

The Highland Council

Education, Children and Adult Services Committee 11 February 2015

Agenda Item	18.
Report No	ECAS 33/15

Home to School Transport Policy Review

Report by the Director of Care and Learning

Summary

This report advises Members of the commencement of a review into the Council's Home to School Transport Policy. It is intended that the final report and recommendations will be brought to the May Committee.

1. Background

- 1.1 It has been a number of years since the Council reviewed its school transport policy. Over the course of the past year, there has also been an internal audit report (HH03/001, issued 10/06/2014) which has made recommendations in relation to the review and updating of the existing policy. This report sets out the proposed scope of the review of school transport policy.
- 1.2 The aims of the review will be to:
- improve and strengthen existing procedures and implement current best practice;
 - clarify responsibilities of the Council, contractors, and parents/ guardians;
 - describe current practices and ensure they are clear to parents and other interested parties.

2. Scope of the Review

- 2.1 The substantive issues to be considered within the Review include:
- The potential for introducing a Code of Conduct for pupils while travelling;
 - New provisions on the responsibilities of the Council and contractors for supervision on transport;
 - Availability of privilege places (currently known as concessionary places);
 - Provision to assess entitlement on road safety grounds where parents are unable to accompany their children on a walking route;
 - Definition of travel entitlement for school that have no defined catchment areas;
 - Update to reflect the growing incidences of pupils living at more than one address as a result of parents' marital status.
- 2.2 Other aspects of the existing policy will be clarified or described in more detail.
- 2.3 As members will be aware, application of the school transport policy in Highland and across Scotland is something which has been subject to external scrutiny and challenge. As a result, Counsel's Opinion has been sought and received. The Review will take account of both the QC's opinion and good practice in other authorities.

3. Next Steps

- 3.1 Entitlement to transport affects parents' enrolment decisions. As enrolment happens in January, a Committee decision in 2015 will provide opportunity to introduce new procedures for enrolment in January 2016.

4. Implications

- 4.1 **Resource implications** – certain parts of the Review, such as the assessment of entitlement on road safety grounds where parents are unable to accompany their children on a walking route, and the suggested update to reflect the incidences of pupils living at more than one address, have the potential to increase demands upon the school transport budget. These are potential rather than actual pressures and are currently not quantifiable. Wherever possible, the review will seek to identify efficiency savings.
- 4.2 **Legal implications** – as set out above, a Counsel's Opinion has been sought and received. The Review will take full account of all relevant legislative requirements.
- 4.3 **Equalities implications** – the review will affect school children. Age is not a protected characteristic for the purposes of schools provision. School transport to denominational schools is within the scope of the Review, as is transport provided for pupils with Additional Support Needs. An Equality Impact Assessment will be undertaken as part of the Review.
- 4.4 **Climate Change/Carbon Clever implications** – The proposal will support the Council's climate change agenda by improving and strengthening existing procedures and implementing current best practice in relation to school transport.
- 4.5 **Risk implications** – the review is intended to minimise the risk of legal challenge to the Council's current provision, by clarifying entitlement rights.
- 4.6 **Gaelic implications** – the Review will support the provision of Gaelic medium education by redefining and clarifying school transport entitlement for pupils attending Gaelic Medium education.
- 4.7 **Rural implications** – The Review will encompass all Highland schools, not just those in rural areas, but aspects of the Review, such as the assessment of entitlement on road safety grounds where parents are unable to accompany their children on a walking route, may have the effect of supporting rural communities.

5.	Recommendation
5.1	Members are asked to note the commencement and scope of the Review, and that a further report will be brought to May Committee.

Designation: Director of Care and Learning

Date: 30 January 2015

Authors: Brian Porter, Head of Resources/Ian Jackson, Education Officer