

North Lanarkshire Council Report

Policy and Strategy Committee

Does this report require to be approved? Yes No

Ref E&F/GMcL

Date 07/12/23

Home to School Transport - Update

From Gerard McLaughlin, Chief Officer (Education – North)

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Executive Summary

On 21 December 2022, following a review of home to school transport by Education and Families, Council endorsed a series of recommendations designed to mitigate significant known risks. These risks included substantially increased costs, ongoing volatility within the transport market and insufficient contractual safeguards leading to unacceptable levels of disruption.

The recommendations aimed to provide a more sustainable, robust and efficient operating model that would maximise available resources, strengthen contingency and increase opportunities to further promote the benefits of active travel within communities.

The recommendations included consideration of potential cost reductions via an increase in free school transport qualifying distance bringing the Council's position closer to the statutory minimum and in line with most other local authorities.

This report provides an update on progress against each recommendation.

Recommendations

It is recommended that Policy and Strategy Committee:

- 1) Acknowledge the progress made within home to school transport.

The Plan for North Lanarkshire

Priority	Improve the health and wellbeing of our communities
Ambition statement	(10) Engage with children, young people, parents, carers, and families to help all children and young people reach their full potential
Programme of Work	Statutory / corporate / service requirement

1. Background

- 1.1 On 16 August 2022, Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT) contacted North Lanarkshire Council to advise that they had failed in their obligation to arrange transport for over 1600 children and young people due to attend our schools the next day.
 - 1.2 The impact of this failure was far-reaching and led to substantial disruption to learning and other service delivery, significant reputational damage, national media coverage and considerable additional costs to secure internal contingency mitigations via emergency planning procedures.
 - 1.3 On 29 September 2022, Policy and Strategy Committee endorsed proposals for a review of the incident and the wider arrangements around the provision of home to school transport within North Lanarkshire.
 - 1.4 The outcome of the review was presented to Council on 21 December 2022 with a series of recommendations for improvement. These included options to address financial risk by increasing the minimum qualifying distance for free home to school mainstream transport.
 - 1.5 On 23 February 2023, as part of the budget setting process, Council agreed a £3.6 million saving in home to school transport to be facilitated by a statutory consultation on changes to the existing qualifying mileage limits.
 - 1.6 A statutory consultation ran from 27 February 2023 to 01 May 2023 with outcomes presented to Policy and Strategy Committee on 08 June 2023. Education and Families recommended that changes to qualifying mileage limits should be implemented in secondary schools from August 2024 and in primary schools from August 2025. The service has continued to work with others to plan for implementation on this timeframe. This work includes detailed analysis of acceptable walking routes, distance measurement and contractual review.
 - 1.7 In August 2023, following the successful provision of all mainstream transport contracts for session 2023/24, the work of the Education and Families Emergency Transport Group was concluded. A School Travel Redesign Board was formed with an agreed remit to create new and updated policy and practice in relation to school travel within North Lanarkshire. The board will work to deliver agreed changes to eligibility for free home to school transport within the mainstream sector and in doing so accelerate a transition from traditional bus transport to more active and sustainable forms of travel.
 - 1.8 The Board will continue to progress other agreed recommendations. The report below provides an update on each.
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2. Report

- 2.1 *Consider cost reduction options via a decrease in free school transport qualifying distance; and/or increase in existing budget provision via budget setting process to take account of current external transport market conditions and pressures.*
 - 2.1.1 A wide-reaching statutory consultation was carried out and made open to all stakeholders. Feedback was analysed in detail, reported to Policy and Strategy Committee, and used to inform implementation plans.

- 2.1.2 A programme of acceptable walking route assessments began in June 2023 and will run until February 2024. These involve detailed on-site analysis of road and footpath conditions, traffic volume and any previous accident data. These are being mapped against GIS data through specialist software to provide a detailed map for each potential walking route.
- 2.1.3 Further ongoing analysis of this data against the revised mileage limits will provide an accurate determination of the number of pupils who will no longer be eligible for free home to school transport. This in turn will inform procurement arrangements for revised contracts by Strathclyde Partnership for Transport (SPT).
- 2.1.4 It is expected that the number of pupils entitled to free home to school transport will fall by around one third. This equates to approximately 2500 secondary pupils from August 2024 and would reflect anticipated cost savings. A further 800 – 1000 primary pupils are expected to be affected from August 2025. It should be noted however that achievable cost savings may be affected by the number of walking route assessments deemed to be unacceptable. The Council is committed to providing transport where acceptable walking routes are not available. Achievable cost savings may also be affected by ongoing volatility in the transport market. The impact of that volatility will only be known once the market has been tested under new mileage criteria.
- 2.1.5 Walking route assessments will also identify areas for possible upgrade through capital investment.
- 2.1.6 Work will continue to refine data around acceptable walking routes and the likely impacts on future contract requirements. Parents will be advised at that point whether they remain eligible for free home to school transport. Those who do not will be provided with information on the acceptable walking routes within their area and guidance on other supports available.
- 2.2 *Ensure that all eligible pupils are aware of, and have access to, the Scottish Government Young Persons' (Under 22) Free Bus Travel Scheme*
- 2.2.1 Children, young people and their families have been made aware of the Under 22 free bus pass scheme via several direct messaging campaigns, promotion in schools and through the Parent's Portal application process.
- 2.2.2 Uptake of the bus pass continues to rise in North Lanarkshire and currently stands at 57% of all primary pupils and 76% of all secondary pupils.
- 2.2.3 Promotion will continue and uptake will be tracked. Liaison on this issue with SPT will also continue to help ensure, wherever possible, that local provision is able to meet local demand.
- 2.3 *Optimise current in-house transport provision to further enhance future resilience and contingency response.*
- 2.3.1 The number of in-house vehicles and drivers has been increased as a key mitigation against future contract failure via the private market. This additional provision has been required to date on two occasions where contracts have failed. The use of the vehicles has been further optimised by demonstrating a competitively priced alternative to schools for routine trips and excursions.
- 2.4 *Develop a clear and comprehensive revised school transport policy*

2.4.1 A draft outline for a home to school travel policy has been developed and is shown at Appendix 1. This work is ongoing and subject to input from services and external agencies.

2.5 *Other areas*

2.5.1 The service has worked to identify a specialist software solution to assist with distance measurement, walking route assessment, ASN contract management, route optimisation and to improve overall governance, data handling and financial control. This is expected to be operational at the start of 2024.

2.5.2 Work on assessing the environmental impacts of our travel provision is underway. This will take account of our programme of work activity in this area and provide a means of tracking and monitoring.

2.5.3 In line with our proposed School Travel Policy, work is underway to ensure that parents are aware of the option of using their own vehicle for ASN transport rather than a private or council provision. This can offer parents a degree of flexibility and remains within HMRC regulation on travel expenses.

2.5.4 The Agency Agreement between North Lanarkshire Council and SPT has been reviewed in detail and revised to improve accountability and manage more fully the risks the council faces in this aspect of service provision.

3. **Measures of success**

3.1 Successful implementation of changes to eligibility criteria for mainstream home to school transport

3.2 Improvements in the efficiency and effectiveness of home to school travel in North Lanarkshire

4. **Supporting documentation**

Appendix 1 – Home to School Travel Policy – Draft Outline

Gerard J. McLaughlin

Gerard McLaughlin
Chief Officer (Education – North)

5. Impacts

<p>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?</p> <p>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"/></p>
<p>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?</p>
<p>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 type="checkbox"/> If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?</p>
<p>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 type="checkbox"/> No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> If Yes, have all relevant legal impacts been discussed and agreed with Legal and Democratic? Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact?</p>
<p>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"/></p>
<p>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 <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/> If Yes, please provide a brief summary of the impact? Introduction of specialist software solution for home to school transport</p>

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?

Communication with stakeholders on impacts of changes to school transport.

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?

There are significant financial and reputational risks associated with this area of service provision and with future changes. These are recorded within the corporate and project risk registers and managed via the service Risk Management Working Group.

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). The report refers to changes to school transport agreed and assessed in previous reports.

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

Yes No



Home to School Travel Policy Draft Outline

Rationale

- North Lanarkshire Council is committed to helping parents and carers ensure that their children get to and from school safely and on time.
- Most parents and carers in North Lanarkshire choose their own way to travel to and from school. We want to help all our families make the best choice for them, for others and for our environment.
- We want the choices available to be as active as possible.
- We want the choices available to be as environmentally responsible as possible.

How can we help?

Option 1 Walking or wheeling to and from school

This is our preferred option.

How can we help?

- We will provide information on safe walking routes including for wheelchair users i.e. routes that have been risk assessed.
- We will keep routes under review and provide opportunity for parents to raise concerns or issues.
- We will work with schools and parent councils on developing local active travel plans.
- We will identify opportunities for investment in infrastructure.

Option 2 Cycling

How can we help?

- We will work with Bikeability and other partners to promote safer and wider bike use
- We will help remove barriers to bike ownership e.g. work with recycledbikesscotland

Option 3 Using public transport

How can we help?

- We will support the application process for free Under 22 travel
- We will work with transport providers to ensure information is available on local bus routes
- We will work with local operators to promote adequate coverage

Option 4 Private car

Whilst bringing additional traffic and increased carbon emissions around our schools, we recognise that some families who have access to a vehicle may wish to use this either occasionally or as a longer term option.

How can we help?

- We will support schools in developing local traffic management plans.
- We will provide parents with advice on considerate and safe parking
- We will consider the potential benefits of exclusion zones around schools at key times
- We will offer travel expenses to those who qualify for ASN transport but prefer to use their own vehicle

Other options

Shared school transport and taxis

In certain instances, the options outlined above will not be suitable for some families e.g. distance may be too far, available routes are not safe or learners may have impaired mobility. In these circumstances we may be able to help.

In line with current national legislation, North Lanarkshire Council will:

- Review and monitor the travel needs of our children, young people and their families
- Offer free shared transport to younger learners who live more than two miles from their catchment school
- Offer free shared transport to older learners who live more than three miles for their catchment school
- Offer free shared transport, taxi or travel expenses to children with additional support needs who are mobility impaired or attending specialist provision.

These are expensive options and can be affected by volatility within the transport market. These options are also subject to meeting certain criteria. These will be outlined in our application process.

Appendices

- Rules / Code of conduct for assisted transport
- Notification of change of circumstances
- Criteria to be applied for privilege places
- How are walking routes measured and assessed