
APPENDIX B: Minutes of Public Meetings Held

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Public Meeting at Grangemouth High School on 7th February 2023

In attendance from the Council:

Robert Naylor (Director of Children's Services) (RN)
Gary Greenhorn (Head of Planning & Resources, Children's Services) (GG)
Richard Teed (Senior Forward Planning Officer, Children's Services) (RT)
Chris Cox (Transport Planning Manager, Place Services) (CC)
Gary McGowan (School Transport Co-ordinator, Place Services) (GM)
Siobhan Couttie (Forward Planning Officer, Children's Services, minute taker)
Carol Cowie (Programme Management Co-ordinator, Corporate Services, minute taker)

Further attendees:

10 members of the public, plus one representative from Education Scotland

A "questions and answer" session followed a short presentation from Robert, Gary and Chris at the start of the meeting.

Question

Within the government guidelines, everyone under 22 gets free public transport, and that is claimed back from central government for the payment of that fare. How is that reflected in the size of the bus (*that will be contracted if this proposal goes forward*)?

Answer

CC: in general, we will tender the size of the bus depending on the number of entitled pupils. There may be space on some buses that those with the under 22 card can use. The reality is, the reimbursement the bus operators get from the under 22 doesn't cover the costs of the extra seats. There may be some capacity but unlikely to be the same (as now). Pupils will be able to use (the under 22 card) on existing commercial buses. But on School contacts, there may or may not be availability. We don't have control over the commercial buses, how they are run and where they are run.

Question

Has anyone approached bus operators in concerning this proposal?

Answer

CC: No, there has been no approach yet, and there will not be until (the way forward is) agreed by elected members and we know the details we would need to go into with them. They would have to make a commercial decision about how pupils might travel using the under 22. The cost of putting a large bus on for example may not be possible with the revenue that would come in.

Question

Are there plans to consult pupils. How does this align with GIRFEC ("*getting it right for every child*"). Do kids have that opportunity to have a voice.

Answer

RT: We have consulted secondary pupils but haven't started on primary school yet. We have sent out group call to secondary pupils registered emails. We also have the ability to send out to all glow accounts.

Question

Should it be coming from central government budget? Because, every child gets free transport but the facility isn't there.

Answer

RN: the under 22 card allows those under 22 to get on a bus if it exists, but doesn't require operators to put a bus on.

CC: the under 22 card wasn't intended for home to school, it was for getting kids out and about. Parents are using it as a free bus pass to get children to and from school. Now Councils have this problem with pupils who are not entitled to free transport and there may not be necessarily be space for them. It wasn't intended for free home school transport.

Question

Is there an action raised to send the consultation out to the kids glow accounts

Answer

RN: we will also send it out to head teachers, who have all their students glow account addresses and we will encourage young people to fill them in.

Question

Who will be getting the letters about the cuts to transport?

Answer

RN: those who are affected by the proposal will receive a letter. Secondary pupils living more than 3 miles will not be affected.

Question

It's the children in the 2-3 mile gap, how will they be notified of the decision?

Answer

GM: we will be writing to everyone who will be losing their entitlement. We try to inform the schools by the end of the term, for example, if it's a new operator, we communicate to the school that there are changes.

CC: we use the council website and social media. This will be during the summer.

Question

Accompanied adult walking the route, does this actually happen? Does an adult take a child along the routes (to school)? Is this done (assessed) in the eyes of a child?

Answer

RN: Yes, young children primary 1 to 2, many parents walking to school with them, and standing at the gate and walking home with them, when children get older and depending on the parent, there will be a level of trust and they might walk with a friend or walk in groups.

Question

With the cuts to the buses, the volume of children will be greater on the route, having the odd 10 pupils that don't get the bus, this volume will increase to 80 kids on these routes. That is where the danger comes in.

Answer

RN: Please respond in the section in the consultation for safe walking routes and areas of concern. My understanding is pedestrian footfall, road traffic, crossing points etc are all considerations in this assessment.

CC: Qualified road safety engineers carry out the route assessments and take the child into consideration. There are national guidelines which cover how these assessments take place. One of the assessments is to identify if there is a pinch point or unsafe crossings. We can use that to identify mitigations. School travel assessments identify traffic island, dropped kerbs. All small measures which can make a big difference. We can use the feedback from parents and surveys by road engineers to understand any required mitigation.

Question

Will this be done for the outcome of the proposal

Answer

CC these assessments do take some time, where there is something obvious and highlighted to us we can put it in the report. This is one of the things elected members will ask.

Question

Do we know where crossings are okay or not, and where it is suitable or not for a child to cross or where there is no facility to do that?

Answer

CC: elected members are wanting to know what mitigating measures can be put in place as part of the decision-making process. The more information you give us to look at, it makes it easier for us to say where problems are.

Question

Is this proposal taken as a given? You are falling in line with other councils and statutory guidelines.

Answer

RN: it can't be taken as a given as there are 30 members in the council, and there is a minority group. There are 2 opposing parties who hold the majority. I was involved in a consultation like this in Renfrewshire and one of the things that came out of that was a number of the routes that the parents said weren't safe. We said we could put a school patrol if it's a pinch point, or zebra crossing in. In the intervening period those children continued on

the school bus until some of these things could be done. Once a proper crossing can be put in, then we can review that decision. Some things can be done really quickly, and some can take longer. We already know a couple of places where we know we can't apply this policy where there aren't safe routes.

GG: There have been 750 responses so far, and we have already picked up some of the pinch points already and sent this to Transport Planning (to investigate). So, the earlier it is flagged up the better. This work is ongoing now.

Question

In a short distance there were 4 cars parked on double yellows, another car mounted the pavement. How do you look at things like that?

Answer

CC: road safety engineers would look at this on the days of assessment. This is part of the assessment, and they will note this down. Dangerous parking, junctions. They will look at this on a normal day and take it into consideration.

Question

Is this done at school drop off and pick up times as from experience, it is very different. We were fighting for a school crossing patrol at Maddiston Primary and they came during a holiday in the middle of the day.

Answer

CC: when we are doing the school crossing patrols, these surveys are done in the morning and afternoon school times. We need an accurate idea of the speed of traffic at the time-of-day children will be crossing the road. This is similar to the road safety assessments. But, parts of the assessment can be done at any time of the day: what does a junction look like, footpath, street lighting

Question

Is this subcontracted out to private companies?

Answer

CC: no, it's done in house. There is a pool of 6 road engineers.

Question

Have you identified the safe routes for all streets which have been identified in the consultation. The route I have identified I believe is unsafe

Answer

RN: Tell us about it as we need to know. If there isn't an identified safe walking route within the miles we have stipulated, then, yes you will still get a bus.

Question

Is Earls Gate identified as a safe walking route?

Answer

RT: at the moment it's not due to the Forth-Clyde Way and the (lack of) crossing opportunities that are there. Earls Gate is now signalised has plenty of crossing opportunities.

Statement

it's unfortunate there can't there be public meetings at all schools, there might have been a bigger representation. Such as Brae's High School for people who can't drive down to Grangemouth

Question

One of the areas that will lose out is Maddiston, which is an area of deprivation. People don't have cars and find it hard to get here. My point is that if children who have a lower attendance and are from an area of deprivation, they will be the ones who will be missing out getting the buses to school, they will they need to walk. As a community group we are running a foodbank, clothes bank, and the amount of people we are getting in who don't have clothes and don't have food, are struggling for shoes and now suddenly you are expecting them to walk for miles to and from school. That can have a huge effect on people's education.

Answer

GG: This isn't something we would ordinarily factor in. That is the point of this consultation. We carry out an Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment, in terms of the protected

characteristic groups, and if there is anything that stands out that it is going to disadvantage individuals or if something is identified during the consultation, we will include it in the EPIA. RN: A number of elected members will be making this point as well. GG: Elected members have to look at the Falkirk area, but there are 24 councils who are already doing this. That is the bigger picture, Falkirk are not doing this in isolation.

Question

In Edinburgh Council moved 2 to 3 miles, in the area there will be a bus route, good crossings. It's not something we have. Our weather tends to be a lot worse here. Maddison does get snowed in. But there is a good transport system in Edinburgh. We don't have that. The transport links aren't great. Braes, the way it's set up, has a poor-quality service. Transport links are poor, it's not viable, and bus operators have cut down too. There is no regular public transport.

Answer

GG the council has to invest in its pavement and road network, so pavements are safe to walk on. So, if there are no bus services, the routes for walking, scooting, and cycling have to be of a standard that meet the requirements of the assessment.

Question

There was another (recent) wider consultation on the Council property portfolio. If the property portfolio could cover that £67m budget gap, does that mean the schools bus proposal go away?

Answer

RN: The Strategic Property Review doesn't scratch the surface; The property portfolio has 133 properties and at best between £5 and £6 million. Most properties are stores, the ones we anticipate are going to close are the ones the public aren't concerned about. They are more concerned about community halls, learning centres, sports facilities, libraries. There is another statutory duty where the council must set a balanced budget year on year. The task is to identify significant savings going forward. In Children's Services, of which Education is by far the larger share. Approximately 2/3rds of the Council's entire budget goes on Children's Services. A very significant proportion is protected by statute. Maximum Class sizes, pupil teacher ratios etc, so the capacity for us to take significant amounts of money out of education are very constrained. What are all the things we do that we don't need to do? Which has led to previous and unpopular decisions. So last year, from the Children's Services portfolio, we closed all public toilets in the district apart from one. So there are a series of things that have been tackled around the edges and the strategic property review is one of them. There is nowhere that says a council has to run a sports centre, and when push comes to shove and all the money we have left is for education, we have to run schools. Roads have to be a particular standard, we have to pick up the waste, we have to run schools.

Question

We are going to have health issues in the future, NHS will be impacted. With the Under 22 card, why doesn't the government give the full fare to the bus operators, if that is what they are saying is free travel. How can we engage with operators to meet the needs of the community. It can't be realistic expect kids to walk 6 miles a day?

Answer

GG: the statutory provision says yes and the only way that can be changed is by the politicians at a national level as it's been in place since the 1980 act.

Question

What are the options for getting children to school?

Answer

GG: there are 24 councils where children in secondary school do walk these distances to school. There is a mix where some walk with their parents, by themselves, with their friends. RN: there will be a hybrid. As Gary said, the other 24 councils, they will include a lot of areas like Falkirk. When I was in Renfrewshire, where the pupils were faced with 3 miles to walk, there was a bus that would get them 2 miles and then they would walk 1 mile.

Question

How do I find out what the safe walking route is from. Do I go with what is on google maps as I am on the cusp (*of the proposed entitlement limit*).

Answer

CC: We use a (*digital mapping*) system called Location Centre. This is more accurate than google maps because google maps uses road centre lines and our system also uses Ordnance Survey footpaths, but this isn't available online. Within Location Centre, the unsafe routes are already disregarded within the route.

Question

The road at the salmon inn is unsafe

Answer

GM: we can revisit that junction, and whether it's deemed unsafe or not. We assess the shortest route.

RN: we communicate with you, that you are losing your transport. You would walk the route with your child and in your view that it is longer than we have said then you need to let us know.

Question

What about the attainment of children, if we do this and attainment drops

Answer

RN: There is no evidence to suggest this will happen

Question

extra-curricular activities will be have to be curtailed

Answer

GM: There will be some possibilities where public transport can be used to support this.

Question

The buses that turn up aren't big enough to accommodate the children affected.

Is the council going to approach the bus operators?

Answer

RN: these things may be possible. With the Council not as a customer, but more like a broker. What happened in Renfrew, 4-6 months after the decision was taken, the parent body of a school said can we buy our own bus because we really want our kids to go to school on a bus. The council helped find out the costs and located an operator and they paid for it themselves.

CC: we had extensive talks with McGill's when the u22 scheme came in and before COVID came in which had a tremendous impact on bus operators. First were a commercial business and if there was a commercial opportunity, they would look at it. For example, there was an uptake of buses with no subsidy from the private school Dollar Academy. Bus companies will not take a gamble. Bus operators will assess demand. If elected members go ahead with the proposal, McGill's may look at it and see if there is a demand and decide if routes are commercially viable.

Question

Can there be discussions with the bus operators now rather than have this limbo period?

Answer

CC: of course, we work with the bus operators daily on existing school transport. At the moment, they are struggling, service hasn't returned to normal post covid, particularly with concession passes as the over 60s concessions haven't come back and travel by bus. Between 64% and 65% of pass holders before covid were concession pass holders. A vast amount of them haven't come back to travel by bus. McGill's seem enthusiastic about improving frequencies of bus services, but this can't happen overnight. They are still struggling with driver shortages.

Question

The company you are using, what are their thoughts and proposals? Have they been consulted? Can they provide a subsidised service in relation to the U22 card?

Answer

CC: if we resize contracts, it will have an impact on them. We need to discuss with them what the options are. Some routes might not change due to the distance involved. We will work with them to see what options there are. Bus operators are not wanting to take too much of a

financial gamble at the moment as there been loses through covid, and the private hire market hasn't come back to same levels.

Statement

My concern is road safety, young children, a body of children walking together on pavements, their road safety and the traffic and the larking about on the pavements and the extra distance. They come out in big groups from school, and it can be 4 abreast.

Question

What are the thoughts on traffic calming measures? Extra pedestrian crossings? Will there be any improvement of cycle routes?

Answer

CC: we are currently looking at the active travel strategy, looking at all the settlements across Falkirk. Within this consultation, please refer to section about your concerns with the safety of routes. Sometimes it doesn't take much to make a route safe. Please provide us with information.

Question

Is ASN transport to mainstream schools affected?

Answer

RN: Any children who go to school via a taxi, are not affected.

The meeting closed at 8.00pm.

**Public Meeting at
St Mungo's High
School on 16th
February 2023**

In attendance from the Council:

Robert Naylor (Director of Children's Services) (RN)
Gary Greenhorn (Head of Planning & Resources, Children's Services) (GG)
Richard Teed (Senior Forward Planning Officer, Children's Services) (RT)
Chris Cox (Transport Planning Manager, Place Services) (CC)
Gary McGowan (School Transport Co-ordinator, Place Services) (GM)
Siobhan Couttie (Forward Planning Officer, Children's Services, minute taker)
Carol Cowie (Programme Management Co-ordinator, Corporate Services, minute taker)

Further attendees:

59 members of the public, plus one representative from Education Scotland. The schools represented by (mainly parents and pupils) were St Mungo's HS (30), Falkirk HS (13), St Andrew's PS (4), St Bernadette's PS (3), Bantaskin PS (3), Langlees HS (2), Larbert HS (1), Larbert Village PS (1), Graeme HS (1), Drumbowie PS (1)

A "questions and answer" session followed a short presentation from Robert, Gary and Chris at the start of the meeting.

Question

How do working adults get our kids to school? Are we expected to walk 2 hours?

Answer

CC: There are national guidelines that we follow for assessing safe walking routes to school, and we assume a pupil would be walking with a responsible adult.

Statement

There is no safe route from Camelon through to St Mungo's.

Response

CC: Fully qualified roads engineers will assess these routes where required. A whole range of factors, whether there is a footway, lighting, crossing points, traffic volume, speed, are used to assess whether a route is safe.

Question

Would the council be prepared to put school crossings in for unsafe areas?

Answer

CC: This depends on the circumstances. If a route is deemed unsafe we wouldn't expect a child to walk that route. There are children at the moment regardless of the distance get transport on safety grounds as there isn't a safe route to school. That doesn't change. Please let us know through the consultation page any particular stretches of road or junctions you want us to look at. We already have a list of areas we have to look at, so it is important to feed this back to us.

Statement

Sometimes the local bus services don't turn up – they aren't available or reliable

Response

CC: we are aware of reliability issues; these issues are across Scotland and not only in Falkirk. This is caused by driver shortages.

Question

Why are we doing this if there isn't public transport to take children to school?

Answer

CC: We have a budget gap and this is only a proposal and no decision has been made yet. Councillors will make that decision around the end of May. They will consider all these factors.

Statement

We are talking about safety, we are talking about putting money on a child safety.

Response

CC: We look at all areas where there can be potential savings, this is why we are consulting and this will go to members to make a decision at the end of May in terms with what happens next with this. All we can do is gather the views of yourselves and

anybody else who is affected and put our recommendations to elected members later this year. They will then make a decision. All the issues that are raised will be fed back.

Statement

What about (pupils walking in) the winter, getting wet clothes? They won't be able to go to school if they are sick

Question

It's in relation to safe (walking) route accompanied by an adult. I've got a child in Primary School and High School, it will take me an hour to St Mungo's and back, how am I meant to be in 2 places at once?

Answer

RN: What we have proposed is the statutory provision, we are obliged to transport secondary pupils 3 miles or more from the school. It is responsible of the parent to get a child to school and it's the Local Authority responsibility to offer transport to pupils living over 3 miles from school. Every family will have different challenges. We are setting out the proposal, we are recording and noting the responses to this. It is the elected members who are the decision makers that will take a view on the answer to that question.

Question

GIRFEC, SHANRI, how is it "getting it right for every child" when they have to take an hour to get to school and back? Is there going to be someone on the school premises from 8.30-8.45 to allow parents to walk back home to then take the second child to the other school. How is that getting it right for every child? in SHANARRI - it is about the safety and health of the child. How does putting children on the streets for an hour before school support the safety of the young child?

Answer

RN: 60% of children going to secondary schools currently are not getting the bus, they already walk or get to school by some other means.

Statement

Not all kids have waterproof clothes, everything is soaking. You are expecting kids to sit in wet or damp trousers and the school cannot provide dry clothes because of the budget. So parents are going to get phoned to say trousers are soaking, and I will have take more time out of my working day to take dry trousers to him.

Question

Is the Under 22 (free bus entitlement) card allowed on the school bus?

Answer

RN: The U22 bus pass is available for any young person to use on a service bus. The challenge in Falkirk is that there aren't enough service buses in the area. There are places where there is poor bus coverage, but there are places where young people are able to use a service bus, maybe not all the way to the school. But where it does exist they will be able to use it.

Statement

There is no bus from Camelon to St Mungo's

Statement

A public service bus will not be able to take all the children from Langlees to Falkirk High School. From Langlees to Falkirk High School- it takes 50 mins to walk

Statement

the volume of cars at the school will increase, lots of cars come into the scheme in 20 mins around the school (opening and closing) at Symington Drive. There needs to be a traffic impact assessment done

Response

GG: more cars around schools has been noted in the consultation.

Statement

We are from Bantaskin Primary School and we are concerned about the traffic congestion in the mornings around the High School at Windsor Park. The extra traffic coming into Bantaskin, along Westburn Avenue and Windsor Road in Particular. The police have recommended traffic calming. This change will add an additional 150 kids and there is no reliable bus service. That is a real concern for us.

Answer

RN: Yes, more cars around the school has been noted.

Statement

There could be potentially another 200 cars as people can't physically walk their schools. No one can give up 2 hours of their day to walk their child to school.

Response

RN: What causes congestion around schools in the morning, who causes the problem? Why do people drive to the door of the school? Head teachers frequently write to parents to ask them not to drive to the zig zag lines and drop kids off at drop off points to avoid congestion.

Question

What percentage of catholic children are losing their entitlement.

Answer

GG: 24 Councils in Scotland are already do this. They will have faced the same challenges that you are raising tonight and they are doing it. This can be done.

Question

There isn't enough car parking for drop off and pick up points at St Mungo's

Answer

GG: we will note (your comment that) there aren't enough parking and drop off points.

Statement

Under the Education Scotland Act (1980), it does say that pupils are to be educated in accordance with the wishes of their parents. Transportation falls within the act, so if it is our wish that our kids are transported to school, it is your duty to provide it.

Response

RN: no, the act says that if your child lives beyond 3 miles it is our duty to provide it.

Statement

The Act says Local Authority has to provide transport, it defines walking distance, the walking distance was defined in 1980, 43 years ago when there was less traffic. It does say in the act you have a duty to provide education as to our wishes and transportation falls within the act.

Question

My walking distance includes a motor way ramp which is partially lit, flooding, and the walking distance according to google maps is 1h5mins. My daughter has to be in school at Larbert High School for 8.40. If she is expected to do that walk, potentially she would be leaving the house at 7.30 in the morning when the traffic on that road is really fast. Nobody keeps to the speed limit. For a number of months of the year it is dark on a partially lit road with fast traffic on and off the motorway with no crossings. The road floods as well. Are there plans to change to start times of the schools if you are expecting children to have longer walks to school?

Answer

RN: on the consultation form, you have an opportunity to say from this address "I cannot identify a route which is less than 3 miles", and this can be checked. Tell us where the risks and hazards are, and which bit floods regularly. These will be assessed if they have been brought to our attention. If you're beyond 3 miles, your child will get the bus. Schools have the ability to consult with start and finish times.

(RE:start times) If there are concerns about traffic concerns around the school, the HT can say P1-P3 can leave at certain times. The secondary schools this might be challenging but might not be impossible. Other Councils have done this.

Question

I appreciate that this is done in other councils, but they do have later start times. But with the current start times, my child would have to leave at 7.30am. For a number of months of the year, it is a dimly lit road.

Answer

RN: there is nothing stopping us doing that. We will record your opinion on starting times and suggestion we should review start times.

Question

Our whole village is on the list of streets affected. It is over 3 miles from our village to Larbert High School

Answer

RT: To measure the nearest available route, people use google maps or Strava, maps on phones. But we use ordinance survey urban paths data, which is very accurate, and links from the front door of the house, farm gate etc, to the gate of the school. It measures the nearest available route. Any segments of the pedestrian network deemed unsafe are taken out of the network and this software works that out for us. Google street maps use street centre lines which isn't as accurate. So that might explain any minor discrepancies.

Question

Is this software available online?

Answer

RT: we only have access to it as it's a specialist software. If you say the distance doesn't match our calculation, then we can then describe the route to school and that will explain how it's calculated. You can then look at that and let us know if there are any sections of that route which you believe are unsuitable.

Question

It is 3.0 miles or is it rounded?

Answer

RT: we are accurate to the nearest decimal place. Addresses on the boundary we will look at the very carefully.

Statements

- This is a Catholic school, there are people who want their children to go to it because they are Catholic, many people will be excluded because of this policy change, the list of places where you might no longer get bus travel will exclude a lot of people which is discriminatory.
- This is indirect discrimination; the end consequence is that it is going to disproportionately affect people of faith because that is the school they want to go to. It will make it a lot more difficult for people to attend the school and this will indirectly affect them practicing their own faith.

Response

RN: People will not be excluded from attending a Catholic school, that's not the case. Anyone who lives beyond 3 miles from any school will continue to get a bus, anyone who up to 3 miles from any school won't get a bus. It is not against one faith group. This policy change is about distance.

Question

A lot of my friends are girls and if you ask any young girl or most women, walking in the winter, in the dark and on their own is something they don't want to do. There are places where I wouldn't like to walk where it's very dark. What is the Council planning to do about this? How do you assure people who do not feel safe?

I could choose to send (my kids) to any school or the closest school which are a safe walking distance from my home. Because I choose to send them to a Catholic school, I am now forcing them to walk on routes that I don't feel are safe. You are discriminating due to my Catholic choice.

Answer

RN: In terms of routes you do not feel comfortable walking, where someone tells us the pavement is too narrow, or there are trip hazards, no suitable crossing, insufficiently lit, therefore it is unsafe, you tell us and it will be evaluated.

Statement

The route from The Bog to St Mungo's, I wasn't happy about that route and a councillor said I could walk along the canal. I was also told that my 7-year-old would be able to walk my 5-year-old to St Andrew's through Ladysmill (park). This is not considering the safety of the children.

Response

RN: we are educationalists, we want the children to be safe and get to school Safe to learn.

Statement

My child does not feel safe walking from her house to the school. This is indirect discrimination, catholic people in this school will be affected more. The Equality Act states it is indirect discrimination where a policy which applies to everyone in the same way has a worse effect on some people than others. Catholic people who attend this school will be affected more than others, and some young people won't be able to attend this school because of this policy.

Response

RN: as officers we look at what the legislation says, - if it's more than 3 miles we provide a bus and if it's not we don't. The reason a statutory consultation is necessary that in the 2010 act states we have to consult where that affects denominational schools. What we are doing is consulting the whole population across Falkirk on this issue. The point you have raised, I have no doubt will come to us from the denominational head teachers, the dioceses and the Catholic church rep who sits on the committee. Your point will be duly noted and considered.

GG: In terms of St Mungo's High School, based on those who are entitled to home to school transport now, is 27% who would lose (following this proposal). This is the lowest percentage loss of any of our secondary schools across Falkirk. The average loss is 50%.

Question

In other councils some parents pay for school buses. Can it be means tested?

Question

Where does that money go to? Does Falkirk Council get twice the money? The U22 card entitles children on public transport, is there something in the legislation that says that stops that being used in a way on school transport.

Answer

RN: Throughout Falkirk, we used to give concessionary bus passes out, but now the u22 is available to use. There are places where there are no bus services and the bus is contracted by the council and it's sole purpose is getting children to school. One of the complications of this new Scottish bus pass has been, if we have contracted a bus for distance entitled pupils. On the inbound journey there are designated bus stops which pick up children to take them to particular school. What happened when the Under 22 bus pass was first introduced, when the bus was leaving the school a whole lot of kids that had the bus pass were jumping on a coach that had 53 seats such that some of the distance entitled pupils couldn't get on it. This was a problem.

GM: You can pay on some school services, they are fare paying services, there are other services that are private hire contracts - we have those as we have to preserve capacity, the current budget doesn't allow us to procuring additional buses for fare paying pupils. You can still pay a fare on the services where this option is available - we haven't taken that away. The trouble is, most people have the under 22 card and this isn't available on all services. It wasn't designed to give all school pupils free home to school transport. It's designed for young people to use on commercial bus services. Transport Scotland didn't realise how much impact this would have on school buses. We raised this at the time, that this is going to put a big burden on local authorities and we don't know what the uptake is going to be. That it will cause capacity issues across a number of school buses. The response we got from them was that we would run for a

year and see how it develops. This response didn't help local authorities. We are looking at changing some of the services simply because it is creating capacity issues. We need to ensure entitled pupils get home and not the kids who are only 2-3 stops along the road.

Question

Can we still pay for our child to go to school? Are we able to buy a season ticket?

Answer

GM: As the proposal stands, we will remove the bus services to un-entitled pupils. That is how the money would be saved.

Question

Is there an option for revenue generation?

Answer

GM There is, but to give you an example, our best ever year was before covid, we generated £90,000 worth of revenue across all school bus services. Currently the average cost of a single bus is £44,000 per year, so that revenue doesn't go very far, we need to see what we are getting back from the U22 concessionary re-imbursements and to see if there are any options to do anything. The concession reimbursement doesn't pay us all the fare, it's 75%, one of the concessionary principles is that bus operators shouldn't be any worse off or better off by transporting concessions. Therefore, you are only going to make the cost of the bus back if it's full.

Statements

- My daughter would have to walk through Falkirk, down the back of Morrisons in a St Mungo's uniform. She is worried that she might need to move to another high school. This is affecting pupils as well. Kids won't be able to go to this school because of the distance.
- There is mention of 24 other councils, but they may have really good public bus services. Or they put on a school bus that they can pay for. You say that 60% of pupils will not be affected, what about the pupils who pay to get on school buses, so it's not just 40% of children who are losing transport? It is much higher than that because they use their passes to get on.

Question

My son goes to mainstream school with additional support needs, and he doesn't have the capacity to walk to school by himself. How many more parents will be asking for a taxi. Some children can't physically walk the distance

Answer

RN: in that situation the parents can make an application to be considered for ASN (*Additional Support Needs*) transport.

Statements

- There is going to be an impact on the children and their learning, absentees, being late, teaching and attainment. They are going to have less time in the classroom. It will affect kids from deprived families who can't afford the bus fare. We are trying to close the attainment gap. This is forgotten, it's going to affect children's learning and attainment.
- It will affect children's mental health. Some kids are thinking about moving high schools. Kids are going to get up earlier to walk for 30 minutes to an hour to school in the morning. Parents have full time jobs and can't walk their child to school. Some children might need that additional help, this will affect their mental health and their learning is really going to be affected.
- My daughter is 15 and her bag is really heavy, and asking them to walk miles with that weight of bags.
- I am a 15-year-old female, and I don't feel comfortable walking 45 mins, especially in the winter in the dark, where streets aren't always lit. I don't feel comfortable doing that and I don't want myself to be put in this situation. If I can't make it to school because I don't feel safe, this will affect my learning. I have got my 1st exams this year, then again in S5 and S6. I don't want to not do well in my exams and decline in my learning because I don't feel safe walking 40 mins from my home.

- You are removing the buses and not giving us an alternative option. There isn't any other option for us. Some parents can't physically be in 2 places at once. I would find the extra bus fare knowing that my kids are safe. You are not giving me an option to keep my kids safe. The families who are really disadvantaged are going to suffer.
- What about kids who go to breakfast clubs? There are about 100-200 kids who go to breakfast clubs, they leave their homes without having a breakfast, walking from home for 3 miles without having breakfast and getting to school to start a day learning.
- Why don't you remove the bus service in the summer and then assess the impact.
- 2 schools are going to clash, Falkirk High and St Mungo's are going to clash on the days they finish early. All these kids coming out at once is going to cause mayhem.
- There is going to be so much absence and lateness because of this.
- My daughter is going through her transition to high school and is stressed out about it as it is. Not everyone who lives in Falkirk works in Falkirk. Some leave very early to be in either Glasgow or Edinburgh. Trusting a child to walk 3 miles on their own, on the long days on a Tuesday and Thursday, then walk an hour home. Those preparing for exams have a lot of homework and studying to do. It's a long day and it's hard to get used to it, especially the transition from primary school to high school. It will have an effect on children's mental health and wellbeing. How are you going to address the mental health problems? There are kids coming into the hospital after taking overdoses because they can't cope with the pressure.

Question

You are saying you are over budget. My daughter is at primary school, and they all got letters to ask if they want to take part in the bike and ride at school, with a free helmet and bike up to £500. Is it more important to give a child a bike or putting on a school bus. How is this more economical?

Answer

Member of the public: That was a government scheme

Statement

In secondary schools, the council paid for iPads, which weren't necessarily needed, and some don't use. Paying out money for something that wasn't needed and was very expensive and now going after school transport that people need to get an education.

Question

How can the bus service be considered necessary under the requirements of the education Scotland act for decades, and now it doesn't suit the budget it is considered unnecessary within the same legislation? This is a financial decision - the legislation doesn't mention your budget.

Answer

RT: Sections 51 and 42 The Education Scotland Act covers the transport obligations. The reason councils provide a higher level of service than that which is required under the Act is that there is discretionary power within the Act to provide whatever service the council requires locally, there are a lot of councils in Scotland who are closer to the statutory limits than we are. This proposal takes us closer to those statutory limits. Within the Act, the council can provide discretionary transport which means that if the Council could afford it and it was viable, they could provide free transport to all children within the district. The current transport policy was set around the same time of the act. The 1980 act is derived from legislation that goes back to 1944. These distance limits have been in place for a long time. But there is a discretionary power for councils to choose where they exceed the statutory requirements and that is where Falkirk Council are at the moment.

Statement

There is a legal justification to still provide it because the Council considered it necessary for decades, and now you are saying it's not necessary within the budget. As a council you considered it necessary for 20-30 years and now you are saying this is over budget and you don't consider it necessary. That is a budgetary thing and not a legal thing. It is a decision based on the budget.

Robert closed the meeting at 8.30pm.

**Public Meeting at
Braes High
School on 21st
February 2023**

In attendance from the Council:

Robert Naylor (Director of Children's Services) (RN)
Gary Greenhorn (Head of Planning & Resources, Children's Services) (GG)
Chris Cox (Transport Planning Manager, Place Services) (CC)
Gary McGowan (School Transport Co-ordinator, Place Services) (GM)
Siobhan Couttie (Forward Planning Officer, Children's Services, minute taker)
Carol Cowie (Programme Management Co-ordinator, Corporate Services, minute taker)

Further attendees:

24 members of the public, plus one Councillor and one representative from Education Scotland

A "questions and answer" session followed a short presentation from Robert, Gary and Chris at the start of the meeting.

Statement

There are a number of children who don't qualify for additional needs taxi services, so there will be the wider impact on ASN pupils who don't qualify for home to school transport that will be affected and face a walk to school that is not appropriate for them.

Response

GG: Additional needs pupils are individually assessed. Those who currently get (school transport based on this assessment) are not affected. For the other pupils, I accept that.

Statement

The street list is of no use as it doesn't tell us what buses are going to be cancelled, which is what everyone needs to know.

Questions

- What is the wider impact on pupils who are affected but not entitled for free bus travel?
- Assessing the impact of the change you can not ignore the other children who use the bus services.
- Parents don't understand that this proposal will affect them. They want to know what buses are going to be cancelled.

Answer

GG: Our statutory assessment covers all contracted buses for pupils who are entitled to receive free transport to school and are based on distance entitled children. The comments you give us tonight we will look at and take on board.

Statement

We have to keep our children safe and ready to learn and ready when they do get to school.

Question

Have you done an assessment from the feedback already received?

Answer

GG: Yes, we have assessed some of the feedback we have received, there has been a lot of feedback on safe walking routes. So work is already being done to assess that.

Question

Are the comments strong enough to change the proposal?

Answer

GG: We can't comment on that just now as we haven't got to the end of the consultation. We have to assess all the correspondence that we get, whether good or bad. We will take an overall assessment before we make a final report for elected members for consideration.

Question

Hundreds of pupils at Canalside drive would lose the bus. This will impact entitled pupils and non-entitled pupils. I've got 2 children at different schools at 1½ and 2½ miles away, so to try to walk both of them is not possible. So I will need to take the car to take them both, and there is no drop off at Westquarter (Primary School). No provision was made for that when they built hundreds of houses.

Answer

RN: The route you are talking about, we would no longer be contracting a school bus. If you are suggesting that hundreds of pupils are using them, then it may be commercially viable without the council paying for it.

Question

If you review all the bus services in Falkirk, will McGills take them over?

Answer

RN: That is for the entire Council take a view on.

Statement

There is a huge queue already at Westquarter Primary School with cars, you are going to be adding to that by taking a bus away with 100 kids on it. We can't car share because of the car seat situation.

Question

How are we meant to know which are the safe walking routes? They should have been made public before these meetings so we can informed assessment.

Answer

RN: We don't have the capacity to assess every house to school walking route. You have much better idea how to walk from your house to the school. We have a digital mapping tool that is used to measure the distance. Tell us on the consultation response form if you think there are hazards or any danger points on the route from your house to the school.

Question

What investigations have you done prior to these meetings? What is a safe route? Parents should have had this information before these events.

Answer

RN: When new housing schemes are built, developers have a duty to put pavements in to take them to the nearest main road, and people should be able to walk to almost anywhere. There are paths and places where there are crossing points that are not appropriate, so what we are asking you to do, if there are any crossing points that are not appropriate in your view, tell us. If there are areas not suitably paved, not suitably lit, let us know about them and we will investigate.

Question

Does the Education Act specify the distances?

Answer

CC: Yes, it specifies the distances. And the guidelines on how walking routes are assessed are updated regularly.

Question

Can you publish this GIS (digital mapping) system?

Answer

CC: It's not publicly available. It's an internal module on a (GIS) system we use.

Question

Have you been scenario planning where the pinch points or bottle necks are going to be?

Answer

CC: We have some local knowledge. We've all worked in transport planning for a long time, so we know where people are traveling to and from. We don't have models, but when assessing routes, there is a consideration about how many pupils there may be on a set width of pavement or road junction or crossing. We know how many children are

going to school, we don't know how many are going to be driven, how many will walk, cycle. We know how many buses are going to each school.

Question

Do you know how many children are on those buses who are not distance entitled?

Answer

CC: we have some indication.

Question

Can I get clarification on crossing roads? When I first looked there was no bus for Westquarter, I was told we couldn't get a crossing on the main road because there weren't enough kids crossing.

Answer

CC: Yes, that is correct. School crossing patrols are an area where there are national guidelines. Falkirk Council has significantly more than required by the national guidelines. We will re-assess where it is necessary, if they meet the council's criteria. We will endeavour to put a school crossing patrol in if it meets the policy. There is no legal requirement for councils to provide any sort of form of school patrol crossing service. But for those who choose to do, there are national guidelines. We are significantly more generous in terms of what we are looking for, volume of traffic, speed, volume of children, type of traffic. If all of sudden there are 100 children walking to Westquarter primary school, we will resurvey the crossing point. If it meets the criteria, we will provide school crossing patrol.

Statement

Kids will be leaving the house at the same time to get to the school. So it's not like a normal increase footfall, it will be a mass exodus

Response

CC: When we do the survey we do it half an hour before school starts and at finishing time. We don't do it mid-day.

Question

You are going to do that when the decision has been made?

Answer

CC: I appreciate that, there isn't an easy way of doing it.

Question

How are councillors going to measure the impact of this proposal if you don't know the costs of the additional school crossing patrollers, the upgrades that are required? You are asking them to save money here, but it might cost more.

Answer

CC: These are things that are going to be reported back to elected members.

Question

How do you measure the impact of withdrawing the bus services?

Answer

CC: Children's Services will write a report of this consultation. If the proposal is accepted it is how Transport Planning Team who will implement. From the feedback from these meetings, we know how many children it will affect in terms of number of children who will lose entitlement. We will have a reasonable idea which of our contracted services may not be in place. We know what public services buses are available to some schools.

Question

Are you measuring the length of time students will be walking to school? From the distances?

Answer

GG: Any concerns raised from the meetings, will be reflected in the report.

Statement

Can it be noted regarding the topography of the Braes, how hilly it is? That adds to time, safety, and considerations of the weather in the Braes area.

Question

Services buses, do you take into account they don't run at the moment?

Answer

CC: Our team arranges travel for distance entitled pupils. The way we do that is we competitively tender, so all licenced bus operators are welcome to tender for these contracts. We tender for the amount of entitled children. Which is roughly around 3,000 children a day. If elected members accept this proposal and the number of entitled pupils reduces, we will have to retender that bus network to reflect a lower amount of pupils. In reality, that is the only way children's services can make the financial savings. It may be the case where you get a double decker to a school because they have 70 children who are distance entitled to transport, there may only be 50 entitled after the change. So we would tender for a 50 seat vehicle. In some cases, there may be nobody entitled for school transport on a particular route, so in this case we wouldn't replace that vehicle under council contract. That is the reality - it is the only way we would be able to make the financial savings.

Question

Can you be more clear what bus services are going to be cancelled?

Answer

CC: It isn't as quite as straightforward as that because, bus fleets and size of vehicle don't tend to match the number of children on a particular run. We have to build in some spare capacity. It also depends on what the operator has available, what the mix of minibuses, single deckers, coaches. In reality, we are not going to know the real impact of this until the decision is taken and we go back out to bus operators. In some cases we may be able to negotiate a reduction in vehicle size, in some cases we may leave the vehicle size. The likelihood is, that in areas where there are no pupils entitled to transport, council funded school buses would not be provided. We have internally looked at what we think the impact will be, but a lot of it depends on the tender process. When we tender, the seats required might be 30 on a particular run, and the operator might come back and say the only vehicle they have left is a 60 seater, so there may well be an additional 30 seats. We can't predict that.

Statement

It would be extremely helpful to know what bus routes will not be getting re-tendered. So all the parents who are not here tonight, who think they are not affected can see it in black and white, where you state you are not tendering this bus.

Response

CC: your point is taken. We are also aware that McGills are still struggling with reliability, not having enough drivers for some routes. That is not ideal and we are also aware post-covid, a lot of the bus routes had their frequencies cut dramatically. Not all schools have buses that go to them directly. It is an option for some pupils for some schools in some areas but might not be in others. It is worth noting that the under 22 pass was never designed for children to travel to and from school throughout Scotland. So the example in Westquarter is there are large volume of children who are trying to get on limited amount of seats on the bus. So having the under 22, is like having an over 60's pass or disabled pass doesn't necessary mean there will be a bus at the time where you want to go. Once elected members make the decision in May, we will need to work very quickly to look at different routes and scenarios and timetables. We will need to look at every single school and bus route to see how they best fit with the number of entitled pupils.

Questions

- The number of vehicles and the impact on the environment. Has there been an environmental impact assessment which considers the damage to the road, the level of traffic, the number of pedestrians and their safety?
- Missing from existing communications is what services will be impacted, it's not been clear to people that school buses will be cancelled?
- The poverty impact assessment, this seems to be focused on saving money and not the wider picture, there are parents who are working, they don't have time to spend 2 hours walking pupils to and from different schools. That means people are going to have to reduce their hours of work, or perhaps lose their jobs. We are in a cost of

living crisis - has that been considered? Can you share with us the poverty impact assessment outlining all of these points?

- If a child receives a free school meal or clothing grant, will they be entitled to a free bus pass regardless of the distance?

Answer

GG: The EPIA (Equality and Poverty Impact Assessment) will be done once we assess the feedback of the consultation, that will be when we conclude the consultation exercise. The points you have made about the impact, we know we need to include that in it. The feedback that we get from the consultation allows us to give added value to it and give examples to quantify the issues that you raise.

Statement

You are concentrating on buses where it is entitled need, in the spirit of co-design and co-production of services, I think your approach to this is completely wrong, we have the empowerment bill which means you should be co-designing and co-producing services with people. This would make much more sense to have everybody around the table ask who wants a bus, who needs a bus, who would be willing to pay for a bus, rather than focusing on entitlement and distance, who wants a bus and getting contractors around the table and having a commissioning model towards service design rather than what is happening just now.

Statement

I know my bus is going to be cancelled and I will need to reduce my hours, but there are people who don't know.

Response

GG: This point has been raised several times and we will need to go back and think about it once we go through this consultation exercise.

Question

Why haven't you considered this in the communication? People don't understand what what you are consulting on. They aren't understanding school buses will be cancelled. This is going to have a huge impact on people's employment.

Answer

GG: The feedback we receive from the statutory consultation looks at what lies beneath the surface. The whole point of the consultation is to look at the issues and challenges. This is emotive, there is no doubt about it. We know that by the feedback we are receiving, and we have had lots of communication from our local councillors because their mailboxes are filled up with this as well. So be assured the message will be going back. It is up to (elected) members to decide on what to do. You raised an interesting point, where would we give free bus passes to children who are on free school meals and clothing grants. The statutory entitlement is quite clear, it is based on mileage.

Question

You have the power to change that for the people in Falkirk

Answer

GG: I accept that we do, the problem we have is it would potentially add further cost. Every young person under the age of 22 does have an entitlement to a free bus pass.

Question

But the U22 bus pass isn't always available to the school buses

Statement

You are putting the distance entitlement over poverty.

Answer

GG: I am not. I am trying to explain why it is difficult to do. This point hasn't been raised at any meetings and we aren't aware of it. We will have to consider it along with other points being made. It is an interesting point, but I think there are a lot of challenges attached to it. Again, the whole point of the meeting is to feedback things we haven't thought of.

Question

How is the distance measured? Is it walking distance or "as the crow flies"? Is it by the exact mile or by point one of a mile? Or does it round up?

Answer

GG: It is not "as the crow flies". It is from the access point from the house to the nearest access point to the school gate.

GM: We have a GIS (digital) mapping system, and it is accurate to within a meter. It measures from your front driveway to the nearest available school gate. It is the nearest available safe route. Effectively this means the shortest available route walking along a footpath, road (pavement) or right of way. This is (based on) the guidelines. So for example, you may say there are no footpaths available in my street, that wouldn't be deemed unsafe as a lot of modern estates don't have footpaths in cul-de-sacs. If you have to walk down a country lane for half a mile with no footpath, that would be deemed unsafe. It doesn't go as the crow flies. It is measured by the shortest available route. What happens when we measure it, if something gets flagged up that it's not suitable, it's not included in the available route to school, so it then measures the next available route. While we talk about the nearest safe walking route, it is really the measured route. That is the route we measure for distance entitlement, but you don't have to use that because often parents will say you have told us the only safe route here. We are not saying that. What we are saying is, that is the route we measure to gain distance entitlement. If you want to walk a different way that is entirely up to you. Many people at these meetings are saying, I've been out in my car and google maps say this. Google maps measure down the centre of the road, they don't use footpaths, footpaths can cut corners and cross greens and going through houses. These are the paths that we will be measuring. People are saying I get in my car and it's 2.5 miles and you are saying it's 1.9, the reason for that is this is the way we measure it.

Statements

- I use the Maddiston bus using the U22 (bus pass). A couple of days ago there was an incident on the motorway which meant our buses were later than they usually were. The full impact of this was shown, you only say that 54 get picked up - that is only passes and not (those that use) the Young Scot card. There are so many young people, 3 times what you have said, and they rely on it.
- The point everyone is trying to make is that there are more than 54 people who get on the Maddiston to Brae's High bus

Response

GM: Maddiston has 2 double-deckers and has done for a number of years. There is the equivalent of one bus full of entitled children and one bus full of non-entitled children. It doesn't work like that in practice, but in terms of numbers that is the way we look at it. Unfortunately, things like that would happen, and I appreciate the bus being late doesn't help and causes impact from time to time.

GG: that is something we will take on board in terms of the wider impact and the children who pay to get to school.

Question

At the Grangemouth meeting, you said there were about 700 people who had responded out of the 20,000 you had sent an email out to. Do you know what the current number is?

Answer

SC: it is currently at 1,275 (responses) at the moment.

Question

Is the number of responses a direct factor for the decision making?

Answer

GG: it depends on the nature of the responses. We expect that most people who are writing in are against the proposal. That is the nature of what we are doing.

Statement

A lot of people will be unaware they are affected and the response rate might be a lot lower (than it could be).

Response

GG: It is a high response rate in terms of consultations we have (previously)done.

Question

Can you commit to putting clearer information out.

Answer

RN: To our best of our ability, we will look at the responses and do our best to classify them. Based on this evening, we will do our best to document what people have commented on the indirect effect of service buses that may not run, and pupils affected, that were not part of the original document. What we will put in the final report is our estimate based on the information we receive from our Transport Planning colleagues.

Question

Can you give us real numbers of how many pupils are using the buses, entitled and others, per route so that full impact is known. rather than the impact on entitled pupils only, which is limited?

Answer

RN: We will look at that

Question

The consultation period is still open, can you put clearer information out,so that all the parents who are actually affected understand that they are actually affected. The information put out is not clear.

Answer

GG: We will reflect on this. The consultation process doesn't end until the 17th March, so we will try and look at the numbers of pupils who use the Under 22 card or pay. If we can get this information, then we can put that on the website to put something out that reflects on the point you raised. How much we will be able to do, i am not sure. But we will see what we can do.

Question

The children who are non-entitled will have to use service buses and walk. Do you have an idea if the service buses are up to it?

Answer

GG: We have said we will look at the points raised tonight,

Question

I was told that I lived under 2 miles from the school and told it was unsafe in the winter so I would get a bus pass. I was wondering why, if it was dangerous in the winter in the last 2 years and she got a free bus pass, now it is deemed safe for her to get to school.

Answer

RN: If the route from your house, albeit under 2 miles, was not deemed safe hasn't become safe, she will still get a bus. If there is no safe route to school, if we can't identify a safe route to school, children get a bus to school because there isn't a safe route. It sounds like your daughter might be one of them.

Question

How may routes are not safe?

Answer

GM: We don't have a different entitlement requirement for the winter. You are either entitled to transport on distance grounds or you are not in terms of mainstream school transport. If we deem that route to be unsafe and you are less than 2 miles then you get a bus pass. But there is no winter versus summer differential.

Question

The distance from my house is 2.9 miles and that will take them an hour in winter weather, there is no way you are going to have all the paths clear. How is that fair to kids to expect them to walk in winter weather twice a day?

Answer

GM: that comes back to the statutory distance

Question

Have you walked that distance, the volume of traffic we have, but the roads were in better conditions back then and the budgets were higher back then. I know there are certain pinch points where there are always accidents. What pinch points have you identified and how many? What studies have you done?

Answer

RN: There are routes we know where there is no safe walking route and we provide transport for them.

Question

Have you thought about the impact on the police, have you consulted with them?

Answer

The police are aware of the consultation. There are a whole number of statutory partners that we inform and the police are one of them.

Question

It is unfair to expect children of secondary school age to walk just under 3 miles a day. I ran that and it is 2.8 miles and it took me 30mins to run it. To expect kids to do that and learn at school. They have had to suffer enough for the last 2 years.

Answer

GG: There are 24 other councils who do this.

Question

In other councils they can pay for the bus service

Answer

GG: I can't comment on that

Question

You are saying about comparing councils, have you compared urban and rural distribution and where the schools are within that? If they are all spread out and there are dark roads, poor pavements, worse weather, no cycle routes, there is going to be a bigger impact.

Answer

GG: There are 24 that are doing it just now, so there are some that are directly comparable with Falkirk. 24 Councils have done this already and in those Council areas, there will be children who are walking 3 miles to school.

Question

How does that affect their learning, what assessment has been done?

Answer

GG: There isn't anything to say that there is any adverse impact that we are aware of.

Question

If Falkirk have always done better than the statutory, there must have been some good reasons why they felt they needed to. What are those reasons and why are they changing now?

Answer

RN: It is about budget savings.

Statement

We would like to pay for it if it suits the parents better. Our children need those buses and if we have to pay for it then we will.

Answer

GG: it is a lot more difficult to achieve that, but the whole point in this consultation is to note this. This is primarily driven by budget cuts and if the council wasn't in the position it is in, then this wouldn't be coming up. We know it's going to impact children and their families.

Question

In terms of the budget cuts, what other potential proposals are out there for budget cuts

Answer

GG: If you go on the Council's website tomorrow, the budget report will be published. All the budget proposals and options will be available in this document.

Question

What are the options?

Answer

GG: As officers we have to table all available options and it is the members who have a very difficult job to work out what ones to take and what not to take.

Question

My son goes to ASN school, and my other child goes to a mainstream school. It will be impossible from me to get my ASN child to school and my other child to school.

Answer

GG: Under the statutory rules, is it up to parents to get their children to school. We have to look at the impact it has and see if we can find a way to create extra capacity on buses or to keep the buses running. If a child goes to an ASN school, that is individually assessed. That individual assessment will still be done.

Question

It is impossible to walk one child to one school and another child to another school. Are children going to be allowed to be late?

Answer

GG This is something that has been raised at previous meetings. This will be reflected in the meeting notes. It is a parent's legal responsibility to get children to school but I do accept that there are challenges there.

Question

Are you going to look at school start times? There may be potential problems for parents walking to Westquarter and then Graeme. Graeme starts before Westquarter. You can't walk an 8 year old 3 miles to Graeme (High School) and then take them to Westquarter (Primary School).

Answer

GG: If there is a potential mitigation that allows that finishing times of schools to be flexible, we do have that ability.

Question

Are you going to be actively looking at that?

Answer

GG: We have to get to the end of the consultation before we look at the recommendations.

Question

When will the parents of non-entitled pupils get notification of the bus withdrawals?

Answer

GG: Our duty is firstly to notify those who are no longer entitled, then we need to look at how we communicate this through the schools etc. This has been raised before at a consultation meeting.

Statement

I am an S1 pupil at Brae's High School and I found out that they are taking away our bus service to school. Alongside my peers, we decided to form a working group against this. Here are some of our concerns:

- California can get their buses even though they are closer to the high school. This is because of geographical reasons and Maddiston should be entitled to this too as it is a very dangerous route, and increased traffic doesn't help.
- You use climate change as a pretext for taking away the Maddiston buses, although I would suggest that by removing buses there will be an increase in cars on the road which contradicts your point on a better climate.

- You state there are only 54% of pupils who will lose the entitlement, you are not counting the Young Scot card users of the Maddiston bus. We find this concerning.
- For a Council who say they provide services to young people, one of the members of "Keep the Maddiston Buses" told me how they rely on the service to get from Maddiston to the high school are concerned about the increased number of cars on the road and in Maddiston, as it is one of the areas of lowest car ownership in Falkirk.
- Many rely on this bus route it is a vital service out of Maddiston as there are no regular services out of Maddiston. The commuter bus only goes near the high school and on Tuesdays and Thursdays it is too late to get us to the school on time.
- The Council's budget deficit - the council believes that taking away contracted buses is the best course of action, but they have not looked at alternative options, such as the Maddiston to St Mungo's service could be merged with Brae's so instead of having 2 buses each you could have one Brae's bus that drops Brae's pupils off first and continue to St Mungo's.
- We also believe you are partially in violation of a recently added Scottish law under the UNRC, specifically Article 28, the right to an education, which we believe this bill could hinder. Taking us to school is part of this.
- This could result in more tiredness, missing school which harms an already underfunded school.
- This proposal disregards geographical and climate consequences. I think the Council should amend the bill to put Maddiston back in the entitled school transport.

Response

GG: can we get a copy of that if you haven't already submitted it, for the consultation?

Statement

There also seemed to be a suggestion that we write to the elected councillors that are going to be taking a decision on this.

Answer

Cllr Hannah: I would certainly encourage people to write to their councillors. Don't just email Labour Councillors, please email all Councillors raising your questions. It is important you tell us as we don't know every route. When it comes to making the decision, we are the people who are making that decision. Officers will put forward proposals and Councillors will make the decision. It is important to fill out the consultation survey, every child has a right to fill out the survey as well.

RN: In terms of contacting Councillors, it is just as simple as going into google and type in Falkirk Councillors and it will come up with the contact details of all 30. You could write to all 30.

Question

Our 2 children live in Shieldhill, the route they have to take in my opinion, I certainly don't feel it is safe for my kids to be walking up and down the Brae. It is a fast road, it is a 40(mph). The residents at the bottom where it goes into a 30(mph) are having problems with speeding. The police camera van has been there on numerous occasions, and for me that is a red alert. That road is clearly a problem. Walking from Shieldhill there is a single pavement, and they will be walking en-masse on a 40(mph) road. I feel it's an unsafe route so I know I will be taking my child by car. This will increase traffic volume, and there will be inconsiderate parking at the school

Answer

RN: the online form, if you have said it's an unsafe route and recorded that, roads engineers will be asked to look at it.

Question

Do you know if there are going to be enough public buses for these children? There is going to be a large amount going to Graeme High. Are the public buses going to run, are they going to be every 15 mins, 30 mins?

Answer

RN: No, I don't know. The service that you are talking about would be run now by McGills, and if there is a market they will run a service, and if not they won't.

Question

So we won't know the impact until the decision is made then?

Answer

RN: 24 other councils do this. I was involved in another consultation, which geographically is not dissimilar to here, in Renfrewshire, with a number of urban towns and rural outlying areas. This consultation in 2009/10 was about moving from 1-2 and 2-3 miles and parents almost said the same things are being said now. In Renfrewshire parents found ways to get their children to school safely.

Statements

- You need to commission the services and co-produce the services.
- We are going to have to give up our jobs to get our kids to school.

Question

What is going to happen to the children moving up from p7-s1 if they expect to go on buses and they aren't there? Do their parents need to get them there? Especially if it's their first child moving up.

Answer

RN: We wrote to all primary parents if they were going to a secondary school that was going to be affected. So the parents of those children who are not yet at secondary school do know about this consultation. So next year, if they might have thought they would have got because their big brother or sister gets a bus, their parents now know they might not get it.

Question

Given the wellbeing of students, and SHANARI indicators, are you asking the student to be involved in these public meetings as well? Have you collected student responses? Have you actively been getting students involved?

Answer

RN: Students are responding, this is a public meeting and is known across all school communities. They have been informed it is happening by their parents. The responsibility lies with parents getting their children to school, so we have to consult with parents because we are making a change to the provision that is currently provided.

Question

When children are soaking, freezing, are they going to have access to a shower, locker, somewhere to change?

Answer

RN: They have the same provision they have currently.

Question

How many kids walk to school just now.

Answer

RN: Around 20,000 children are not currently entitled to free school transport

Question

That is going to increase, so do you have extra facilities to allow the kids to shower?

Answer

RN: we have showers at all of our secondary schools.

Statement

They don't all have lockers to put wet clothes in.

Response

RN: We are talking about a small increase in children walking to school.

Question

Are there plans for drop off points for the extra volume of cars?

Answer

GG: Traffic is always a problem at schools and this will be fed back and reported

Question

What about breakfast clubs? Are the hours going to change as it's never been ramped up again post covid.

Answer

RN: Breakfast club provision will remain as it is for the time being

Statement

If you are trying to avoid getting children going to school at the same time, then what is the point at dropping them off at 8.30 when we can drop them off in the playground 10 mins later. If they get a bus earlier to school, then they could go to the breakfast club

Question

Maddiston is an area with a high level of deprivation. That area has received a lot of money to close the attainment gap. Yesterday on our local Facebook page there were videos of children setting fire to things, playing with fire. These are the children, if you are going to make it hard for them to get to school, they are not going to go. So, you want to know how it will affect communities, then you have got children like that because you have made it too hard for them. They were the children who were entitled to the free transport before and they are not getting it.

Answer

GG: Yes, the wider impact on the community has been raised at other meetings and will be fed back.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm.

**Public Meeting at
Denny High
School on 7th
March 2023**

In attendance from the Council:

Robert Naylor (Director of Children's Services) (RN)
Gary Greenhorn (Head of Planning & Resources, Children's Services) (GG)
Richard Teed (Senior Forward Planning Officer, Children's Services) (RT)
Chris Cox (Transport Planning Manager, Place Services) (CC)
Gary McGowan (School Transport Co-ordinator, Place Services) (GM)
Siobhan Couttie (Forward Planning Officer, Children's Services, minute taker)
Carol Cowie (Programme Management Co-ordinator, Corporate Services, minute taker)

Further attendees:

64 members of the public, plus 5 Councillors, 1 representative from Education Scotland and a reporter from the Falkirk Herald.

A "questions and answer" session followed a short presentation from Robert, Gary and Chris at the start of the meeting.

Question

In Bonnybridge, Greenhill, we will need to walk to The Toll to use public transport, there is only 1 bus the goes through Bonnybridge and stops at the Denny Cross. So, there are going to be a lot of pupils coming from the same direction all expected to get the one bus which comes every 20 minutes. They would have to walk from The Cross. We are from Greenhill, and they would need to walk down to The Toll to get a public bus which will already be full from people who are coming from further along in Bonnybridge at Larbert Road. They will need to get off the bus and walk from The Cross. I don't think it's going to work in terms of space in public buses, and they may be late because they can't all get on the bus at the same time. This service is highly unreliable.

Answer

GM: there are some issues particularly from High Bonnybridge with no direct bus service. The commercial service from High Bonnybridge does run 1 an hour, but you will need to walk down to Bonnybridge Toll where the service is every 20 mins. These scenarios will happen at other schools. This particular issue, we will have to see whether the local bus operator can enhance the service. At the moment, some of the local bus services are suffering with reliability issues across the network, and there is a shortage of drivers. There is hope that this will improve as the months go on.

Question

In the Greenhill area, I wasn't aware there was a measuring tool, I used google maps for example. At Braes High School, I asked how the measurement was measured, I'm sure I was told "as the crow flies". In the legislation which is accompanied with the guide to Improving Transport Scotland document, chapter 4 states safe walking measurements are measured by the available route from your home to the school gate. So, when you look at High Bonnybridge, we live up in the area and we received a letter to say that school transport will be affected, and if you take Hillside Crescent for example, there are 2 available walking routes. I would appreciate to see your safe walking route. Google maps has it as an hour and 10 mins walk and that is expecting kids and a responsible adult to walk down through Bonnybridge, through the golf course, and down a single track road where cars are doing 60 mph. The other route from High Bonnybridge would be Drove loan, that according to google maps is 4 miles. So, I fail to see how another tool can be shorter than that. Both routes are over 3 miles.

Answer

GM: we use a GIS (digital mapping) system called Location Centre, which unfortunately isn't available to the public due to licencing issues which means we can't share in an open forum as such. Unlike Google maps where they use road centre lines, our GIS will use every available footpath, the measured route from your home to the school gate, it will use any available path and show the shortest available route. So, we use footpaths and walkways where google maps won't. The shortest available route, most of the routes for Denny High will be to the back gate of Denny High. Some people say to us, this is the distance and will show us a map from google maps coming down through The Cross to the front door. In general, most of the routes from Bonnybridge will come down the Glasgow road, through Demoreham Ave into the back gate. In terms of the roads past

the golf club, the road at Roughmote is deemed unsafe, so we don't use that. We look at the shortest, available safe route.

Statement

There is no safe route from Greenhill to Denny High, have you walked through Drove loan? Walking through it in December when it's pouring of rain, ice and snow. Would you want your children to walk that route? We all need to work, there is a cost of living crisis

Question

I have got a boy who has additional support needs and he gets picked up at 8.50(am), I can't walk from my house to St Andrews (primary school) and back again for my little boy. Transport don't accommodate me, they accommodate the easiest route for him to get to school. I don't know what you want me to do as my girl is going to miss out in school.

Answer

RN: The concerns you have, can you put them down in the survey, to tell us that this is a challenge for you?

Statement

I'm from the Banknock, Higgs and Longcroft Community Council. First of all, I think it's very convenient that you are using a tool that no one can access. In Higgs you have the cut-off up to Kerr Crescent, which is the roundabout at the motorway to go into Glasgow. It is 3 miles from Denny High to the War Memorial in Longcroft, so you have cut out all of Higgs and Logan Court on Cumbernauld Road with a system that none of us have access to, to prove you wrong. We have one bus an hour that heads to Denny, that doesn't turn up and the same on the way back from Denny. How do you propose to get these children to school? They have already spent 2 years not going to school. They are already comfortable staying in the house, parents are struggling to get their kids to school and you are taking away the bus service. I can think of a million ways Falkirk Council could save money other than taking transport away from the kids.

Statement

The current definition of a safe walking route includes parents walking their children to school. If there is a single parent with children going to different schools, how does Falkirk Council plan to ask them to (do this?). One (of mine) goes St Mungo's High School. I come from Camelon, I have google mapped it and it's 1.7 miles to my house, the canal route is not safe, she is 17 years old, has to walk an underpass where there are cyclists, and people walking their dogs and that is a busy road at the under pass and including the Rosebank. I have walked it with my children, and they are not safe and I am not asking a 17 year old child who has anxiety problems to walk to school. What plans show where the safe routes are, and what plans are there to put in a safe walking route such as putting in (street)lighting. The lighting at the canal path isn't safe, it's only cat eyes. There is no safe route there.

Response

RN: we have asked people to tell us about any hazards on a particular route, and where routes are unsafe, tell us. Roads engineers to look at these and assess.

GM: We don't use canal paths. That is not part of the route.

Questions and Statements

- Two Schools are not allowed to meet together, Falkirk High and St Mungo's, who can't meet (because of problems with) fighting. How would the Council plan to stop that?
- You are expecting 8-year-old with a responsible adult to walk. If that responsible adult is working, we are in a cost-of-living crisis and you are putting up council tax by 7% and now charging for bin uplifts. Where is this money going that you are trying to save?

- Where are the independent road assessments? You have said you are not going to share your information on the GIS. From our perspective as parents and carers. How do we know you are being honest and transparent?
- Is there going to be an independent assessor going to assess the roads. I worry when I drive the Drove Loan, that you can't get out at the top, you need to stop and wait. Who as an independent assessor going to determine that is safe? Particularly when you are trying to save money. You are putting our child's lives in danger just to save money.

Question

If you look at the footpath along Drove loan, you will see it's not safe. Some parts there is no pavement at all, cars fly down it. It is very dangerous.

Answer

GM: there is a set of guidelines road engineers use to measure these routes. Essentially, a route that can be walked by a child accompanied by an adult, you can use any footway or right of way that is suitable with a child and adult. That would take into considerations such as condition and width of footpaths. The assumption is that you should accompany your child to school or make suitable arrangements.

Question

For licencing reasons we can't access the GIS (mapping) system, however, we are being asked as parents to do a risk assessment for our kids if we don't use a defined safe walking route would be from our house. How are we meant to do that, when Drove loan is deemed safe by Falkirk?

Answer

CC: We aren't keeping secrets. The system we use is a system that the Council licenses, it's not a system that we can make available to the public. We are not hiding anything. You can contact the Transport Planning department and we can tell you what route that system is suggesting as the shortest safest available route from your house to the school. Due to the feedback from other meetings, I have said to my colleagues we do have to look at if there a way we can make this system available on the Councils website or something that gives a general safe walking route. It's not something that we can turn around quickly. Our system is accurate, because before we used this system, we used a measure using a walking meter wheel. When Denny High School opened, my colleagues and I spent a lot of time walking around Bonnybridge, through Drove Loan, measuring the change in entitlement from the old Denny High School to the new one. Our systems are accurate.

Statement

If I give you all the addresses in Haggs, then I want the safe walking routes for them all.

Response

CC: There is a practical reason why we can't do that. But, by telling you where the cut-off point is that is something you can work out.

Statement

17 Kerr St in Banknock is the cut off, your Council workers in their vans told us.

Response

CC: It isn't calculated by driving routes, it is by path networks. But if you contact us, we will tell you what the walking route is and where the cut off is, we can't realistically process 1,000 of houses, we don't have resources, systems or staff to process that. Anyone who contacts us, we will endeavour to get back as soon as we can.

Statement

I got a copy of the route for my daughter, as prior to this consultation, there were was a capacity issue with the buses. There was a problem when she couldn't get home one night as there was no capacity on the bus. So, if you cut the buses that you have got in place right now, then that is going to make public transport horrific to get on because there will be too many kids getting on public transport. Some of the buses are not regular enough to get the kids to and from school. The route you sent me through was different to google maps. It was a maze through housing estates. It took her ages to walk to and from school. In the wintertime it was dark, and you are expecting her to walk hours in the

dark. This cuts out socialising - we are trying to encourage children to attend school and this has a detrimental effect.

Question

What reputational damage to the Council or repercussions are there if a child or a parent of a child gets hit by a car along the drove loan? £750,000 overspend projected - how much of that overspend is cuts in the bus service?

Answer

GM: I don't have individual figures for individual services. The services went up by £550,000 since last year alone. So although there was an overspend on the budget of £750,000, the actual increase from last year was over half a million.

Question

What amount of the budget cut is affecting the people here tonight.

Answer

GM: I don't have a figure, there are 33 services affected in total (across the Falkirk Council area), with 6 services from Bonnybridge/Denny that may be affected.

Statement

What about the cost and impact on human life? What about getting hit by traffic, in the dark?.

Question

As a representative of St Mungo's, the route along the canal isn't safe, the roads aren't safe, there are no traffic lights. What do you expect kids at the age of 12 to do?

Answer

RN: We don't consider canal paths as a safe, but do tell us about the paths or crossings that you don't think are safe and they will be assessed.

Question

You are going to reduce the services to those who are entitled, but there are also children who are not entitled and are in the same predicament, who are using the Under 22 card on the buses but may not have a bus to go on.

Answer

RN: anyone who is remaining entitled will get a bus. We may contract a service for those currently entitled with spare capacity and, over the years, non-entitled pupils have been boarding these buses as fare payers, and more recently using the U22 bus pass. These buses are run because the council subsidises to transport the entitled pupils. The Council subsidise this additional capacity, but if that is withdrawn then the operators will need to decide whether it is commercially viable to continue providing this service.

CC: At the moment, we have several double-deckers contracted which have 60-65 entitled children and they have 75 seats. Once these changes come into place, there may only be 14 entitled pupils and when we re-tender the bus, we will re-tender for 30-35 seats.

Question

Given the safe walking routes issues: if this goes ahead, people will drive, and there will be a significant increase in the number of vehicles on the road and the congestion already around the school is terrible at start and finish times. There has already been an unfortunate incident where a child has been struck. What consideration has been given to the volume of cars that this will lead to around our schools?

Answer

RN: At all of the public meetings, people have suggested that if the proposal goes ahead there will be increase traffic and congestion around schools. We would deal with each and every scenario when it arises. If congestion in and around the schools became a great concern to us, the Council would need to look at traffic calming measures, and we have also talked about phased start times of schools, to avoid having all the traffic at the one time.

Question

It was said that 24 councils have the same (policy). When you drill down, its places like Glasgow, Dundee, East Renfrewshire. These are hugely urbanised areas and there is a huge difference asking a 12-year-old to walk, early in the morning, through a heavily urbanised residential area, where there are safe places, safe areas around, somewhere safe for them to run if something was to happen, rather than ask someone walking from High Bonnybridge into Denny. Our issue at Denny High is that there are a lot of satellite villages, and they are having to walk and leave the safety of their village. Falkirk High School have a larger built-up area, with houses and shops around. This isn't the same for Denny High, why this not been done on a school-by-school basis? Why is it a one blanket approach?

Answer

RN: It's done based on the statutory distances. The driver for this proposal is that officers were asked to look at options for saving money. It is going to make around £1million in savings, so we would like to hear other ways to save money. The Council, prior to Christmas, had a public consultation on the budget. The background to this proposal, is that the Council has to look at all the statutory and non-statutory services. So, for example, providing 190 days of school education is a statutory requirement.

Statement

What about Scottish Governments "closing the gap" agenda or "equity for all" agenda. Is that being put by the wayside? We can't help the place we live in. When we chose the area we live in, people got a bus to school. Now you are changing the goal posts, not us. It doesn't fit in with the SNP's equality for all agenda. Our children are left behind after the COVID pandemic.

Question

Can you confirm if Drove Loan is a safe walking route? The path is so narrow, and you are talking about more children walking along the road.

Answer

RT: Drove Loan was an issue when the school moved from it's previous site. The 2-mile entitlement limit changed within Bonnybridge. The 2-mile boundary moved further into Bonnybridge. A lot of people questioned Drove Loan at the time, so we did a roads assessment by the national guidelines and we also got an independent review. We reported this to the Education Committee in 2009, so it was all documented. It is available on the Council's website. I know it's a bone of contention for everyone. But it was assessed according to the national guidelines. It is parents responsibility, it's not a Council's responsibility to decide when a child is old enough to walk to school. That is what the national guidelines, the standards by which safe available walking routes are set by. It's not set by children walking on their own, it is set by children walking with a responsible adult. What they look at is width of path, and that was looked at very carefully on Drove loan, the traffic, the speed of the traffic, accident statistics. It was also looked at carefully and by an independent review.

RN: If it's been raised again as it has been, roads engineers will look at it again.

Question

Are you going to do this for Falkirk High and St Mungo's Schools?

Answer

RT: We have asked a specific question in the consultation. The specific question is "do you have any concerns about walking routes to school". The walking routes up to 2 miles for primary schools and the walking routes between 2 and 3 miles for the secondary schools that are within the walking distance to local primary schools have already been looked at over the past 40 years. If that has changed or there any concerns about individual routes, we can look at this. Rest assured, we have looked at most of the pedestrian network. What we are looking for are identified hazards, so these can be excluded where necessary from the pedestrian network.

Statement

Councillor McCabe: This is a political decision, the Council has made that clear. The Councillors have asked officers from every department to offer suggestions for savings they can make. They have put forward suggestions. There are options available.

£600,000 can be found elsewhere within the budget figures. One example, I brought it up at the Council budget meeting, is that the council are going to spend £300,000 to put cameras into their vehicles. This isn't statutory, we don't have to do it. Why are we doing this when they are cutting transport for our kids? This is discriminatory against kids who stay in outlying areas. The kids who don't stay in the centre of Falkirk, they stay in the outer areas. The kids in Banknock, Coney Park. These kids are going to walk difficult roads and paths. Drove Loan will never be overturned as a dangerous route. I put an enquiry in 2 weeks ago, because a lady who came out at the top of Drove loan nearly got smashed by someone speeding on the Drove Loan. The response I got was because it is lit, the speed limit is 30 miles per hour, it's not the best of roads, but that unfortunately is a pedestrian route for our kids to Denny High School. This is a political decision. You should be speaking to your Councillors.

Question

How much is (the cost of school) transport in total? How much is it a year?

Answer

GM: The overall school transport budget is just over £5 million; in the last 10 years it's gone up by 98% and the number of kids is roughly the same.

Question

How much money would you save if the proposal went ahead?

Answer

GG: The estimated saving over a full year is £1million. The budget papers contained £625,000, because this reflects August to March the current financial year. The balance would be saved the following year.

Statement

My thoughts are around the safety of children and young people. We live in Fankerton, west of Denny. It is 2.2 miles (to Denny High School), and we are very fortunate that my child gets a taxi to school. That is a great privilege. If that taxi is withdrawn and my husband and I can't take our children because of our own work commitments, we will not allow our child to walk from Fankerton to Denny High School. The path to leave the village, there is a pavement on the first section, then you get to the hospice, you need to cross the road to the other side. The pavement is poorly maintained. My angst is the speed of the traffic and the type of traffic. We are talking log lorries, agricultural lorries, cars that vastly exceed the speed limit at all times of the day and night. She shares a taxi with friend who is entitled. That taxi will pass our house every morning and we will need to make alternative arrangements to get her to school. The weather in Fankerton can be different compared to Denny. It can be snowing when it's not in the town itself.

Question

The question is about the £750,000 overspend, you have just given a figure of £625,000. I was trying to localise it. I am assuming that is a global figure for the council today. But I was looking to find out in terms of Denny and Bonnybridge? I was told there wasn't an answer for that. Is there been an impact assessment or forecast of absentees, persistent lateness if kids can't make it on time for school? Academic or outcome of the schools? Have these things been assessed?

Answer

RN: With regards the localised saving, the original answer was that the officer said he didn't have the figures to hand. It is made up of a number of contracts that will no longer be required. That information could be provided if you speak to the officer at the end. We have mentioned there are 24 councils that have the same policy as this, they are not all urban, but some have similar characteristics and can be compared. When you look at national school attendance rates, there isn't much variation. Across Scotland attendance rates are around 94% for primary and secondaries and varies by 0.4 to 0.6 percent. I don't think any work has been done to assess whether attendance is different based on the level of home to school transport provision.

Statement

Maybe you should do, to determine what impact will it have. There is a lot of information you have about the full impact on this. There are multiple issues; there is safety of pupils,

traffic safety, increase risk of bullying as they will be in much more exposed areas without access to safe places.

There is an expectation that an adult will be able to accompany them. Has there been an assessment done of the potential impact on reduction of employment rates in the area if a parent has to walk up to 3 mile and back to take children to school? That is something the council has a duty to find out. It should be considered. Our pupils have lost 2 years to covid, strikes, and this is another thing that will reduce pupil attendance. It feels like the education department isn't doing what they can to encourage more attendance, they are doing the exact opposite.

Answer

RN: The Council education department is working on improving attainment and attendance. In terms of the impact assessment question. An impact assessment could be done after the event. At the moment, I can't tell you how many children might not start attending school because I don't know what alternative arrangements will be made. At the moment, 76% of our pupils don't get a bus provided by us.

Questions and statements made at end of meeting (no time to fully answer/respond to)

- Some people don't have over an hour to walk if expected to walk 3 miles.
- My children are entitled to an under 22 pass, so your 76% is way off as half of them use their Young Scots card. You can't say 76% of them don't get a bus. They do.
- You talk about the 24 councils, but we pay Falkirk Council Tax, so you have a responsibility to us to do the best for our children.
- The environmental impact, will this policy increase area wide emissions, taken into consideration people who are already driving their kids to school? Isn't this against 2045 net-zero aims? If you are taking the buses off the road, parents who have cars will take their kids to school by car.
- We are trying to save money, but it is going to cost more, with impact on climate, employment, bus services. Is there an impact assessment about the overall impact? There will be an increase litter with kids walking to and back from school. That all comes at a cost.
- You are going to spend £7.5m on the DEAR road (Denny Eastern Access Road), to stop congestion in Denny. Shouldn't DEAR be scrapped and put that money to the budget where it is needed.

Answer

RN: These points have all been captured and can be summarised as unintended consequences of the proposal. Mentioned was attendance, on attainment, employment, litter, inter-school bullying. We will provide elected members a full summary of what has been raised and what has been asked at the public consultation. This will be published on the website in advance of the executive meeting (where it will be discussed). This provides the opportunity for queries or misrepresentations to be challenged before members make a final decision.

The meeting closed at 8.30pm.