

North Lanarkshire Council Report

Education, Children & Families Committee

Does this report require to be approved? Yes No

Ref MOH/CMcD

Date 19/11/24

Petition for Immediate Action on School Transport Cuts and Public Safety Concerns in North Lanarkshire

From Michelle O'Halleron, Acting Chief Officer (Education - North)

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Executive Summary

A petition has been received regarding the changes to school transport distance eligibility criteria which came into effect for Secondary School pupils from August 2024 and is due to come into effect for Primary School pupils from August 2025. This report outlines the petition request, the service consideration of the petition and proposes a response.

Recommendations

It is recommended that the Education, Children and Families Committee:-

- (1) Acknowledge the contents of the petition.
- (2) Note that the decision to move to the statutory distance criteria was taken by the Council on 23 February, and as a consequence the report be remitted to the next meeting of the Council

The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority	Enhance participation, capacity, and empowerment across our communities
Ambition statement	(20) Improve the involvement of communities in the decisions, and development of services and supports, that affect them
Programme of Work	Sustainable Futures

1. Background

- 1.1 The following petition was received by Education, Children & Families, Chief Officer (Education - North) with 1724 signatures recorded via the change.org website. The petition was initiated on 16th August 2024 by Councillor Greg Lennon.

"We, Councillors from Progressive Change North Lanarkshire, have been approached by our constituents to initiate this petition. We, the undersigned, express our deep concern over the recent decision to cut school transport services in North Lanarkshire, which parents report has resulted in significant and detrimental impacts on their children's journey times to and from school. The abrupt cessation of school transport provisions has extended the daily commute by 2 hours for many children, forcing them to endure longer, more arduous journeys, ultimately affecting their ability to arrive at school on time and ready to learn. This situation is further compounded by the severe lack of public transport options available in many areas, leaving parents and students with few, if any, viable alternatives.

Parents are particularly alarmed by the actions of certain Labour MPs who, rather than addressing the broader issue and vote in favour of parents, sought to capitalise on the situation by proposing limited private transport provisions. These proposals have been implemented in only one or two select areas, leaving the majority of affected families without any form of relief. Even in the areas where additional provision has been made, the services are woefully inadequate, often leading to overcrowding on the provision and further impacting public bus services, which fails to meet the needs of our communities.

Furthermore, parents are gravely concerned about the so-called "safe walking routes" that many children are now being forced to use. Parents across the district have raised legitimate and urgent concerns regarding the safety of these routes, particularly for younger children. Despite their concerns, parents have advised that the local authority has provided little to no information to parents on the criteria used to deem these routes as safe. This lack of transparency only heightens parents fears for our children's well-being and safety, especially as we approach the winter months and darker evenings.

In light of these issues, we, the signatories, demand that North Lanarkshire Council take the following actions immediately:

- 1. Pause the current school transport cuts until a thorough review can be conducted.*
- 2. Initiate a comprehensive review of the safe walking routes, including input from parents, schools, and independent safety experts, to ensure that all routes are genuinely safe for children.*
- 3 Provide clear and detailed information on the decision-making process that led to the designation of these routes as safe.*
- 4. Schedule a full debate at the next meeting of North Lanarkshire Council to discuss these issues, with a roll call vote on the necessary mitigations the council can introduce to ensure the safety and well-being of all children affected by these transport cuts.*

This petition is a call to action for the Council Members to take immediate steps to address the serious and widespread concerns of parents and community members. The safety and education of our children must be prioritised over any short-term cost-saving measures introduced at the last full council meeting of North Lanarkshire. We

urge the Council to listen to the voices of its constituents and take the necessary steps to protect our children's futures."

2. Report

- 2.1 On 23 February 2023, as part of the budget setting process, the council decided to consult on changes to the existing qualifying mileage limits for free mainstream school transport as a way of saving up to £3.6 million against a backdrop of having to save £65 million over the next three years.
- 2.2 Prior to the consultation, North Lanarkshire Council provided free school transport for:
- Any primary pupil who lives **more than one mile** from their catchment school
 - Any secondary pupil who lives **more than two miles** from their catchment school
- 2.3 The law states that councils must provide free school transport for:
- Any child under 8 years of age who lives **more than two miles** from their school
 - Any child over 8 years of age who lives **more than three miles** from their school
- 2.4 The changes bring the council's school transport policy closer to legislative requirements, and other councils, by providing free school transport for:
- Any primary pupil who lives **more than two miles** from their catchment school.
 - Any secondary pupil who lives **more than three miles** from their catchment.
- 2.5 The consultation was conducted in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and carried out over the period 27 February 2023 to 1 May 2023 during which time all interested parties were invited to submit comments via an online questionnaire. In addition to online digital engagement nine public meetings were held across the authority as follows:
- Tuesday 14 March - Airdrie Academy
 - Wednesday 15 March - St Andrew's High
 - Thursday 16 March - Chryston High
 - Monday 20 March - Calderhead High
 - Tuesday 21 March - Bellshill Academy
 - Wednesday 22 March - Our Lady's High (Cumbernauld)
 - Tuesday 28 March - Our Lady's High (Motherwell)
 - Wednesday 29 March - Clyde Valley High
 - Thursday 30 March - Kilsyth Academy
- The public meetings allowed stakeholders to attend in person and discuss specific issues directly with council officers.
- 2.6 A full consultation report, including detailed analysis of the responses received was submitted for consideration by Policy and Strategy Committee prior to approval on 8th June 2023.
- 2.7 Following approval at Policy and Strategy Committee a programme of walking route assessments was undertaken by independent Roads & Infrastructure Specialists for secondary school transport routes.
- 2.8 Walking Route Assessments are undertaken in accordance with North Lanarkshire Council's "Walked Routes to School" Policy which utilises guidance from the West of Scotland Road Safety Forum. The methodology identified within the guidance and

used when conducting assessments has been adopted by Local Authorities across Scotland.

- 2.9 As part of the review process, walking route assessments provided by the independent Roads and Infrastructure Specialists were reviewed by Officers from Education & Families and the Roads and Infrastructure Team.
- 2.10 Parents and carers of secondary age children were also given the opportunity to request a review of their child's eligibility as part of the review process.
- 2.11 The petition requests that the council "pause the current transport cuts". The Service would advise that the changes to eligibility criteria were approved by the full Council and any changes to this decision can only be made by the full Council.

3. Measures of success

N/A

4. Supporting documentation

N/A

Michelle O'Halleron

**Michelle O'Halleron
Acting Chief Officer (Education North)**

5. Impacts

5.1 Public Sector Equality Duty and Fairer Scotland Duty Does the report contain information that has an impact as a result of the Public Sector Equality Duty and/or Fairer Scotland Duty? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact? If Yes, has an assessment been carried out and published on the council's website? https://www.northlanarkshire.gov.uk/your-community/equalities/equality-and-fairer-scotland-duty-impact-assessments Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
5.2 Financial impact Does the report contain any financial impacts? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, have all relevant financial impacts been discussed and agreed with Finance? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?
5.3 HR policy impact Does the report contain any HR policy or procedure impacts? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, have all relevant HR impacts been discussed and agreed with People Resources? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact? Financial savings of £3.6m has been approved for home to school transport to be achieved by August 2025. Potential changes to walking route assessment criteria could impact on the achievement of these savings.
5.4 Legal impact Does the report contain any legal impacts (such as general legal matters, statutory considerations (including employment law considerations), or new legislation)? Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If Yes, have all relevant legal impacts been discussed and agreed with Legal and Democratic? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact? The changes to school transport distance eligibility criteria bring North Lanarkshire School Transport provision closer in line with statutory requirements
5.5 Data protection impact Does the report / project / practice contain or involve the processing of personal data? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, is the processing of this personal data likely to result in a high risk to the data subject? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If Yes, has a Data Protection Impact Assessment (DPIA) been carried out and e-mailed to dataprotection@northlan.gov.uk Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
5.6 Technology / Digital impact

Does the report contain information that has an impact on either technology, digital transformation, service redesign / business change processes, data management, or connectivity / broadband / Wi-Fi?

Yes No

If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?

Where the impact identifies a requirement for significant technology change, has an assessment been carried out (or is scheduled to be carried out) by the Enterprise Architecture Governance Group (EAGG)?

Yes No

5.7 Environmental / Carbon impact

Does the report / project / practice contain information that has an impact on any environmental or carbon matters?

Yes No

If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?

5.8 Communications impact

Does the report contain any information that has an impact on the council's communications activities?

Yes No

If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?

5.9 Risk impact

Is there a risk impact?

Yes No

If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the key risks and potential impacts, highlighting where the risk(s) are assessed and recorded (e.g. Corporate or Service or Project Risk Registers), and how they are managed?

5.10 Armed Forces Covenant Duty

Does the report require to take due regard of the Armed Forces Covenant Duty (i.e. does it relate to healthcare, housing, or education services for in-Service or ex-Service personnel, or their families, or widow(er)s)?

Yes No

If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the provision which has been made to ensure there has been appropriate consideration of the particular needs of the Armed Forces community to make sure that they do not face disadvantage compared to other citizens in the provision of public services.

5.11 Children's rights and wellbeing impact

Does the report contain any information regarding any council activity, service delivery, policy, or plan that has an impact on children and young people up to the age of 18, or on a specific group of these?

Yes No

If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact and the provision that has been made to ensure there has been appropriate consideration of the relevant Articles from the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC).

If Yes, has a Children's Rights and Wellbeing Impact Assessment (CRWIA) been carried out?

Yes No