

MINUTES OF A MEETING OF THE CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE POLICY AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE HELD AT COUNTY HALL, CHELMSFORD, ON THURSDAY 5 JULY 2012**County Councillors present:**

T Chapman (Chairman)	I Grundy
S Barker (Vice-Chairman)	E Hart
J Baugh	T Higgins (Vice-Chairman)
R Callender	L Mead
J Deakin	D Morris

Non-Elected Voting Members present:

Mr R Carson
Rev R Jordan

The following Members were also present:

Councillor R Gooding
Councillor C Riley

The following officers were present in support throughout the meeting:

Graham Redgwell	Governance Officer
Matthew Waldie	Committee Officer

The meeting opened at 10.00 am.

1. Apologies and Substitutions

The Committee Officer reported the receipt of the following apologies:

Apologies	Substitutes
Cllr S Hillier	
Cllr R Pearson	
Cllr T Sargent	
Cllr J Young	
Mr S Geddes	--

2. Declarations of Interest

Councillor Higgins declared that she is on the management committee of Stepping Stones Nursery, Colchester (specifically in relation to the consideration of respite care under the item on home to school transport).

3. Minutes

The minutes of the meeting of the Children and Young People Policy and Scrutiny Committee held on 14 June 2012 were approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

4. Matters Arising

Members requested that a Forward Look be attached to every agenda in future.

5. Cycle allowance and cycle purchase scheme

Members considered report CYP/17/12, setting out the proposed Cycle Allowance and Cycle Purchase Scheme, and CYP_SCR_031, a scoping document in respect of these cycle schemes and of the provision of Home to School Transport. The Chairman welcomed Emma Toublic, Head of SCF Strategic Transport and Awards, and Nick Roberts, Passenger Transport Development and Delivery Manager, to the meeting.

Mrs Toublic drew attention to the following basic elements being put forward for consideration by the Cabinet Member.

1. Under the proposed Cycle Allowance scheme, parents of secondary age pupils would be paid £50 per term, where there was an entitlement to free transport but the pupils wished to travel to school by bicycle. This would only be payable if the cost of transport exceeded the allowance.
2. Under the proposed Cycle Purchase Scheme, a payment not exceeding £250 would be made, under the same conditions, to pay for the purchase of a cycle, along with other necessary equipment, and suitable road safety training.

She then responded to Members' questions.

Numbers. Although approximately 22,000 pupils could be eligible for the Scheme (including 3,200 over 16s), take up was likely to be modest - 100 or so were expected. Peterborough City Council, for example, had a take up of 30. In response to the suggestion that cycling would not be an attractive prospect to older pupils, Mrs Toublic pointed out that the YEA (who had been consulted) had indicated that it would be good for this older age group, as it would give them greater flexibility in time of travel, in keeping with the more irregular timetabling encountered post GCSE.

This would not affect the continued provision of a bus service. The County Council has a statutory duty to provide "transport", although this is not defined in legislation.

Costs. The £50 per pupil per term compared well to the average £3.80 cost per day of providing public transport. With regard to the purchase scheme, the Council would aim to achieve economies by bulk buying. After the initial cost of (up to) £250, a further £50 a term would be paid, to cover maintenance, etc.

Security. In the event of the theft of a cycle, although the responsibility for the cycle would rest with the pupil's family, the County Council would take into consideration any relevant circumstances, particularly in respect of low income families. Most schools now have secure housing for bicycles; the Council has been proactive in this area, and still have subsidies available to schools. Members supported the use of tracking/coding of bicycles, where practicable.

Risk Assessment. This had been carried out, as described in the agenda item. A definitive legal opinion was being sought on the overall position, with regard to the County Council's liability, in the case of an accident. It had been suggested that the risk to the County Council was no greater than it would be in providing other forms of transport. Parents would be responsible for the maintenance of the cycle and the use of the Bikeability service would be made available.

Involvement of families. In response to a Member's suggestion, Mrs Toublic agreed that they might consider providing bicycles to primary school pupils, on the understanding that they could cycle with the parents. She pointed out that there would be issues around primary school pupils cycling on their own.

Weather. This was not felt to be a significant issue. Parents already had the responsibility to ensure pupils were ready for collection at coach pick-up points, up to a mile distance from home and it was not seen as being different to this.

The Committee expressed support for the proposed Scheme, endorsing its green elements, but it requested further figures, particularly relating to other authorities which had already had a similar scheme already in place. It also asked for a progress report in due course, on the basis that the proposals were agreed by the Cabinet Member.

6. Home to school transport

Members received report CYP/18/12, setting out the County Council's current policy on Home to School transport.

Mrs Troublie drew attention to the following main elements.

The County Council must provide transport in a number of instances, mostly based on the location or accessibility of the school being attended, with lower thresholds applied to those in Lower Income Families. Essex County Council may also provide transport on a discretionary basis, according to a limited number of conditions, which were listed in the agenda item.

It was noted that the Council sets certain requirements for all operators, including that each driver holds an advanced CRB certificate. This goes beyond statutory requirements.

Members then looked at specific issues.

Costs. These had gone down by over £3.6 million since 2009/10. One policy that helped achieve this was paying a mileage allowance to parents to take the children themselves, to special schools, instead of providing a bus or taxi service. This was often liked by parents, as it gave them greater flexibility and control.

There had been a marked increase in the number of Post 16 pupils, but a decrease in spend had been achieved by making slight policy changes, for example by requiring parents to take their children to pick up points.

The extension of the school leaving age is likely to incur an additional cost of £350,000. A paper is being written for Cabinet's consideration to look at Post 16 transport and to propose making certain minor changes, to enable this to be contained within the budget. Other local authorities are considering removing transport for Post 16s, as the requirement is to provide access to learning, but not necessarily transport. The Committee drew attention to two particular issues: the transition of pupils from local schools to specialist schools, and lengthy journeys being undertaken by those attending specialist colleges. They asked for these to be covered in this Cabinet paper.

The County Council is trying to encourage the use of standard bus services, which are also used by non-school passengers. This should encourage commercial investment. The Council does not have influence on public operators but would like to have more, one aim being creating a link between the commercial services and the County's subsidised ones. It generally has a good relationship with most operators. In respect of Personalised Transport Budgets, the aim is to have all likely transport needs assessed by one team and for them to produce one budget, with resulting appropriate payments. This is being taken forward and is being seen as a trail blazer in national terms.

"Student Behaviour Initiative". Poor behaviour was a problem on school transport, so the Council initiated a programme to educate pupils, starting at primary school age, by visiting schools (using drama and DVDs, for instance) in a pro-active manner. The Charman recommended that

Members see these student behaviour training sessions for themselves and asked Mr Roberts to provide a list of dates for circulation to the Committee, both for the rest of this term and in the autumn, when available.

Provision of schools own transport. It was suggested that, now that schools were increasingly in control of their own budgets, that they should take on the responsibility – and costs – of home to school transport. Mrs Toublic pointed out that the Department for Education had no intention of changing these requirements, as any changes would impact on schools admissions. Some other local authorities had tried devolving budgets to schools, but with limited success.

Framework Contracts. The use of these is being explored. At present these cover only 10% of children. The intention is to extend this, but it is proving difficult, as the legislation is antiquated, dating back to the 1940s.

Academies/free schools. The Council uses traditional priority admission areas for transport purposes. A newly set up school could define its catchment as the whole of the county. In response to this issue, some local authorities have limited their provision. The new free school falls within the “Five Parishes” area of Brentwood. The current situation with this area is an anomaly and may well need to be considered as a specific issue.

Respite transport. Councillor Higgins suggested more could be done here, to provide more information on what is done, and greater clarity for parents. Mrs Toublic agreed to ask a member of her team to contact Councillor Higgins, to discuss this matter. The Committee will receive an update at its September meeting.

Reduced fares for young people. In response to the suggestion that the reduced cost travel might be reintroduced (using BITE cards or similar), Mr Roberts pointed out that the scheme had been very expensive and take-up had been limited. However, he needed to educate operators here, to convince them that they should see such schemes not as threats but as opportunities for their business.

Staggered starts for schools. Mr Roberts pointed out that efforts have been made to introduce staggered starts, to ease congestion, but this has proved unpopular with schools. Schools tend not to be very flexible, and changing times can prove complex. Academies/free schools may introduce such changes, but probably with less consultation with the Council.

Automatic Vehicle Location. A proposal is currently out to tender.

“Point of Integration”. In response to the suggestion that the general public should be allowed to use school buses, particularly in rural areas which are often poorly served, Mrs Toublic pointed out that there was a considerable level of opposition to such mixed use from parents. They seemed concerned over the integration of children with adults. However, this would seem a sensible approach and she will take this forward.

The Chairman thanked Mrs Toublic and Mr Roberts for their very helpful contribution to the meeting. She reminded them that Members would like to see the policy document on Post 16 transport, when it is available, with a view to providing some comments on this to the Cabinet Member.

7. Dates of future meetings

The dates were noted. The date of the next meeting was confirmed as:

Thursday 6 September. Committee Room 1. Members’ pre-meeting at 9.15am.

8. Bus Users Transport Groups

In the light of the discussion under Item 6, above, Councillor Riley brought Members' attention to the Bus Users Transport Groups. He asked Members to encourage those who had public transport issues to attend these meetings when possible, so that problems may be drawn to the attention of those operating the services.

The meeting closed at 11.25 am.

Chairman