

ITEM 4

MINUTE EXTRACT

Time began	6.00pm
Time ended	7.38pm

COUNCIL CABINET 7 JULY 2009

Present: Councillor Jones (Chair)
Councillors Care, Naitta, Skelton and Troup

In attendance Councillors Jennings and Williamson

This record of decisions was published on 9 July 2009. The key decisions set out in this record will come into force and may be implemented on the expiry of five clear days unless a key decision is called in.

Key Decisions

29/09 Proposed Modification of Discretionary Home to School Transport Services

The Council Cabinet considered a report on Proposed Modification of Discretionary Home to School Transport Services. The Council's budget approved on 2 March 2009, included the proposal to withdraw the Council's discretionary transport provision that was provided predominantly for children that lived less than two or three miles from school. The estimated financial saving included in the budget proposals was £280,000 to be made over two years. In order to deliver the £280,000, Council Cabinet needed to be advised of the detailed implications of the proposals and approve any recommendations in the light of this information. The report set out the implications of these proposals and considered the results and analysis of a public consultation exercise, a scheme impact assessment and a financial assessment of the situation with various options and mitigating measures that could be considered by Members.

There had also been a significant change in the situation since the proposal was first considered, as reported to Council Cabinet on 2 June 2009. This related to a local commercial bus operator, Nottingham and Derby, that had now registered to run commercial services to Saint Benedict and Derby Moor from September 2009, along very similar routes to the current Council routes. This meant that these commercial services would in any event, replace the Council services and children would be able to pay a daily fare to use these buses. The Council would purchase from the operator season tickets for those

children that were eligible for school transport. In the current academic year, only 64 pupils would not be accommodated on these new services.

There were a number of positive points arising from this development:

- There would be minimal disruption for these schools; a seamless transfer was expected from provision by the Council in the current academic year to Nottingham and Derby in the new academic year commencing in September 2009.
- A facility to pay in advance would still be offered; but as pupils would be able to pay on the day, patronage on the buses was expected to increase.
- Increased numbers of secondary pupils travelling by bus were likely to result in a decrease in the number of home to school car journeys across the city.
- Any increase in bus travel would tend to offset the negative environmental and congestion-related effects of any extra car journeys resulting from the remaining measures proposed.

Having assessed all of the information available, it was recommended to Council Cabinet that they approve the withdrawal of the Council's commitment and direct financial contribution to the provision of these discretionary school transport services, that was those predominantly for children travelling less than two or three miles to school. It was acknowledged that these service withdrawals would require parents/carers to make other travel arrangements for their children, which may be challenging for some, particularly in the short term. One of the main reasons for this recommendation was to provide an equitable approach to transport provision to all schools in the city and to focus continuing support on providing transport to those children that live beyond the statutory minimum walking distance from their nearest appropriate school.

The key mitigation measure was for the Council to continue to develop the Sustainable School Travel Strategy and work with these affected schools more closely over the coming year to develop and support their School Travel Plans and seek to support parents/carers in planning their travel arrangements. A very positive outcome from this change was that it should increase the numbers of children walking and cycling to school and thereby support both the Government and Council's health agenda to increase children's physical activity. The approval of this proposal would meet the savings target included in the Council's budget strategy by 2010/11. Any changes to this discretionary transport provision would not take place until September 2010.

The Council Cabinet also considered a report of the Chairs of the Children and Young People and Planning and Transportation Commission setting out the views of the Commissions.

The Commissions recommended that

- the proposals set out in the Directors report [be] rejected
- in the interim the current proposals to provide discretionary home to school transport using Notts Derby bus service be underwritten by the Council. This was to ensure that school transport would be provided for the full academic year in the event that the commercial service did not prove financially viable
- Council Cabinet conduct a detailed and city wide consultation to establish the school bus requirements of all 105 schools in the City so that a realistic estimate could be made of the costs of providing comprehensive transport to all schools in Derby
- The Council, together with bus operators such as Notts Derby investigate the options for providing a commercial service to all Derby schools, the costs of providing such a service, and the practicality, based on the lower fares that commercial operators were apparently able to charge, of reducing the subsidies the Council pays to support its current services to schools
- During the coming academic year the Council monitors the take up of the pay as you go services offered by Notts Derby and compares this information with that relating to the take up of the previous advanced payment service.

Options Considered

1. To carry on with the existing provision; however this would mean carrying on with the inequitable system of school transport provision across the city and additional funding of £100,000 a year would need to be identified.
2. To phase out the provision over a number of years; this would support those children who had already started school. The cost of this would be around £450,000 over seven years.
3. To provide a bus service to all schools across the city, around 100 schools, to provide full equity of access to schools. This was estimated at a net annual cost of £1.5m.

Decision

1. To approve the withdrawal of the Council's commitment and any direct financial support from September 2010, for the provision of category c) discretionary home to school transport, as described in paragraphs in Appendix 2 of the report.

2. To approve the ongoing development and enhancement of the Council's Sustainable School Travel Strategy to provide information to parents on access to all schools and to continue to support School Travel Plans and help to prioritise the safer routes to school infrastructure programme as part of the Local Transport Plan capital programme. Over the next year this support should be prioritised to those parents/carers and schools that were directly affected by the modification of the bus services.

3. To note the continued statutory transport provision for all mainstream schools including to faith schools and the Council's continued commitment to non-statutory transport provision to faith schools as defined in Appendix 2 under Categories a) and b) respectively.

4. To note the Council's commitment to B-line, the young person's concessionary travel scheme, which in partnership with the commercial bus operators, supports half fare travel for children up to the age of 18.

Reasons

1. To provide an equitable approach to transport provision to all schools in the city and to focus continuing support on providing transport to those children that live beyond the statutory minimum walking distance from their nearest appropriate school.

2. Implementing this recommendation will enable the savings proposals included in the Council budget to be met by 2010/11.

3. If we can increase the numbers of children walking and cycling to school then this will support both the Government's and the Council's health agendas to increase children's physical activity and improve their health.

EXTRACT ENDS