

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

REPORT TO: Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date of Meeting:	6 th October 2014
Report of:	Director, Children's Services
Subject/Title:	Update on Home to School Transport
Portfolio Holder:	Rachel Bailey

1. In April 2012, after significant consideration by a member Task and Finish Group, extensive consultation with key stake holders Cabinet resolved to make the following changes to the Home to School Transport Policy.
 - a. That free transport will no longer be provided for children attending denominational schools through parental choice on the grounds of a parent's religion/faith; withdrawal of which to take place for all students – whether current recipients or future applicants – from September 2012. Exceptions are to be provided for secondary-school age children from low income families attending a choice of their 3 nearest qualifying schools between 2 and 6 miles from home, or up to a maximum of 15 miles to the nearest school preferred by reason of a parent's religion or belief, in accordance with statutory responsibilities.
 - b. That the savings resulting from the withdrawal of entitlement on grounds of religion/faith in 2012/13 be redirected to provide one-off funding to the affected educational establishments; this money is to be ring-fenced accordingly. Each establishment will have freedom over how it uses this one-off funding to support alternative travel options to students. It is estimated that such savings will be of the order of £150,000, which will be distributed on an equitable basis to relevant establishments.
 - c. That a reduced devolved grant – £375,000 a year (equating to approximately 50% of current net expenditure) - be offered to all Sixth Forms and Further Education Colleges accepting Cheshire East resident students for post 16 mainstream transport subsidies and for this money is to be ring-fenced accordingly. Each Sixth Form or College will determine the basis of support to each student taking account both the needs of the students and the establishments themselves. The respective grants, to be awarded on the basis of the 2011/12 data and the efficacy of this to be reviewed yearly.

- d. That the Council, in full partnership and consultation with parents, carers and special schools, look at alternatives around Special Educational Needs transport to improve outcomes by promoting a positive culture of independence for children, young people and families. In addition, the Council will undertake further reviews of provision such as where transport is provided by way of the Education and Inspections Act (2006) and social care transport needs.
2. At the time of the decision an identified risk was that parents/ students will choose alternative educational establishments should transport subsidy be reduced. It was felt that this may result in some children becoming eligible for transport on alternative statutory grounds – such as the nearest suitable establishment being located beyond the statutory walking distance. This risk has not manifested itself and pupil churn in the system has been minimal.
3. Both Catholic High schools within the borough have now established their own home to school arrangements and in fact there has been minimum impact on pupil numbers. This is reflected in the primary sector for both Roman Catholic Schools and Church of England Schools.
4. The Authority's statutory obligations in regard to Home to School transport are kept under regular review in the context of Department for Education guidance.

Home to School Transport and Transport Solutions Limited

5. Cabinet has previously approved (1 April 2014) to the implementation of Transport Service Solutions Ltd (TSSL); a council owned and controlled company, for the delivery of transport services, including home to school transport.
6. That proposal was in accord with the Councils' declared intent of becoming a strategic commissioning authority with a hard split between commissioning and service delivery and with a focus on stimulating innovation, efficiency and staff involvement whilst delivering against challenging budgetary targets.
7. The work aligns with the Council's overall direction of travel, having created a number of such companies recently. These have all gone 'live' only after careful consideration of the business case for each and the establishment of robust financial and governance arrangements.
8. The provision of home to school transport will be undertaken by the new Transport Service Solutions Company. Extensive work has been undertaken to develop a service level agreement with the company to ensure that the Council fulfils its statutory responsibilities in regard to home to school transport. The agreement has been developed to ensure that there will be minimal impact on those eligible for home to school transport.