

# North Yorkshire Council

## Executive

16 July 2024

### Scrutiny review of the proposed Home to School Transport Policy and consideration of the Motion referred from Council

#### Report of the Assistant Chief Executive Legal and Democratic Services

#### 1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 To update the Executive on the outcome of the informal meeting between the Children and Young People's Service and Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee to discuss the Home to School Transport Policy proposals to come into effect from September 2025. For the Executive to consider the outcome of the discussion to help inform their recommendation to Council for their meeting on 24 July 2024, when the Policy is debated.
- 1.2 For the Executive to note the report and for it to help inform their decision on the Notice of Motion that was referred from Full Council on 15 May 2024.

#### 2.0 SUMMARY

- 2.1 This report provides an outline of the Notice of Motion that was proposed and seconded at Full Council on 15 May 2024 (see Appendix 1).
- 2.2 This report provides details of the outcome of the informal meeting held on 20 May 2024 between the Children and Young People's Service and Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee (CFOSC) to discuss the Home to School Transport Policy proposals to come into effect from September 2025.
- 2.3 As such, this report serves two functions:
  1. To help inform the Executive's decision on the Home to School Transport Policy.
  2. To help inform the Executive's decision on the Notice of Motion that was referred by Full Council to the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

#### 3.0 BACKGROUND

- 3.1 In March 2024, Children and Young People's Service requested to meet with CFOSC to present and discuss the proposed new Home to School Transport Policy. Due to timescales and availability, it was agreed that this would be an informal meeting over Teams. The meeting was held on 20 May 2024. Those in attendance were Members of the CFOSC, Councillors who requested an invite, and the Director and Assistant Directors of Children and Young People's Service. The Assistant Director for Education and Skills gave a detailed presentation that outlined the Department for Education's revised statutory guidance covering travel to school for children of compulsory school age. The Assistant Director explained that the Council is now consulting on the proposed new home to school travel policy for North Yorkshire to ensure compliance with the new statutory guidance. The consultation is also a review of the discretionary

areas of the Council's current travel policy, that are above and beyond the statutory requirements of the guidance.

- 3.2 At the Full Council meeting on 15 May 2024, a Notice of Motion was made to halt the cuts to free school bus services in the county and to use the £6.2m of emergency central government funding for its intended purpose of supporting frontline services. The Motion was moved and seconded and referred to the Executive.

#### **4.0 KEY ISSUES RAISED AT THE MEETING HELD ON 20 MAY 2024**

- 4.1 Several questions and points were made. These can be summarised below.
- 4.2 The Assistant Director was asked what defines a “suitable school”. She explained that North Yorkshire Council has followed the DfE definition as stated in their 2023 guidance, as “the nearest suitable school (with places available)”. Currently, the main eligibility criterion within NYC’s existing home to school transport policy is above and beyond that definition.
- 4.3 Although a petition to “Stop School Bus Cuts” was submitted to NYC as part of the consultation process, it did not meet the required 500 or more signatories to be debated at the local Area Constituency Committee. It has, however, been referred to the Children and Young People’s Services for consideration as part of the consultation.
- 4.4 The Directorate recognised an error in the model used to estimate changes in eligibility of pupils over a seven year period. This affected a small number of schools that had been sent data from the model and was quickly corrected and new data shared. They notified the schools affected, invited them to a face-to-face session at County Hall, extended the consultation period, promoted this on the Council’s consultation webpage and emailed all consultees of the revised end date.
- 4.5 There were some questions around exploring ways of how the public could also access buses being used by school children, but it was explained that these areas are not part of the current consultation. However, it may be something that can be explored at a later date.
- 4.6 Director confirmed that pupils who currently qualify for school travel will still remain eligible for the period they remain in school, unless there is a change of address requiring a re-assessment of eligibility. However, siblings who have not yet started school may have different eligibility depending on whether the choice of school is the nearest suitable school with places available.
- 4.7 The estimated projected savings is based on a number of assumptions, including behavioural changes, and is estimated to make an annual saving at the end of the policy transition period of between £770,000 to £3.8 million.
- 4.8 The Director confirmed that if required by Government, the Council will also undertake a comprehensive review of Home to School Transport for 16 to 18 year-olds to meet statutory duties.
- 4.9 There was concern that some children may now be expected to walk on dangerous and busy roads/footpaths, especially in the more rural areas. The Director stressed that it is a statutory requirement to ensure that children attending their nearest suitable school and who live within the statutory walking distance were ‘able to walk to that school in reasonable safety’.
- 4.10 It was commented that some families will now be expected to pay up to £800/year for a bus pass. However, it was stressed that families have always had a choice over

schools and if they choose one which isn't their nearest "suitable school", it is their responsibility to ensure their child can access it.

- 4.11 The Director confirmed that once the updated policy has been in place, they will provide an update to the Committee in due course.

## **5.0 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.1 Based on a number of assumptions, the proposed Home to School Transport Policy is estimated to make an annual saving at the end of the policy transition period of between £770,000 to £3.8 million.

## **6.0 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 6.1 The Council will ensure that statutory guidance is followed when consulting and implementing the policy.

## **7.0 EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS**

- 7.1 The Directorate has undertaken an equalities impact assessment which will be updated as necessary before a decision is made.

## **8.0 CLIMATE CHANGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 The Directorate has undertaken a climate change impact assessment which will be updated as necessary before a decision is made.

## **9.0 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

- 9.1 To facilitate the recommendation to debate the Home to School Transport Policy at Full Council on 24 July 2024.

## **10.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)**

For the Executive to:

- i. note the outcomes of the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting on 20 May 2024
- ii. consider the Notice of Motion that was referred to the Executive by Full Council at their meeting of 15 May 2024 and make a recommendation to the meeting of Full Council to consider at their meeting on 24 July 2024.

## **APPENDICES:**

Appendix A – Notice of Motion proposed and seconded at Full Council on 15 May 2024

Barry Khan  
Assistant Chief Executive, Legal and Democratic Services  
Northallerton

Report Author – Alice Fox, Senior Scrutiny Officer

**Notice of Motion proposed and seconded at Full Council on 15 May 2024**

Home to School Transport

A significant proportion of the NYC Home to School Travel Service is governed by legislation. However, proposals to bring the policy in line with the DfE requirements by removing some areas of discretionary provision has some risks:

- estimated annual savings of £3.2m are based on a number of assumptions which are difficult to predict
- the full financial impact of the changes won't be seen for seven years
- families with more than one child could have different eligibility, with children from the same family being forced to attend schools in different locations
- restricting eligibility to nearest school only will have a significant & disproportionate impact on rural communities
- potential changes to the pattern of admissions at schools where transport provision is a factor
- a house move within the area could mean children are forced leave their current school.
- North Yorkshire will be paying other authorities to educate its own children while perfectly good schools inside the county lose out.

We call on this council to halt the drastic cuts to free school bus services in the county and to use the £6.2m of emergency central government funding for its intended purpose of supporting frontline services.

Proposer – Cllr Barbara Brodigan

Secunder – Cllr Felicity Cunliffe-Lister.

The motion was moved and seconded and referred to the Executive.