

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

CABINET MEMBER

REVIEW OF HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 To report on the outcome of stakeholder consultation on the proposed changes to home to school transport policy considered by the Cabinet Member on 20 March 2008.
- 1.2 To recommend changes to the Home to School Transport policy.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 At the meeting on 20 March 2008, the Cabinet Member considered a report reviewing two aspects of the home to school transport policy:
- The incorporation of the new duty to extend entitlement to free transport to pupils from low income groups
 - Transport provision made to voluntary aided schools within North Lincolnshire
- 2.2 The decision was taken to consult stakeholders on the extension of entitlement and the phasing out of the denominational transport policy to take effect from September 2009, and that a recommendation be submitted to the Cabinet Member once stakeholder views had been obtained.
- 2.3 Letters to the following stakeholders were sent out requesting feedback to the proposed changes. The closing date for comments was extended to 23 May 2008:
- All schools in North Lincolnshire
 - Chairs of Governing Bodies
 - Parents of pupils who currently receive free transport under the denominational schools policy
 - Parents of all pupils at Catholic primary schools
 - Diocesan Education Services

Meetings have taken place between the Cabinet Member for Children's Services, officers, representatives of Catholic Schools and the Nottingham Diocesan Director of Education.

3. OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

3.1 Phase Out the Denominational Transport Policy

New pupils starting voluntary aided schools on or after 1 September 2009 would not be entitled to free transport unless they met the criteria under the low income policy. However, free transport would be available to those currently eligible whilst they remain at the same school.

3.2 Status Quo

Make no change to the present policy.

4. ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS

4.1 Phase Out the Denominational Transport Policy

Provision of Home to School Transport to Denominational Schools is not a statutory requirement. In addition, the current policy does not offer the same support to all pupils who choose a school other than the catchment school. In order to minimise impact on those pupils currently receiving free transport to denominational schools, the entitlement would be phased out. Free transport would be available to those currently eligible whilst they remain at the same school. The change in policy would take effect from September 2009. Pupils from families on low income would be entitled to free transport under the new duty.

4.2 Status Quo

The extension of the entitlement to free transport to pupils from low income groups is a statutory requirement and therefore must be incorporated into the policy.

No change to the denominational school transport policy would continue service provision beyond the council's statutory obligation.

5. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)

5.1 Financial

5.1.1 The current cost of the transport to denominational schools is £177k. The proposed changes to denominational transport would gradually reduce this cost over the five year period commencing September 2009.

5.1.2 The Department of Children, Schools and Families have provided funding for to cover any additional cost as a result of the statutory extension of entitlement through the Area Based Grant.

5.2 Staffing

There are no staffing implications

6. **OTHER IMPLICATIONS (STATUTORY, ENVIRONMENTAL, DIVERSITY, SECTION 17 - CRIME AND DISORDER, RISK AND OTHER)**

6.1 Environmental

If school transport were withdrawn alternative methods of transport would be used. The school's travel plan would have to be reviewed to allow for this and to minimise the impact on the environment.

6.2 Statutory

The Home to School Transport Policy has been reviewed in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Education Act 1996, particularly sections 444 and 509 and the Educations and Inspections Act 2006.

7. **OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION**

7.1 Following consultation, 27 responses were received from parents. This represents 2.3% of the parents consulted. The feedback covered concerns regarding affordability; barriers to access; environmental impact and impact on admissions. The extension of entitlement to low income groups was welcomed.

7.2 One letter was received from a Head Teacher of a Catholic School and one from the Director of the Diocesan Education Service. The feedback raised concerns regarding the effect on the partnership between the local authority and Catholic Schools, impact on people within rural areas and the reduction of choice.

7.3 At the consultation meeting between officers and Catholic schools representatives the main concerns were the affect on choice and diversity for Catholic families and the impact of increased traffic around schools. Suggestions from the Diocesan were made regarding minimising the cost impact on families particularly those with more than one or two children.

8. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

8.1 The Cabinet Member approves the incorporation of the entitlement to free transport for children from low income groups into the Home to School Transport Policy in accordance with the Education and Inspections Act 2006.

8.2 The Cabinet Member approves the phasing out of the Denominational Transport Policy with effect from 1 September 2009.

SERVICE DIRECTOR CHILDREN, STRATEGY AND PARTNERSHIPS

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Background Papers used in the preparation of this report

North Lincolnshire Council Home to School Transport Policy
Letters received from stakeholders consulted
Report of Catholic Head presented to the consultation meeting 22 May 2008
Notes from the meeting with Catholic school headteachers held on 22 May 2008