school. The numbers of pupils affected are much lower at these schools.

3) 'Entitled' Pupils

The Council will continue to provide free transport for pupils attending any of the affected schools if they meet the required criteria, as detailed in Section 2.1 of the Council's Policy on Home to School Transport. An extract these criteria is attached to this note.

4) Help and Assistance

Should the proposals be implemented, officers will consult with affected schools and parents/carers to determine how any change in the mode of home to school travel can be managed or (wherever possible) assisted. This may include measures such as working with schools to help them initiate their own alternative service provision, or providing travel plans or education & cycle training for pupils. Officers will also seek to work with partner organisations such as the NHS to promote links with the government's new 'Be Active, Be Healthy' strategy and 'Change 4 Life' initiatives.

Extract from the Council's Policy on Home to School Transport

2.1 How We Assess Who Qualifies For Free Transport

We will provide free transport to the nearest suitable school for any full-time pupil when there is no school within the 'statutory walking distance' stated in the 1996 Education Act. This distance is:

- two miles - for pupils who are under eight years old **Note:** free travel stops at the end of Year 3 in which the pupil becomes eight
- three miles - for pupils who are eight years old and over.

If the child is eligible for free school meals or the parent is in receipt of the highest level of working tax credit, the distance is two miles.

For secondary schools, transport may be provided to one of the three nearest schools if the child lives more than two miles, but not more than six miles from that school, or to the nearest school based on religion or belief up to a maximum distance of 15 miles.

We will give free travel in one of the following ways:

a a travel pass for a school bus service or a season ticket for a local bus service

b a refund of travel expenses, paid in arrears, for a 'child bus fare', or fuel allowance, as long as the school confirms the pupil has been attending.

2.2 Pupils in faith schools

Derby City Council provides free travel to the end of statutory school age for secondary age pupils attending a maintained faith school if the child is attending on religion or belief grounds and

If the child is eligible for free school meals.

If parents are in receipt of the maximum level of working tax credit.

Transport may be provided to the nearest school based on religion or belief if the school is over two miles but less than 15 miles from the home address.

Note: The Education Act 1996 does not make a specific statement that pupils are expected to walk to school if they live less than the statutory walking distance, but this seems to be implied.