

For: (x) <table border="1"> <tr> <td>Executive</td> <td><input checked="" type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> <tr> <td>CLMT</td> <td><input type="checkbox"/></td> </tr> </table> Meeting Date: 29 April 2013 Report of: Director – Children & Learning Report author: Debbie Craig (Admissions & Planning Manager)	Executive	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	CLMT	<input type="checkbox"/>	Agenda Item Number: 9
Executive	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>				
CLMT	<input type="checkbox"/>				

Subject: Proposed Changes to the Council's Home to School Transport Policy in respect of Denominational Transport Lead Executive Member(s): Cllr Waheed Akbar Wards Affected: All	Consultations:	(x)
	Councillors	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Scrutiny	<input type="checkbox"/>
	Stakeholders	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Others	<input type="checkbox"/>

Recommendations 1. That Executive consider the results of the consultation and agrees to implement Option 1 with a one-off subsidy of £420k split between the Luton schools affected, with a very small proportion retained to facilitate a hardship fund for pupils currently in receipt of free denominational transport to an out of Borough school. The subsidy will be apportioned on a pro rata basis according to the number of pupils, in receipt of free transport, attending each school.
Background 2. Denominational transport is discretionary except for secondary pupils, aged 11-16, from low income families ¹ who qualify for free transport to their nearest state funded denominational school within 2-15 miles of their home. 3. Neighbouring Councils have already withdrawn or are in the process of withdrawing discretionary denominational transport.
The current position 4. The Council's current Home to School Transport Policy provides free transport if a child is attending the nearest maintained school with vacancies, which provides for their religion or belief, providing that the child has been admitted to the school on denominational grounds and that the distance criteria ² are met.
Goals and Objectives 5. To reduce expenditure in this area to contribute to the Council's savings targets.

¹ Low income is defined as pupils who receive free school meals, or whose parents receive maximum working tax credit.

² Distance criteria: between 2-15 miles of the home for children under 8. Between 3-15 miles of the home for primary phase children aged 8-11. Between 2-15 miles of the home for secondary pupils, aged 11-16, from low income families. Between 3-15 miles of the home for secondary pupils who do not meet the low income criteria.

Proposal

6. The current costs relating to denominational transport are set out below:

Cardinal Newman Transport	£403,848
Secondary Out of Borough Denominational Transport	£9667
Primary Denominational Transport	£111,000

7. The cost of providing discretionary home to school transport could increase further if a faith based Free School were to be approved in, or within travelling distance of, Luton.

8. Stakeholders were consulted on the following two options:

Option 1:

9. Withdrawal of funding for all non-statutory transport with effect from September 2013. This would include the withdrawal of free transport for pupils currently entitled to discretionary support under the existing transport policy.

10. This option would result in an approximate saving of £278.6k in 2013/14 and £487.8k in 2014/15 depending on the eligibility for free transport in future cohorts.

Option 2:

11. Withdraw funding for discretionary denominational transport with effect from September 2013, except for those pupils in Key Stage 4 who would continue to receive transport until the end of Year 11. This approach would phase out free discretionary denominational transport over a two year period as new pupils moving into Key Stage 4 from September 2014 onwards would not be eligible for free discretionary denominational transport.

12. This option would result in approximate savings of £198.8K in 2013/14, £411.3K in 2014/15 and £470.7K in 2015/16 and £487.8K in 2016/17 and thereafter.

13. There have been over 900 responses to the consultation. 76% considered that option 1 would have a 'very big impact' on their family. A further 10% considered that option 1 would have a 'fairly big impact' on their family.

14. 53% of respondents thought that option 2 would have a 'very big impact' on their family and 17% considered that it would have a 'fairly big impact'.

15. The main themes arising from the consultation are set out below:

- Adverse financial impact on parents – especially those with more than one child.
- Families would not be able to afford to send their child(ren) to Cardinal Newman Catholic School.
- Adverse impact on pupil numbers at Cardinal Newman and a fear that the School would close. Concern that a reduction in pupil numbers would reduce school funding and result in teacher redundancies.
- Alleged previous agreement that the former County Borough would provide free transport to Cardinal Newman in perpetuity due to the School's location.
- Reduces choice for parents.
- The withdrawal of funding is discriminating against Catholic families.

- Non Catholic pupils are likely to be allocated Cardinal Newman as places will be available if there is a drop in the number of Catholic pupils attending the School.
- There would be pressure on places at local schools.
- Cardinal Newman is a good school which has consistently delivered high academic standards. It has the lowest levels of students who are NEET (Not in Education, Employment and Training) in the town.
- Numbers attending Catholic primary schools could decrease if Cardinal Newman is not considered to be an attractive option due to transport costs.
- Breaking up of friendship groups, if pupils can't afford to travel to Cardinal Newman. Concerns about bullying if pupils have to change school.
- Concern that pupils will need to move to a local school which would disrupt their education.
- Concern that pupils will not be able to get a direct bus to school.
- Increased traffic congestion and pollution.
- Parents already contribute to building costs for Cardinal Newman School as the school receives less capital funding as it is a voluntary aided school.
- Fear of safety for children walking rather than travelling by bus.
- Concern that pupils will not be able to access a Catholic education.
- Those already paying will be impacted upon if direct routes are cut.
- May have chosen differently in the September 2013 high school transfer round if these proposals were known then.
- Council Tax keeps going up – would rather it is spend on things to benefit the whole community.
- Comments on money wasted on bus way, Love Luton festival & Barnfield rebuilds.

16. Two petitions have been received opposing the proposal to remove funding for discretionary denominational transport. An e-petition has also been submitted, however, this cannot be considered as the addresses of those signing the petition have not been supplied.
17. The Headteacher of Cardinal Newman Catholic School has suggested an alternative option for phasing out funding for discretionary denominational transport. The School proposes that new Year 7 intakes would not be entitled to free discretionary denominational transport from September 2014. This proposal would mean that parents applying for a place at Cardinal Newman Catholic School and other faith schools from September 2014 will be made aware that free discretionary denominational transport will not be provided. However, this proposal would phase out discretionary denominational transport over five financial years and four academic years in the secondary sector and a seven financial year period in the primary sector.
18. In order to aid the implementation of Option 1, it is proposed that the Council provides a one-off subsidy of £420k split between the Luton schools affected, with a very small proportion retained for a hardship fund for pupils currently in receipt of free denominational transport to an out of Borough school. Each Luton school in receipt of the subsidy would determine how it would be used and the period of its use.
19. The establishment of a Charitable Education Trust is also being explored as this could also provide financial assistance to families. Any Trust would rely on Luton businesses donating funding to provide practical help to support the education of children in Luton e.g. financial assistance towards the cost of clothing, equipment, books and travel. If a Trust can be developed, families facing financial hardship (but don't meet the low income criteria for transport) could apply for assistance with transport costs.

Key Risks

Key Risk	Mitigation
The withdrawal of funding could result in pupils	Low income families will still receive free

opting for alternative schools, due to the cost of transport.	transport. A one-off bursary will also be paid to the schools affected to aid the introduction of this proposal.
Capacity of non-faith secondary schools to absorb pupils seeking a more local school.	There is sufficient capacity in the system to be able to offer pupils an alternative school within three miles of their home (statutory walking distance).
Maintaining direct bus routes to Cardinal Newman Catholic School	Commercial operators have indicated a willingness to run direct services to the School. Alternatively, the School could contract bus/coach operator(s) to run direct routes.
Increase traffic and congestion	There is the opportunity to maintain direct bus routes to the school. The bursary could provide targeted support to families for whom bus fares are most problematic e.g. those with more than one child attending the school.

Consultations

20. The following stakeholders were consulted:

- Parents of pupils currently receiving free transport on denominational grounds.
- Parents of pupils attending Luton Catholic schools and Wenlock Junior School.
- Young people of sixth form age and their parents.
- Headteachers and Chairs of Governors of all Luton schools.
- Headteachers and Chairs of Governors of any out of Borough schools affected by the proposed changes.
- Roman Catholic Diocese of Northampton
- Church of England Diocese of St Albans.
- MPs and Councillors
- Central Bedfordshire Council and Hertfordshire County Council.

Appendices attached:

Appendix A – IIA Report

Background Papers:

Results of the consultation.

IMPLICATIONS

For Executive reports

- grey boxes must be completed
- all statements must be cleared by an appropriate officer

For CLMT Reports

Clearance is not required

		Clearance – agreed by:
Legal	The legal implications are contained within the body of this report. It is a legal requirement to consult relevant stakeholders prior to making a decision that will affect the Council's Home to School Transport Policy.	Graham Cole – Solicitor, Legal Services – on 16.4.13
Finance	The financial implications are contained within the body of this report. The offer of a one-off payment will require the use of reserves (available from the 2012/13 projected underspend) and the proposal	Steve Dickman, Interim Finance Manager, Children and Learning has seen and agreed the

	will ensure that the budgeted saving from this item for 2013/14 and future years will be achieved.	financial implications Monday 15 th April 2013.
Integrated Impact Assessment (IIA) – Key Points		
Equalities/ Cohesion/Inclusion (Social Justice)	The IIA shows a negative impact in respect of religion/belief. The continuation of free transport for students from low income families and the provision of a one off subsidy to the schools affected will help to mitigate this impact.	Maureen Drummond, Social Justice Adviser, 15 April 2013.
Environment	Any reduction in bus travel would have an adverse impact on the environment if students were driven to school.	Strategy and Sustainability Officer, 15 April 2013.
Health	There is a beneficial health impact for children/young people who walk or cycle to school.	Chimeme Egburah, Advanced Health Improvement Specialist, 16 April 2013

FOR EXECUTIVE ONLY - Options:

- a) To approve the recommendations
- b) Not to approve the recommendations