

Cheshire East Council

Cabinet

Date of Meeting: 13th March 2018

Report of: Mark Palethorpe, Acting Executive Director - People

Subject/ Title: Available Walking Routes to School Programme – Phase 2A

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Jos Saunders, Children and Families

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 The Available Walking Routes (AWR) to School Programme, originally agreed by Cabinet on 14 June 2016 and then confirmed on 18 October 2016, involves 5 phases. This report seeks decisions on one route within that programme – Phase 2A.
- 1.2 Phase 2A concerns the route between Mobberley and the Knutsford Academy and Knutsford Academy, The Studio. On 12 September 2017 Cabinet authorised the proposed community engagement on the removal of free transport between Mobberley to Knutsford Academy and Mobberley to Knutsford Academy, The Studio on the basis that the route is now assessed as an available walking route.
- 1.3 This report includes the outcome of the community engagement re Phase 2A and seeks confirmation that the Mobberley to Knutsford route is deemed 'available' and that free transport be withdrawn for those Mobberley pupils resident within 3 miles of the Academy.

2.0 Recommendations

It is recommended that Cabinet:

- 2.1 Confirms that the route between Mobberley and Knutsford Academy and Knutsford Academy, The Studio is deemed an 'available' walking route. Therefore free home to school transport will be withdrawn for current and new pupils living in Mobberley within 3 miles of the Academy, effective from 1 September 2018.
- 2.2 Acknowledges the feedback from the public engagement and agrees that the proposed withdrawal of transport shall be amended as detailed in section 3.6 in order to address some of the concerns raised.
- 2.3 Agrees that a one-off subsidy (calculated at £192 per annum) be paid to all affected families for the remainder of their child's attendance at their

respective schools (this is the agreed rate for pupils at secondary schools excluding 6th form).

- 2.4 Authorises officers to undertake all necessary actions to implement the recommendations above.

3.0 Reasons for the Recommendations

- 3.1 The Council has a duty to provide travel assistance to secondary school pupils who live more than three miles from their nearest school. For those living within 3 miles of school a similar duty applies if there is no 'available' walking route.
- 3.2 The route between Mobberley and Knutsford Academy and Knutsford Academy, The Studio has been modified by the installation of a new pavement between Broadoak Lane and Rockswood Way. The full route has now been reassessed by a qualified assessor and declared to be an available route. A certified copy of the route assessment is included as Appendix A.
- 3.3 The original proposal means that there will no longer be a need for the Council to provide free transport for 41 children living in the Mobberley area who reside within the statutory walking distance to school of 3 miles for pupils aged 11 plus. There are a further 29 pupils who live outside the 3 mile limit who will continue to receive free travel support.
- 3.4 Parents of pupils for whom free transport is withdrawn would be eligible to receive a subsidy payment to mitigate the impact of the decision. The subsidy would be £192 per child for each year the child is expected to remain at the current school (excluding sixth form). This eligibility would include pupils who have started at the school in September 2017, but would not be available for those starting at the school in September 2018. The reason for this is that information on the proposal has been shared in September 2017, with an engagement exercise having taken place between 20 September and 17 October 2017, which was ahead of the 31 October closing date for September 2018 applications for high school transfer
- 3.5 The public engagement in respect of the route from Mobberley ran from 20 September 2017 to 17 October 2017. In total 46 people responded, largely with expressions of opposition to the proposals. Those comments can be clearly separated into a number of common themes. There are also a few suggestions as to what mitigations could be put in place. A detailed analysis is attached as Appendix B. A response to the separate themes with input from Cheshire East Council Transport and Highways officers is also attached as Appendix C.
- 3.6 As a result of the public engagement it is suggested that the original proposals be varied as follows:
- The home to school distance for lower school pupils shall be measured to the entrance on Westfield Drive rather than the one on Bexton Road. This extends the distance by some 0.3 miles and means that 4 pupils will now

not have their free transport withdrawn. Of the 41 pupils originally included 37 will therefore now have transport withdrawn.

- 3.7 Assuming pupil rolls and addresses remain approximately constant the proposals will deliver estimated annual savings of £22,000 once the subsidy period ends.
- 3.8 The Council is making a series of changes to scheduled bus services as part of the Supported Bus Service Review. Scheduled bus services between Mobberley and Knutsford will continue but running to an adjusted timetable. The existing 88 and 188 services will be replaced with service numbers 88, 89 and 188 from the 1st April 2018. The AWR proposals mean that the council will withdraw the free bus passes currently offered to some pupils who use these services. Pupils could however continue to use the services by paying a fare with a young person weekly pass currently available at a cost of £10.00. The revised timetable is available at:
<http://www.dgbus.co.uk/buses-in-cheshire.html>
- 3.9 A report to Cabinet in June 2016 recommended that a footpath be installed on the route between Mobberley and Knutsford in order to provide a permanent available walking route.
- 3.10 The footways comprising the route are regularly inspected for safety by Cheshire East Highways as part of a scheduled inspection regime. Defects that present a hazard will be identified and arrangements made for prompt repair.

4.0 Wards affected and Local Ward Members

- 4.1 Knutsford Ward:
Cllr Tony Dean, Cllr Stewart Gardiner, Cllr Hayley Wells-Bradshaw
- Mobberley Ward:
Cllr Jamie Macrae

5.0 Implications of Recommendation

5.1 Policy Implications

- 5.1.1 These proposals are in line with Cheshire East Council's adopted policy on Available Walking Routes to School, which was approved on 15 October 2012.
- 5.1.2 Adopting the recommendations will help ensure that we implement the AWR policy in a fair, equitable and consistent manner.

5.2 Legal Implications

- 5.2.1 The Council is required by both the Education Act 1996 and the Education and Inspections Act 2006 to make suitable travel arrangements free of charge for certain students to attend school. Legislation has determined that local authorities are required to make school travel arrangements where a child lives under the statutory walking distance to school (currently 3 miles for children of secondary school age) but does not have a route available that can be walked in reasonable safety.
- 5.2.2 For a route to be available, it must be a route to school, along which a child, accompanied as necessary, can walk with reasonable safety from traffic hazards.
- 5.2.3 If free transport is not withdrawn from those routes which have been classed as available to walk, the Council may risk challenge from the parents of children using other routes across the Borough which are also classed as available but for whom no free transport is provided
- 5.2.4 It is for the Council to assess route safety, taking into account the need to create safe walking, cycling and travel routes and encouraging more pupils to walk and cycle to school.

5.3 Financial implications

- 5.3.1 In accordance with the October 2016 decision of Cabinet, a subsidy has been agreed for parents of children for whom free transport is withdrawn during the AWR programme. The amount agreed is £192 for a secondary school pupil for each year they remain at their current school. This is made as a single one-off payment.
- 5.3.3 The subsidy estimate based on current children attending and expected to continue to attend in September 2018 is £13,824. A temporary budget provision is included in the Council's 2018/19 budget plans for the parental subsidy payments.
- 5.3.3 The Council's three year medium term financial strategy assumes that savings from AWR will be delivered to enable the Council to maintain a balanced budget.
- 5.3.4 The costs associated with transporting children on this route amount to some £22,000 per annum.
- 5.3.5 The People element of the client commissioning budget is £9m as at the First Quarter Budget Book 2017/18.

5.4 Equality Implications

5.4.1 A full equality impact assessment has been completed regarding the Available Walking Routes to school programme and is available to view on the Cheshire East Council Website.

5.5 Rural Community Implications

5.5.1 This proposal applies to pupils whose walking route to school is less than 3 miles for secondary aged pupils. All pupils equal to or over this distance travelling to their local or closest qualifying school would be eligible for travel support.

5.6 Public Health Implications

5.6.1 The public health implications will be considered as part of the corporate Sustainable Mode of Travel to School (SMOTS) strategy, which will examine and promote the healthiest way of travelling to school.

6.0 Risk Management

6.1 Maintaining existing arrangements will result in inconsistency and inequity in the provision of transport across the borough.

7.0 Access to information / Bibliography

7.1 The Cheshire East Council Available Walking Routes to School Policy can be found at:
http://www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/public_transport/school_transport/walking_routes_to_schools.aspx

8.0 Contact Information

8.1 Contact details for this report are as follows:
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