

## **WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **PUBLIC CONSULTATION MEETING 1 DUMBARTON VENUE - Our Lady & St. Patrick's High School (Also made available online) Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> April 2023 – 7.00 p.m.**

#### **ATTENDING:**

Laura Mason (LM), Chief Education Officer, WDC  
Andrew Brown (AB), Senior Education Officer, WDC  
Claire Cusick (CC), Senior Education Officer, WDC  
Julie McGrogan (JM), Senior Education Officer, WDC  
Lyn Pennycook (LP), Education Support Officer, WDC  
Sheila Brown (SB), HMIe, Education Scotland

#### **In Attendance:**

30 members of the public in person, and 3 members of the public online.

#### **Welcome and Introduction**

LM opened the meeting and welcomed the members of the public in attendance to the statutory consultation meeting. LM introduced herself and the Council Officers in attendance and outlined the format of the meeting.

#### **Consultation Process**

LM continued by explaining the consultation process, and stated that West Dunbartonshire Council are required by law to conduct a statutory consultation for any proposed change to denominational transport, but have taken the opportunity to consult more widely on the changes for all schools affected. LM advised that presently, around 1,200 children and young people are transported to 12 of our schools. At the meeting on the 8th of March, Educational Services committee approved the launch of this consultation, and agreed that it should run from the 9th of March until the 9th May, and that a report outlining the results of this consultation and making appropriate recommendations be presented to a meeting of the educational services committee in the week beginning the 5th July.

LM continued that in terms of the timeline for the consultation, we aim to provide individual outcomes to those in receipt of transport currently this week. This is the first of our public events for geographical areas, with a further two to take place in Clydebank and the Vale of Leven. When the consultation formally closes all responses will be collated, and provided to Education Scotland who will then undertake some fieldwork - they will sample visit a number of schools, and look to speak with children and young people, the Parent Council and a wider group of parents. Education Scotland will then produce a report to the Council based on how the consultation was conducted, and this report will form part of the material submitted in the report to the Educational Services committee to be held in the week beginning the 5th of July. West Dunbartonshire Council (WDC) are required by law to publish their Consultation Response Report three weeks before the committee meeting.

Should the Educational Services committee agree to implement any changes, it is proposed to do these in two phases - the first phase affecting children and young people who presently use public transport for their journey to school in time for the start of the next academic year, and the second phase to time with the start of the following year in 2024 - this is of course all subject to the findings of this consultation, and committee approval.

## **Proposed Changes**

AB spoke to the proposed changes being addressed in this consultation. The proposal is to increase the distance a pupil resides in order to qualify for transportation. For primary aged pupils that would mean a change from the existing 1 mile distance to 2 miles, And for secondary, a change from the existing 2 miles to 3 miles. AB stated that throughout the documentation we have stated that this is more in line with legislation, as Scottish Government do not specify a distance for local authorities to provide transport, but instead refer to a 'safe walking distance'. WDC have not measured distances 'as the crow flies', but instead have used the West Dunbartonshire Mapping and Geographical Information Centre tool which is developed by ESRI. This is a tool that is used worldwide, and the same tool that is used for all council mapping applications – for example, the tool on the WDC website allowing residents to find out what day their bins are collected. In education, the tool is used for school catchment areas, and for school transport. Using this tool, we first pinpointed the school gates, or access points to school sites which then allowed us to define, on the maps, the distance from our schools to any address.

AB shared a number of images [due to the projected image in the OLSP hall, it was acknowledged that these were difficult to see on screen]. The software can identify routes that are walkable. The image displayed showed part of the Vale of Leven that has walkable routes to OLSP - those routes were shown as purple lines in the image. The software helps to understand which of those walkable routes are within three miles of OLSP shown here, and a similar exercise was undertaken for each of the schools affected. Understandably, the software highlighted areas that are outwith the 2 or 3 mile distance, showing addresses that would be eligible for transport provision. By plotting on the mapping software the location of the home addresses

for children and young people that presently receive transport, allow us to see what this would mean for individuals affected by the proposed changes.

Whilst the mapping software will tell if something is walkable, we need to ensure that it is a safe route to walk. What do we mean by 'safe'? By safe, we mean that there is provision of an accessible footpath, maintained to a suitable quality. There is adequate provision of street lighting, so that this path is lit and can be walked safely. Where crossing points need to be used, is there is safe way to cross the road, and where there is a high volume of traffic, or a higher speed of traffic, this has been taken into consideration. This isn't new to us - we have been providing school transport for decades, so we already have a considerable amount of knowledge and experience in this area. There are presently a number of young people who are provided with transport on the grounds of the being no suitable route for them to walk - this will not change. Where concerns have been raised, we have walked routes, and checked all of those with colleagues in the Roads team.

AB drew attention to two specific areas - the Stirling Road, the A813 at the 'Lions Head' roundabout near the Vale of Leven Industrial Estate, and the junction of the A82 and A814 at Milton to highlight this point - although these are 'walkable' routes - we do not consider them to be a 'safe walkable' routes. So, in the example of OLSP although many of the addresses in the Vale of Leven are within the 3 mile distance proposed, if you are coming from the Vale to attend OLSP, we will still have to provide you with transport, as there is not presently a safe route for you to walk. The same applies for addresses in Milton and Renton. Children and young people attending the catchment schools of St. Patrick's Primary, Knoxland Primary, Dumbarton Academy and OLSP from these geographical area will similarly still be eligible for transport on the grounds of safety.

LM mentioned at the beginning that we would be writing to each family who is presently in receipt of school transport with the outcome of this exercise for your individual circumstances so that each of you know how this will impact you.

AB shared a table highlighting the affect the proposal would have on the number of children and young people presently transported to schools.

School	Existing Numbers	Not Eligible
Gartocharn Primary School	17	
Knoxland Primary School	21	5
Linnvale Primary School	*	*
St. Eunan's Primary School	22	22
St. Mary's (Alexandria) Primary School	16	16
St. Mary's (Duntocher) Primary School	12	*
St. Patrick's Primary School	*	*
Clydebank High School	249	179
Dumbarton Academy	23	5
Our Lady & St. Patrick's High School	533	130
St. Peter the Apostle High School	106	81
Vale of Leven Academy	184	153

If accepted, we would propose to make changes in two phases - first by making the most straightforward change. Many of our children and young people are transported using 'service' buses. At the moment, we pay First Bus to transport our young people on the very same service bus you or I could also get. With the introduction of the Under 22 Travel Pass, young people would be able to get exactly the same transport without additional cost to the council. Technically, the public purse is paying twice for this service. We have been working with SDS, the Senior Phase team and Working4U to maximise the uptake of the travel pass scheme, and would seek to ensure that all young people that need a card have one prior to the summer holidays.

The second phase would see us making changes to the dedicated transport provision that we presently have contractors operating - most notably Marbil, McColls and a number of local taxi providers. We would be looking to make these changes in time for the following session starting in August 2024, due to the terms of the existing contracts and termination clauses and timescales.

## **Education Benefits**

AB highlighted the benefits and dis-benefits associated with this proposal. As LM stated at the introduction, the council needs to identify areas where we could reduce our operating costs, and as already made mention of areas here where the public purse is paying twice. There are of course other benefits associated with this proposal.

UN Convention on the Rights of the Child Article 3 which affirms that 'in all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration', so in all of our decision making, we need to ensure that the long term benefits for our young people are at the centre of our thinking.

The Scottish Government is committed to a long term vision for active travel that encourages promotes walking, cycling, public transport and car sharing in preference to single occupancy car use for movement of people, and encourages efficient and sustainable freight.

There are a number of benefits associated with physical health:

- The World Health Organisation reported that walking for 30 minutes or cycling for 20 minutes on most days reduces mortality risk by at least 10%
- Active commuting is associated with an approximate 10% decrease in risk for cardiovascular disease and a 30% decrease in type 2 diabetes risk
- Cancer-related mortality is 30% lower among bike commuters
- The Scottish Health Survey of 2021 identified 28% of children at risk of being overweight. An active lifestyle combined with a healthy diet can help to reduce this

Equally, there are benefits to mental health:

- Improve focus – in one study, brain activity in the areas of focus and attention were increased following a period of walking. Walking to school can therefore improve focus on school activities
- Walking has been found to improve people's mood and develop creativity

Building relationships with those you walk with. Whether it be a group of friends or family, spending time walking together can help build relationships as people talk about their day or other things that are on their mind. For those children that do not have the required sense of road safety to walk unaccompanied, parents or carers may have to accompany their children on the journey to and from school. In other local authorities, many parents have benefitted from sharing this with a group of other parents whose children live near them. This has reduced the impact on individuals, led to increased connections with neighbours, and an increased sense of community.

Reducing the number of people taking car or bus journeys can help to improve our air quality.

A walking survey in 2021 found that participation was lower amongst residents of the 10% most deprived areas.

Whilst there are benefits to making a change, there are equally dis-benefits associated with this proposal:

- Journey time – for some, the journey to school time will increase if not travelling by bus. This may result in an earlier start to the day for some, as they plan for their journey taking longer.
- Inclement weather – weather in the West of Scotland is frequently inclement, resulting in families having to equip children and young people for wet and windy weather. This may increase financial pressure on households.
- Some benefits are only realised if children and young people swap the passive bus journey for an active means of getting to school

AB concluded by highlighting that The Eco-Schools Scotland programme (with which all of our school are engaged) encourages active travel for our children and young people.

The programme promotes:

- encouraging and enabling parents and children to walk, cycle and use public transport;
- setting up a working group with school, parent, local authority, community, police, and transport representatives to run a school travel or 'safer routes to school' project;
- writing and implementing a school travel plan;
- running an effective road safety awareness programme for pupils;
- raising awareness of the damage caused by transport to the environment and people's health, and;
- providing adequate support and information about travelling to school for pupils and staff who wish to walk, cycle or use public transport.

All schools will be encouraged to revisit their school travel plan to encourage an increasing uptake of active travel.

## Questions

LM opened the meeting for questions from those in attendance.

### **Q. Will Milton be impacted?**

A. Transport will still be provided to children and young people from Milton who attend St. Patrick's Primary, Knoxland Primary, Dumbarton Academy and Our Lady & St Patrick's High School on the grounds of safety.

### **Q. Re dedicated buses, child didn't get a bus pass (Dumbarton Academy).**

A. Bus passes were ordered through our partner SPT. We were not aware that they had not been provided to Dumbarton Academy pupils, as this hadn't been brought to our attention. We will pick this up with both SPT and the school.

**Comment. Suggestion that transport to secondary schools be removed but retain primary transport.**

**Q. Was it taken in to account that Milton Primary closed and pupils were transferred to Knoxland which is the next school. The stress this could cause of child walking this distance, ability to concentrate, lot to ask of a 4 year old.**

A. Yes, this was taken into account, and children living in Milton will still be provided with transport.

**Q. Pupil at Knoxland, lives in Garshake, with undiagnosed ASN. Queried whether individual circumstances would be considered. If did not qualify could people come back re this?**

A. Transport provision for children with ASN is not governed by the same criteria, and individual assessments and outcomes are made for individual needs. ASN queries can be followed up with the school.

**Q. Is A82 considered a safe walking route?**

A. The A82 has a number of controlled crossing points.

**Q. Various people were looking for confirmation whether they would be affected or not.**

A. Individual outcomes for those presently in receipt of school transport will be provided.

**Q. Question about transport from Renton, as there are concerns of safety walking from Renton due to roads, lorries, safety, blind spots.**

A. Children and young people travelling from Renton to OLSP would still be provided with transportation on the grounds of safety.

**Comment. Concern re reliability of bus from Milton. Noted that on occasion First Bus drives past the stop as does not want to pick up school pupils.**

**Q. Query if there would be an increase in First Buses due to increased demand?**

A. Should the recommendation be implemented, we will provide local service operators with the data we have showing the number of children and young people we would no longer be transporting.

**Q. Timeframe for dedicated serviced (2024) - will this end in 24 and would we have to go through this process again?**

A. If implemented, we would propose to end the dedicated services for those no longer eligible at the start of session 2024/25, so they would still have transport up until then.

**Comment. On understanding the health benefits, some routes may be considered safe to walk but not safe due to behaviours.**

**Q. What provision will be in place for ASN children?**

A. Transport provision for children with ASN is not governed by the same criteria, and individual assessments and outcomes are made for individual needs. ASN queries can be followed up with the school, with a 'Team Around the Child' meeting in the first instance.

**Comment. Safe routes may not be the same for all due to behaviour of children - noted removal of crossing patrollers.**

**Comment. Suggested that there are not any educational benefits from this.**

**Q. Who walked the routes and are the results published?**

A. Routes have been walked by Education Transport and checked by Roads. Documentation can be provided.

**Q. Will the safety report be independently verified?**

A. This has not been a requirement that we have been made aware of, but will discuss further with Corporate Health & Safety.

**Q. Does this take in to account pupils who are carrying art work, instruments, time for exams etc. and the stress/anxiety this could cause pupils.**

A. Adults were involved in the assessment of routes with an understanding of the needs of children attending school.

**Q. If we don't agree with the report will there be time to walk the route to log disagreement?**

A. Yes.

**Q. The bus will be picking up in Milton so why not pick up at Garshake?**

A. The size of vehicle used is determined by the number of pupils being transported. There are occasions where there are spare seats on vehicles, which are offered through our 'Privilege Seat' process. Further information can be found about this on the Education Transport page of the website.

**Q. Where is the saving? Kids who are being put off the bus are being put at risk.**

A. The saving is being made by no longer paying for the transportation of some pupils.

**Comment. The traffic is fast on the A82 and poses a risk to life.**

**Comment. Weather is awful, and kids will have to walk far in it.**

**Q. Further question on reliability of busses which don't stop and make pupils late for school.**

A. Reliability of service would be a matter for the operator.

**Q. Could we look at savings from elsewhere (Young Scot Cards)?**

A. Savings would be made from not paying for a bus pass for those already making use of service buses and their Young Scot card.

**Q. Brucehill/Castlehill/Westcliff - people living in different streets would be not eligible from someone living in the next street. Would the bus pick them up?**

A. The bus would only pick up those eligible for transport, or those with a privilege seat.

**Q. Would we be looking at smaller busses for areas?**

A. The size or type of vehicle is determined by the operator on the basis of the number of pupils transported.

**Q. What is the course of action if disagree with safe route?**

A. A process is already in place for such queries. If you contact education transport they will be able to assist.

**Q. Request for slides to be made public.**

A. Slides will be published on the consultation page of the West Dunbartonshire website.

### **Next Steps**

LM addressed what will happen next in the consultation. The consultation remains open until midnight on 9<sup>th</sup> May 2023, and anyone wishing to make their views on the proposal known can do so in a number of ways including: online survey (this asks whether you are in favour of the proposal - yes or no), by phone, in writing, or by email. At the end of the consultation period all documents and views obtained through the consultation process are collated and shared with Education Scotland, who will undertake fieldwork to assist them with writing an independent report on the consultation, and respond to Laura Mason. Andrea McMillan and Sheila Brown from Education Scotland will undertake meetings with parents/staff/children from a number of schools affected in the week beginning 15<sup>th</sup> May 2023. A report including recommendation will be submitted to the Education Services Committee in July 2023 to make a final decision.

### **Close of Meeting**

LM thanked everyone for attending and reminded those attending that views on the consultation can be made through the online survey, by email letter, phone or through an informal chat and you have until 9<sup>th</sup> May 2023 to submit your response.