

ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Date of Meeting	Tuesday, 27 th November 2018
Report Subject	School Transport – Concessionary Spare Seats
Cabinet Member	Cabinet Member for Streetscene and Countryside
Report Author	Chief Officer (Streetscene and Transportation)
Type of Report	Strategic and Operational

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A report was presented to the Council's Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee in July 2018 to identify options for managing several non-statutory transport arrangements (referred to as transport anomalies) identified by the Integrated Transport Unit as part of its route optimisation and procurement exercise completed in September 2017.

Details of the proposed charges for concessionary spare seats were outlined in the report and the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee were requested to consider the pricing options to reach full cost recovery. The Committee recommended the adoption of Option 2 (i.e. £100.00 per term) as its preferred pricing structure for a concessionary bus pass for the current school year (2018/19), with a review to be carried out on the impact of the increased cost in order that the level could be set for future years.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1.	That the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee note the information provided on revenue projections from the various options for concessionary fare prices
2.	That the Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee recommend Option 2 £450 per year (£150 per term) as the preferred rate for concessionary seats in 2019/20.

REPORT DETAILS

1.00	BACKGROUND TO THE PROPOSALS
1.01	The Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 (as amended) ('the Measure') sets out the legal framework specifically related to travel and transport provisions for

	<p>learners travelling from home to school in Wales. Under the legislation, the Local Authority must provide free home to school transport for learners of compulsory school age attending secondary school who live 3 miles or further from their nearest suitable school (2.5 miles if the family are receipt of benefit) and 2 miles or further for primary school.</p>
1.02	<p>Additionally, Flintshire County Council's Home to School Transport Policy reflects the statutory provisions of the Measure and stipulates that free transport for children of compulsory school age is provided where a child receiving secondary education lives over 3 miles from the nearest appropriate school and 2 miles or further for primary school. To do this, coaches, minibuses and taxis are procured especially for school transport and the transport network is designed to run in the most cost-effective way to serve pupils entitled to free transport. Where subsidised transport is provided by the local authority and parents want to use this service, but their children do not qualify, the local authority can, by law, charge for this provision and any spare seats on the transport can be sold to pupils who are not entitled to free travel. These places are called Concessionary Spare Seats.</p>
1.03	<p>Concessionary seats are not guaranteed. They can be withdrawn (and a refund given) if the seat is later needed for a pupil entitled to a free seat. The transport network is not designed so that spare seats can be created to meet demand; transport services are reviewed regularly and services can be withdrawn if there are not enough numbers of entitled children travelling. Concessionary seats on contract vehicles are limited, so if an entitled child needs that seat in the future, a child may have their concessionary seat withdrawn at short notice. Parents are expected to make their own arrangements for ensuring that their child travels to and from school and needs to ensure they have other plans in place if their concessionary seat is withdrawn or if they are not able to obtain a concessionary seat when they do not qualify for free school transport.</p>
1.04	<p>Additionally, as part of the County wide bus network review, the Council is also reviewing the subsidies it provides to commercial bus operators. This will result in some subsidised bus services, which are used by non-eligible pupils to travel to school, ceasing to operate.</p> <p>In these cases and where pupils who are directly affected by the cessation of these services can be identified, they will be offered concessionary seats on the school buses to travel to the schools affected. The capacity on these buses will be expanded to cater for the additional demand; however, the offer of concessionary travel will only continue until the end of the summer term in 2020, when it is expected that parents will make alternative arrangements for transporting their children to school each day.</p>
1.05	<p>Reports were presented to the Council's Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Cabinet in July 2018, when the Committee recommended the adoption of Option 2 (£300 per year or £100.00 per term) as its preferred pricing structure for a concessionary bus pass for 2018/19, with a review to be carried out on the impact of the increased cost after one year. The rate is still less than 50% of the full cost of providing concessionary seats and this creates financial pressures for the Authority at a time of austerity and when difficult decisions are being made on wider budget issues. The Council's high level aim is to maximise revenue generation with full cost recovery wherever possible.</p>

	Appendix 1 details other Local Authorities current concessionary fare charges.
1.06	The impact of the increase in the cost of the concessionary seats has not had a detrimental impact on the numbers requesting the service however, the number of pupils purchasing concessionary seats are historically low in number. The greatest impact will be on those moving to the school buses from the publicly supported bus serves, when the routes end (Para 1.04). These pupils will be faced with a higher cost of concessionary fares however it should be remembered that they are currently paying fares on the public services and the recommended charge for concessionary passes represents reasonable value, when set against the current charging levels for journeys to school on the public bus services. The options for future concessionary seat charges are shown in Appendix 1.
1.07	Whilst the long term aim would be full cost recovery for the service, it is considered unfair to raise the charges to this level in such a short period of time and therefore options 1 and 3 are not recommended at this point in time. Option 2 - £450 per year (£150 per term) provides a balance position against full cost recovery and the affordability of the scheme for parents, particularly those with a number of children travelling to school on these services and is therefore recommended for 2019/20.
1.08	The charge will be introduced from September 2019 and will in future form part of the annual review of charges across all Council services.

2.00	RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS
2.01	Staff resources will be required in the short term to administer the charges and process payments for concessionary fares for those pupils affected by the withdrawal of the subsidised public transport routes.

3.00	CONSULTATIONS REQUIRED / CARRIED OUT
3.01	With Cabinet Member (Streetscene and Countryside)
3.02	Consultation will be required with Schools and officers will be attending the Head Teacher Federation meetings to brief Head Teachers on the changes to concessionary fares.

4.00	RISK MANAGEMENT
4.01	A Local Authority could be at risk of challenge by way of judicial review or complaints to the Public Services Ombudsman for Wales if the school transport policy is not applied consistently and fairly in all cases. This risk can be mitigated by applying the school transport policy in full and addressing any historical anomalies highlighted.

5.00	APPENDICES
5.01	Appendix 1 – Details of concessionary spare seat charges for other LAs
5.02	Appendix 2 – Pricing options for concessionary seats

6.00	LIST OF ACCESSIBLE BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS
6.01	<p>Contact Officer: Stephen O Jones, Chief Officer, Streetscene and Transportation Telephone: 01352 704700 E-mail: stephen.o.jones@flintshire.gov.uk</p>

7.00	GLOSSARY OF TERMS
7.01	None