



Agenda Item 9

**Consideration of Changes to Current
Home to Schools Transport Policy
and Arrangements**

Falkirk Council

Title: Consideration of Changes To Current Home To School Transport Policy and Arrangements
Meeting: Education, Children and Young People Executive
Date: 23 March 2021
Submitted By: Director of Children's Services

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 This report seeks to consider the planning, administration and financial implications that would result from amending the existing Home to School Transport Policy as requested by the Education, Children and Young People Executive at its meeting of 28 January 2020.

2. Recommendations

2.1. Education, Children and Young People Executive are asked to:-

- (1) note the information presented regarding amendment of the Home to School Transport Policy, and**
- (2) agree not to amend the Home to School Transport Policy for the reasons summarised in section 7.1.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The Education, Children & Young People Executive, at its meeting of 28 January 2020, agreed to instruct the Director of Children's Services to bring a report to a future meeting, regarding school transport for children with more than one residence as set out in the Transport Policy – Operational Guidance, with:-
- (i) an analysis of how many children were affected by the current policy;
 - (ii) potential options to provide transport, and
 - (iii) information on any cost implications arising therefrom.

4. Considerations

4.1 Current Policy Arrangements for Home to School Transport

- Provision of a bus pass or taxi service from a single ("main") address, where distance (or safety) entitlement applies.

- The scholars pass for school bus transport is for the full school year (190 days) and provides free travel on a single identified service/route with a particular operator.
- If a taxi is required (isolated farms for example) it is contracted for on an annual basis, (5 days a week term time) and can often be organised to serve a number of pickups/drop-offs at different addresses to minimise costs.

4.2 Challenges Faced if Existing Policy Arrangements Change to Meet the Circumstances Outlined in the Motion

- Provision of a bus pass and/or taxi service from two addresses, where distance (or safety) entitlement applies, would be required. This could be in different areas.
- In some circumstances the current (main) address is not distance/safety entitled, but the second parent's address will be, so transport is only required from this address.
- Unless both parents live on the same bus route, a scholar's bus pass will be required for 2 different services. These are both charged at full annual cost.
- If taxi provision was appropriate, then the pattern of residence would need to be fixed (stipulated days) as any changes to that would involve significant administration input and would have contractual challenges for the taxi provider. This could require 2 separate taxi contracts, which would be less efficient and cost more.
- The current wording of the various components of the existing Home to School Transport Policy would have to be re-worded to take account of children potentially having 2 addresses.

4.3 Information on the Number of Pupils Potentially Affected

- There is no data available on how many families there are in the Falkirk Council area where the parents live at different addresses, and how many of these would become distance or safety entitled under this proposal.

4.4 Summary of the Operational, Administrative and Planning Implications of Such a Change

- Bus contracts may have to include additional capacity, that would not be getting used each day. On a larger scale this would result in a reduction in efficiency, potentially mean more buses being required which in turn would increase our "carbon footprint" and this would also involve additional cost.
- Taxi provision would become more complex if transport to different addresses is required. There would be less scope for joint taxis provision that provide for several pupils on the same journey. There is currently a shortage of taxi provision at school drop-off and pickup times. Delivering this change may not be possible, and again this would add to overall costs.
- Such changes would require additional administrative input from both our Transport Team and Taxi operators. This could also be problematic if parents alter or change the days in which their children reside with them as they would expect transport still to be provided and not be aware of the additional administrative burden involved.
- In addition to the above, such a change would create a precedent that may result in challenge to the way in which "main residence" determines the school catchment area a pupil lives in. Such a challenge, if successful would cause significant admission capacity and planning challenges for the Council in determining school place entitlement. Equally having accepted that a pupil

could have 2 main residences could give rise to the unprecedented situation that both parents could request a place in their own catchment school if they both reside in separate catchment areas.

4.5 Summary of the Potential Cost Implications

- In most circumstances, the provision of school transport from an additional address would be equivalent to the “doubling up” of existing transport, or a completely new entitlement. This would mean 2 full year costs being attributed to 1 pupil.
- Current efficiencies when the current bus and taxi provision would also be lost.
- As there is no data available on how many pupils and families this would apply to it is impossible to estimate just what the additional cost could be but it may be substantial.

4.6 Proposal for Free Bus Travel for Under 22s

Included in the Scottish Government’s 2021/22 budget are plans to introduce free bus travel for under 22s. Whilst the full details of this scheme have yet to be agreed, this may help and support a number of young people who, in addition to their main residence, may also stay at another address some of the time.

5. **Consultation**

- 5.1 Children’s Services Officers consulted with Transport Planning Officer on this matter.

6. **Implications**

Financial

- 6.1 Although for the reasons outline in Section 4.5 actual additional costs cannot be ascertained, they could nonetheless be substantial.

Resources

- 6.2 As stated in Section 4.4 any changes in the existing procedures would mean additional administrative time is required.

Legal

- 6.3 As stated in Section 4.4 a precedent could be established that could in turn lead to challenge over the Council’s Admissions Policy in so far as it effects “catchment area” determination.

Risk

- 6.4 And change to existing arrangements could significantly increase exposure to financial risk.

Equalities

6.5 None

Sustainability/Environmental Impact

6.6 A reduction in the current efficiency levels that that current transport contracts provide could result in additional mileage or journeys being required. This as a result would increase the Council's "carbon footprint".

7. Conclusions

7.1 There is no doubt that the motion presented raised some valid and interesting questions and could, if no limiting factors were present, be accommodated.

Given however the significance of these limiting factors:

- Lack of data
- Potential of significant additional costs
- Reducing efficiency of transport provision could have a negative effect on the Council's "carbon footprint"
- Potential for setting precedents that may impact on Admissions Policy and determination of catchment areas

It is difficult to currently see how such changes could be implemented and as such it is recommended that the changes contained in the Motion are not progressed.

Director of Children's Service

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Appendices

- None

List of Background Papers

The following papers were relied on in the preparation of this report in terms of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973:

- None