

## APPENDIX SEVEN

### **BUDGET OPTION: TRANSPORT POLICIES**

#### **1.0 OUTLINE OF PROPOSAL**

- 1.1 The Council provides transport for over a thousand people across the borough every day; travelling to schools, colleges, Council facilities and other services.
- 1.2 This option will, if accepted, involve a full review of that transport, with a view to stopping providing transport to some Council services, and instead requiring the people using the services to either contribute to the cost of the transport or find other means.
- 1.3 For home to school transport including post 16 college transport the proposal is to change the Council's transport policies so that the Council provides statutory transport which supports those with the greatest need. The proposal is to phase the changes based on academic year, commencing 2014/15.
- 1.4 The home to school transport has a budget of £4.6m – savings proposed are:
  - The removal of discretionary denominational transport.
  - The removal of Post 16 transport (non SEN).
  - A reduction in the number of students with Special Educational Needs (SEN) eligible for transport. This includes the removal of all Post 16 transport for students with SEN.

#### **2.0 RATIONALE FOR PROPOSAL**

- 2.1 Department for Education benchmarking data indicates that Wirral's SEN Transport spend per capita is relatively high compared to other Local Authorities: Wirral £91, Statistical Neighbour Average £77; Lowest £31; Highest £93. Wirral has higher SEN population than most authorities (Percentage of children with Statements: Wirral 3.3%, National 2.2%). The current policy provides transport for all children with a statement, other Local Authorities do not.

#### **3.0 ACCESSIBILITY OF PROPOSAL**

- 3.1 The option in relation to transport policies for children and adults was published alongside a series of other options from the Chief Executive on November 9<sup>th</sup> 2012. These options were published following an extensive period of consultation during September and October 2012, which focussed on broad principles of policy to gather initial views on how options should be developed.
- 3.2 Residents, staff and stakeholders were provided with a range of information detailing the background, level of savings, potential impact

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and methods of mitigating any potential negative impact for this and all other options. This information included:

Questionnaire: Split into three sections, the questionnaire provided a one paragraph summary of each option and provided the opportunity for respondents to select one of three choices indicating their opinion on the option.

Summary Paper: Three summary papers (one per 'theme') were produced and were available online, at Council buildings and at consultation events. These papers provided a summary of each option, including the level of savings involved and some background information.

Option Paper: For each of the published options, a detailed option paper was available. This paper provided information regarding the background to the option, the potential impact if the option was implemented, proposed methods to mitigate that impact and also the potential savings associated with the option.

- 3.3 The Questionnaire was the primary research tool used in this consultation, and as such it was essential that the document was designed in a way to ensure robust, clear and actionable results. It was also vital to the success of the project to ensure that the questionnaire was produced in a fashion that was accessible, clear and neutral. To ensure that this was the case, Council officers took a number of steps to ensure the questionnaire was externally validated as an effective research and consultation tool.
- 3.4 A draft version of the questionnaire was analysed by an external agency through the Market Research Society. The final draft of the questionnaire was also presented to the members of the Children in Care Council and a group of people with learning disabilities at a Council Day Centre who made further suggestions as to the design and wording of the document.
- 3.5 Further work was also done to ensure accessibility including publishing an interactive Easy Read version, and developing three individual videos, which were used at consultation events, on the Council website and also played through the network of 30 LCD screens in One Stop Shops and Libraries. These videos were designed to more fully explain the context of the options and also provide guidance for how to complete the questionnaire document.

### **4.0 CONSULTATION PROCESS**

- 4.1 An extensive programme of public consultation was completed in relation to all options which were published in November 2012. This programme included over 100 community events at locations such as libraries, supermarkets, cinemas, community centres and children's centres.

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- 4.2 Extensive online promotion of the consultation was also completed, with emails being sent to over 13,000 residents, and the consultation also featured prominently on the Council's website which receives in excess of 1,000 hits per day.
- 4.3 Organisations from the Voluntary, Community and Faith sectors were also actively encouraged to take part in this consultation process.
- 4.4 Detailed consultation meetings were held with the Wirral Schools Forum, Primary Heads, Secondary Heads, Special Heads, School Governors and the Wirral Children's Trust among others, where this and other appropriate budget options were discussed at length. These meetings involved a full discussion of the proposal, its potential impact and the mitigation which could be implemented.

### 5.0 CONSULTATION FEEDBACK

- 5.1 In terms of the public consultation process, the response to the questionnaire demonstrated broad approval from Wirral residents, staff and other stakeholders as to the implementation of the option. The table below shows the response to the public consultation:

<b>Answer Options</b>	<b>Response Percent</b>	<b>Response Count</b>
I support this under the circumstances	35.2%	1691
I accept this if it is absolutely necessary	33.1%	1591
I find this completely unacceptable	31.7%	1520

- 5.2 At the series of meetings with schools and other bodies described above, people attending were provided with detailed information relating to each option. This information contained the details of the proposal, the rationale for the proposal, information as to the potential impact and the suggested mitigation of that impact.
- 5.3 People attending were given the opportunity to ask questions of Council officers and also to have those questions and concerns fed into the consultation process.
- 5.4 It was made clear at these meetings that colleagues from schools, including head teachers and governors, and partners from the Wirral Children's Trust, were concerned as to the potential impact of this option on education in the borough, particularly the impact on a significant number of high risk vulnerable young people.
- 5.5 Concerns were raised by the Diocese that the removal of the denominational transport policy would discourage parents from sending their child to a denominational school.

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- 5.6 It was highlighted at all meetings that reductions in transport funding could potentially lead to a decrease in attendance, particularly for those who are post 16 and at risk of becoming NEET.

### **6.0 POTENTIAL IMPACT IDENTIFIED**

- 6.1 The potential impact on Council staff of implementing this option was provided at the start of the process in the original options paper, and is provided below. Further potential impacts have been identified and discussed with people using services throughout the consultation process.
- 6.2 The option would result in a reduction in School Escort Staff which is commensurate with a reduction in the number of students transported and also transport drivers and attendants.
- 6.3 The changes have the potential to impact on the educational attainment of students, life chances, reduced choice and parental employment opportunities. Other potential impacts are on school attendance, school resources, OFSTED inspections and Department for Education assessments. There is potential to impact on other Council services such as Education Social Welfare, Special Educational Needs teams, Social Work teams, Youth Outreach and Youth Offending Teams. There may be carbon reduction implications as more children may be driven to school with associated road safety implications.
- 6.4 There is also potential for more families or adults requiring assistance from voluntary and community sector organisations following the proposed reduction in services.
- 6.5 Further potential impacts were identified during the course of the consultation, which are described above in points 5.5 and 5.6.

### **7.0 PROPOSED MITIGATION**

- 7.1 It is important that due regard is shown to the concerns highlighted throughout this consultation process from people using the services, their families, carers, and our own workforce. It is proposed that, should this option be considered and recommended by Cabinet and approved at Council that the following factors should be taken into account in the implementation of the option.
- 7.2 There should be a full consultation with students, parents, schools and colleges on any proposed policy changes.
- 7.3 Phasing of the policy change to ensure that transport will not be withdrawn from those currently eligible and at school. Use of travel training in a phased supported way can increase confidence in using public transport for other purposes and can help to prepare the young person for life after education and into adulthood.

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7.4 The consultation process suggested that those who are most vulnerable should be prioritised, particularly those who are at risk of becoming NEET. People suggested that ongoing monitoring of the performance of the service, and associated factors such as attendance, should be reported regularly to the Children's Trust Board as the new policy is phased in.

### **8.0 SUMMARY**

8.1 The rationale for this proposal is outlined within this report, in that to rationalise, and achieve financial savings, from the borough's transport policies, and to bring them in line with other authorities, will require a full review of all policies.

8.2 While expressing concern at the potential impact of a reduction in transport, people contributing to the extensive consultation process made a number of suggestions as to how the impact could be monitored and mitigated.

8.3 It is therefore felt appropriate that the decision can be taken to review all transport policies with a view to implementing the options described in section 1.0 of this report.