

West Dunbartonshire Council

Report by the Executive Director of Educational Services

Council Meeting: 28 May 2008

Subject: Free School Transport Provision for Eligible Primary 1 Pupils during the Initial Six Weeks of the School Session

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1** To present to the Council for consideration information on the cost implications of extending school to home transport for Primary 1 children eligible for free school transport, attending school in the mornings only during the first six weeks of the school session.

2. Background

- 2.1** Councillor Black presented a motion at the May meeting of the Full Council raising issues regarding the provision of free school transport to Primary 1 pupils. The motion read as follows:

“This Council requests a report on the cost of providing transport for those primary school children who attend half day only at the start of term. This lack of provision has been an appalling omission on the part of the Council in previous years and has impacted unfavourably on primary school children who cannot by virtue of distance that they have to travel be expected to walk to school.

“This Council recognises that the regeneration of the schools’ estate contributes to this problem and will in future endeavour to make proper provision for all school transport especially for primary school pupils. The intention of this report would be to evaluate the cost of providing Lunch time arrangements which should be made for small children during the first month or 6 weeks in order that they will in fact have transport arrangements made for them and not be abandoned at the school site that they attend. We have a responsibility to ensure that travel provision is adequate and this glaring omission is unacceptable and therefore a report will be brought forward to Council by adoption of this motion”.

- 2.2** As the motion indicates, all Primary 1 pupils currently attend school during mornings only for their first six weeks at school. Pupils entitled to free transport are currently able to use this entitlement only in the morning on their way to school; the responsibility for taking them home at lunch time rests with parents/guardians.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** The projected roll for pupils starting Primary 1 in August 2008 is 967; it is estimated that 15 of these children will be entitled to free home to school transport. This is based on applications for free transport received to date; 9 Primary 1 children are eligible in the current school session.
- 3.2** West Dunbartonshire Council's agents for school transport, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT), requested information through their national transport network, Association of Transport Co-ordinating Officers (ATCO), on which Scottish Local Authorities currently transport their Primary 1 pupils home on the reduced school days. SPT report that they are aware of only one Authority in Scotland who makes this type of provision (Midlothian).
- 3.3** Under the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 Local Authorities have a statutory duty to provide free transport for pupils under the age of eight if they live two miles or more from school. West Dunbartonshire Council's policy is more generous in also providing free transport for primary school pupils who live between one and two miles from school.
- 3.4** The same Act states that parents or guardians have the final responsibility for the safety of pupils on the journey to and from school.
- 3.5** The 15 children due to start school in August who we know live more than a mile from school and are therefore entitled to free transport could be accommodated by Educational Services' fleet of buses operated by Internal Transport. The cost would be in the region of £1,200. An additional cost would be the loss of income earned by undertaking school trips and could result in "downtime" drivers' charges in the region of £1,000.
- 3.6** The new arrangement is not subject to tendering arrangements and could be implemented in time for the new school session.

4. Personnel Issues

- 4.1** This change in policy would have a moderate impact on workload for key staff.

5. Financial Implications

- 5.1** The anticipated cost to the council of providing lunch time transport for the 15 children known to be eligible for free transport would be in the region of £2,200.

6. Risk Assessment

6.1 There would be no significant risk to service delivery as a result of this change of policy.

7. Conclusions

7.1 To the best of SPT's knowledge, should West Dunbartonshire Council agree a change in policy to provide lunch time school to home transport it would be one of only two Scottish Local Authorities to do so.

7.2 The cost of extending transport for Primary 1 children entitled to free transport is moderate and could be accommodated within existing budgets.

8. Recommendations

8.1 The Council is invited to note the estimated additional costs of providing lunch time school to home transport for the small number of children entitled to free transport by Internal transport.

8.2 The Council is invited to approve a change to policy to provide for lunch time school to home transport for Primary 1 pupils for the first six weeks of the school session commencing in August 2008.

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Background Papers: No background papers

Wards Affected: 1,2,3,5