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**Changes to mileage limits for mainstream home to school transport**

**A report on the consultation held from**

**27 February 2023 to 01 May 2023**

**Published 17 May 2023**

**Contents**

**1.0 Introduction**

1.1 Purpose

1.2 Background

1.3 Changes

1.4 Methodology

**2.0 Analysis of responses**

2.1 Online survey

2.2 Public events

2.3 Dedicated Email

**3.0 Response to issues raised**

**4.0 Report by Education Scotland**

**Appendix A**

Educational Benefits Statement

**1.0 Introduction**

This report is published by North Lanarkshire Council in response to a statutory consultation carried out under the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010.

**1.1 Purpose**

The purpose of this report is to advise all stakeholders on the outcome of the consultation exercise undertaken recently on changes to mileage limits for mainstream home to school transport. This outcome will be presented to the council’s Policy and Strategy Committee for consideration on 08 June 2023.

**1.2 Background**

On 23 February 2023, as part of the budget setting process, North Lanarkshire Council decided to consult on changes to the existing qualifying mileage limits for free mainstream school transport as a way of saving £3.6 million against a backdrop of having to save £65 million over the next three years.

The law says 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

North Lanarkshire Council currently provides 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.

This is more generous than the legislation requires and more generous than most other councils in Scotland.

**1.3 Changes**

The changes would 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 by the nearest acceptable walking route
* Any secondary pupil who lives **more than three miles** from their catchment school by the nearest acceptable walking route

**1.4 Methodology**

The consultation was conducted in accordance with the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010 and carried out over the period 27 February 2023 to 01 May 2023 during which time all interested parties were invited to submit comments via a dedicated email box and/or complete an online questionnaire.

Full details of the changes were published on the council website alongside a frequently asked questions section and a list of existing school bus routes identified as likely to be affected by the changes. Visitors to the council website had access to a range of accessibility tools including translation options.

51,334 individual text messages were sent to parents in North Lanarkshire from Monday 27 February 2023 directing them to the consultation website. A further reminder was sent to all parents on 23 March 2023. Schools, Parent Councils, Trade Unions and Church representatives were also made aware of the consultation.

As part of the consultation process there were also nine public meetings held to allow stakeholders to attend in person and discuss specific issues directly with council officers. They were held on:

• Tuesday 14 March Airdrie Academy Airdrie

• Wednesday 15 March St Andrew’s High Coatbridge

• Thursday 16 March Chryston High Chryston

• Monday 20 March Calderhead High Shotts

• Tuesday 21 March Bellshill Academy Bellshill

• Wednesday 22 March Our Lady’s High Cumbernauld

• Tuesday 28 March Our Lady’s High Motherwell

• Wednesday 29 March Clyde Valley High Wishaw

• Thursday 30 March Kilsyth Academy Kilsyth

As required, Education Scotland was provided with a summary of all relevant written responses and oral representations made during the consultation period. A report on this was provided to North Lanarkshire Council.

Following the consultation period, it is the Council’s duty to review the proposal taking account of the feedback received from stakeholders during the consultation period which includes online responses, written responses and oral representations made during the public meetings. The content of Education Scotland’s report has also been taken into consideration.

**2.0 Analysis of responses**

**2.1 Online survey**

An online form was developed to collect feedback from the public on the proposed changes to home to school transport.

In total 3828 responses were collated. Respondents were asked to select from a range of options of who they are when completing the questionnaire. The options that respondents could select were parent/carer; pupil; teacher; school support staff; early years employee; parent council member or chair; and other.

As can be shown in the figure above, the majority of respondents were parent/carers with 89% (N = 3423) highlighting they were either a parent or carer of a child within NLC. 2% (N = 83) were pupils and less than 1% were teachers (N = 28). Additionally, less than 1% of respondents were school support staff (N = 6) and early years employees (N = 9). A small proportion of the sample, 1% of respondents were parent council members or chair members (N = 44). If respondents did not fall within any of those categories, they could select ‘other’. 6% (N = 235) of the sample selected ‘other’. Those who selected other came from a range of individuals. Some examples of those who responded include grandparents; other family members including aunts and uncles; local residents; concerned citizens; family friends; parents of former pupils; transport workers and general members of the public.

Individuals were asked to indicate whether they agree with the proposed planned changes. 94% of individuals (N = 3596) specified that they do not agree with the changes. 4% of individuals (N = 151) do agree with the proposed changes, and 2% (N = 81) specified that the changes do not impact them.

Respondents were also asked if they or their children would be affected by the planned changes. 77% of individuals (N = 2694) highlighted that they would be affected. 17% of individuals (N = 634) specified that they wouldn’t be affected by these changes, and 6% (N = 230) selected ‘not applicable’.

Individuals were then asked three questions where a text box was provided to write any thoughts and feelings towards the changes. The following analysis will be split by individuals who agree to the proposed planned changes and those who disagree with the proposed planned changes. These responses have been analysed to determine if there were any emerging themes across the sample. Additionally, due to the large volume of responses, it has been agreed that a random sample of 10% of the qualitative responses will be collated.

Feedback from those who **agree** to the planned changes

**Q.11**

Those who responded ‘yes’ to question 9, followed by ‘no’ or ‘not applicable’ to question 10, made no further comments in question 11. Those who responded ‘yes’, they agree to the changes, followed by ‘yes’ they will be affected by the changes, made comments which have been summarised in the table below into key themes.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **KEY THEME** | **THEME FREQUENCY** **(*out of 37 responses*)** |
| **Not happy with the changes** | **12** |
| **Child is no longer eligible for school transport** | **8** |
| **Child is now eligible for school transport** | **8** |
| **Will get child safely to school**(will use other transport / walk) | **7** |

**Q.12**

Those who responded ‘yes’ they agree to the changes, followed by ‘yes’ they will be affected by the changes, made comments which have been summarised in the table below into key themes.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **KEY THEME** | **THEME FREQUENCY** **(*out of 37 responses*)** |
| **Not happy with the changes** | **13** |
| **Child is no longer eligible for school transport** | **11** |
| **Child is now eligible for school transport** | **13** |

**Q.13**

Finally, individuals were asked if they had any additional comments. Those who responded ‘yes’ they agree to the changes, made comments which have been summarised in the table below into key themes.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **KEY THEME** | **THEME FREQUENCY (*out of 46 responses*)** |
| **Parents responsibility / Children able to walk** | **29** |
| **Better public transport required** | **10** |
| **Too far a journey for children** | **9** |
| **Miscellaneous** | **5** |

Those who responded ‘does not impact me’ about the changes, made comments which have been summarised in the table below into key themes.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **KEY THEME** | **THEME FREQUENCY *(out of 28 responses)*** |
| **Public Transport** | **11** |
| **Safe walking routes** | **8** |
| **Miscellaneous** | **6** |
| **Additional vehicles on road** | **5** |

Feedback from those who **disagree** to the planned changes.

**Q.11**

Individuals were asked ‘If yes, how will you be affected by the proposed changes?’ following on from the question ‘will you or your child be affected by the planned changes?’. Those who responded ‘no’ or ‘does not impact me’ to question 9, followed by ‘no’ or ‘not applicable’ to question 10, made no further comments in question 11.

Those who responded ‘no’ they do not agree with the changes, and then ‘yes’ they will be affected by the changes, made comments which have been summarised in the table below into key themes and sub-themes.

A randomised sample of 10% (n=274) was taken from the total responses (n=2736) once blanks had been removed.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **KEY THEME** | **FREQUENCY (*out of 274 responses*)** | **SUB-THEMES** |
| **Safety / Health Concerns** | **129** | * Unsafe walking route – e.g., due to busy roads, irresponsible drivers, dual carriageways, lack of safe crossings, areas with no footpaths, routes through wooded/forest areas, isolated and unlit routes
* Unsafe due to people – e.g., area of previous sexual assault, walking routes through underpasses and areas where antisocial behaviour takes place
* Health of parent – e.g., disabled, sick, or mental health issues resulting in parent being unable to help transport child to school
* Health of young person – e.g., health conditions and additional support needs that make travelling to school alone unsafe and stressful for young person
* Children not being familiar with area to walk or how to use public transport / child protection concern over young children using public transport alone
 |
| **Walking Distance Too Long** | **64** | * Too long a distance to walk to and from school every day, especially on unsafe routes
* Too far for young primary age children to walk alone
* Children having to leave very early in the morning when streets are isolated and dark, to make it to school on time
 |
| **No Alternative Transport** | **51** | * Areas that do not have adequate public transport services / no bus or direct bus route
* Parents who have no alternatives- e.g., no family members locally to help them, can’t afford additional costs, can’t manage it around work schedule, parents who don’t drive, parents who have health issues that prevent them being able to walk with or drive child to school
 |
| **Financial Impact** | **35** | * Parents having to cut down their working hours / change jobs to be able to take children to and from school will have detrimental effect on their finances
* Possible consequences of parents turning up late for work due to having to drive children to school
* Difficult for parents who work shift patterns
* Cost of moving house to be closer to school
* Added cost of public transport
* Added cost of childcare to ensure children can get to and from school
* Added cost of fuel to drive children to school
* Difficult for parents with 2 or more children at different schools
 |
| **Traffic Increase / Congestion** | **30** | * Increased traffic – meaning busier roads for children walking to school and crossing roads
* Even more congestion at schools and surrounding residential areas
* Increased likelihood of accidents
* Increased delays causing more children being late to school and/or more parents being late to work
* Negative environmental impact
 |
| **Travelling in Winter / Adverse Weather** | **28** | * Walking alone in isolated / poorly lit routes in the dark
* Crossing busy roads in the dark
* Scottish weather – walking a long distance to school in bad weather and not being able to change clothes/dry off
* Flooding on roads
 |
| **Public Bus Service Unreliable / Full** | **21** | * Bus times don’t align with school times / buses can be late and unreliable resulting in children being late for school
* Public buses already very full and with more children needing to use the service at peak times, not always guaranteed to get on
* No direct bus route
 |
| **Attainment Concerns** | **13** | * Possibility of late comings, absences and truancies due to difficulty of getting to school safely and on time – resulting in a negative impact on education/attainment
 |

**Q.12**

Individuals were asked ‘If yes, how will you be affected by the proposed changes?’ following on from the question ‘will you or your child be affected by the planned changes?’. Those who responded ‘no’ they do not agree with the changes, made comments which have been summarised in the tables below into key themes and sub-themes.

A randomised sample of 10% (n=261) was taken from the total responses (n=2613) once blanks had been removed.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **THEME** | **FREQUENCY (*out of 261 responses*)** | **SUB-THEMES** |
| **Safety concerns** | **226** | * Unsafe walking route – e.g., secluded areas, speeding cars on the route, poorly lit or unlit route, no footpath on parts of the route, narrow pavements, lack of safe crossings and wooded/overgrown areas
* Unsafe due to people – e.g., route goes through areas of previous sexual assault and theft, parents/carers also feel walking to school through these routes leaves their children more open to interactions with bullies
 |
| **Length of journey** | **65** | * Too far for primary school children to walk alone, often on unsafe paths
* Asking children to leave very early in the morning to make it on time for school and to walk back from school, parents/carers feel that it takes up a huge chunk of their day
 |
| **Winter travel/ adverse weather conditions** | **56** | * Walking route will be too dark in the winter months, children will have to leave the house when it is dark and walk home in dark conditions, on unsafe roads
* Scottish weather will mean that pupils will arrive to school wet and cold, with no change of clothes and unable to start their day fresh
* Flooding on roads and muddy paths
 |
| **Increase in traffic/ congestion** | **22** | * Environmental impact – omissions from the amount of cars on the road
* Congestion issues in streets and around the schools due to too many cars on the road
* Issues at drop off and pick up at schools with the additional cars that may be on the road if parents/carers choose to drop children off. Already some issues at some schools.
* Unsafe for children to walk these routes due to the number of cars that will be on the road if the changes are enforced
 |
| **Health and wellbeing concerns** | **15** | * Concerns about children with health conditions, mental health conditions, learning disabilities and those having troubles with bullies at school
 |
| **No alternative transport/ unreliable public transport** | **14** | * Unreliable public transport within their area – e.g., times of buses do not align with school start and finishing times, not enough buses in the area for all the children and some routes with no public buses at all
* No alternative transport - parents/carers are unable to walk their child to school as they have other children at different schools, no other family members available to help out, parents/carers who don’t drive and parents/carers with health issues that mean they would not be able to accompany their child on the walk to school
* No direct bus route
 |
| **Financial concerns** | **12** | * Adjusting shift patterns to suit new changes
* Possibility of being late for work while trying to get their child to school
* Fuel costs
* Additional costs for public transport/taxis
 |
| **Attainment concerns** | **3** | * Worried that children will miss school due to being late, being off from colds/flus due to the conditions they would need to walk in and arriving to school wet and unprepared for the day ahead
 |

**Q.13**

Those who responded ‘no’ they do not agree with the changes, made comments which have been summarised in the tables below into key themes and sub-themes.

A randomised sample of 10% (n=207) was taken from the total responses (n=2073) once blanks had been removed.

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **THEME** | **FREQUENCY (of 207 responses)** | **SUBTHEME (if applicable)** | **SUBTHEME FREQUENCY** |
| **Safety concerns** | **139** | Unsafe routes / Dangerous for children | **131** |
| Children too young to walk length of journey | **15** |
| Danger to children’s lives (predators) | **9** |
| Happy to pay for child to reach school safely | **2** |
| **THEME** | **FREQUENCY (out of 207 responses)** |
| **Increase in traffic** | **53** |
| **Public transport** | **42** |
| **Financial concerns** | **22** |
| **Adverse weather / winter travel** | **21** |
| **School absence** | **20** |
| **Attainment** | **16** |
| **Environment** | **14** |
| **Coronation** | **9** |
| **Childrens mental health** | **6** |
| **Parent work commitments** | **6** |

**2.2 Public events**

A public meeting / drop-in session was held across the 9 towns within North Lanarkshire. A total of 182 stakeholders registered to attend the session with only 56% of those registered actual attending, as outlined in table below

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Drop-in session** | **Attended** | **Registered - Did not attend** | **Grand Total** |
| Airdrie | 14 | 3 | 17 |
| Bellshill | 3 |   | 3 |
| Chryston | 13 | 6 | 19 |
| Coatbridge | 10 | 12 | 22 |
| Cumbernauld | 42 | 29 | 71 |
| Kilsyth | 1 | 13 | 14 |
| Motherwell | 8 | 5 | 13 |
| Shotts | 4 | 4 | 8 |
| Wishaw | 6 | 8 | 14 |
| **Grand Total** | **101** | **80** | **181** |
|  | **56%** | **44%** |  |

Officers who engaged with the stakeholders recorded the theme of their concerns which is highlighted in the table below.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Theme** | **Response** |
| Adverse weather / winter travel | 4% |
| Increase in traffic | 4% |
| Parent work commitments | 4% |
| Public transport | 25% |
| Safety concerns:  Unsafe routes | 63% |

Following their attendance at the public meeting/drop in session we issued a survey to stakeholders.

When asked how they would rate the information which was provided 47% rated the information as very good.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **How would you rate the information you were provided with?** | **Excellent** | **Fair** | **Poor** | **Very good** | **Very poor** | **Grand Total** |
| **% response** | 6 | 24 | 12 | 47 | 12 | 100 |

**2.3 Dedicated email box**

A dedicated mailbox, schooltransportconsultation@northlan.gov.uk, was established to allow stakeholders to email any questions or queries, the table below highlights the themes of these queries:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Theme** | **Response** |
| Adverse weather / winter travel | 9% |
| Child medical condition | 4% |
| Distance concern:  Does their child still qualify | 30% |
| Increase in traffic | 13% |
| Parent work commitments | 4% |
| Public transport | 4% |
| Safety concerns:  Children too young to walk | 13% |
| Safety concerns:  Unsafe routes | 21% |
| **Grand Total** | **100%** |

**3.0 Responses to the issues raised**

Education and Families Senior Management Team has considered the original proposal and reflected carefully upon the responses received. For clarity, this change would mean that, whilst fewer pupils would be eligible for free home to school transport, our provision would remain more generous than the law requires.

The changes would not affect children with additional support needs and would only apply where an acceptable walking route is available. The service is committed to assessing all affected routes, including those identified specifically by respondents to the consultation as being of concern to them.

Whilst it remains a parental duty to get children to and from school, we recognise that these changes would mean a significant shift for some families. It is our intention, in line with local and national priorities, to ensure that those parents can work with their schools, other parents and specialists to develop more active travel options that are suitable and safe and provide wider benefits to our children and young people.

This will include work to develop effective traffic management around our schools should parents choose to bring cars within these areas. We will also work with our regional transport partners to help ensure that young people, who choose to do so, have free access to effective public transport.

The service is also committed to robust and ongoing equality and poverty impact assessments on the effects of these changes to ensure that we are aware of, and manage, any related barriers to equality which may arise. The phased introduction of these changes over the next two years as planned would provide space and time for this to happen.

In recent years, authorities have faced severe inflationary pressures in school transport costs. During financial year 2022/23 the overspend in mainstream school transport rose to £2.8m and there remains ongoing volatility and uncertainty within the market. These increasing costs place significant financial pressures on both the Service and wider Council to maintain a balanced budget.

It is recommended that mileage limits for mainstream home to school transport are changed to better reflect the legislative position, to protect other services by reducing cost from an unpredictable transport market and to encourage participation in more active, cleaner and greener travel.

**4.0 Report by Education Scotland**

Under the terms of the Schools (Consultation) (Scotland) Act 2010, Education Scotland (formerly Her Majesty’s Inspectorate of Education) have produced a report on the educational aspects of the changes consulted upon.

The report can be accessed in full at the Education Scotland website and North Lanarkshire Council website. The report summarises its findings and conclusions as follows:

*North Lanarkshire Council has identified the need to make financial savings through aligning their school transport arrangements more closely with the School Transport Guidance 2021. They state that this will protect school budgets from further savings. HM Inspectors agree that the proposal is in line with national guidance and statutory walking distances. However,* *almost all stakeholders raised notable concerns. These include information about adequate walking routes and the capacity of public transport to meet any increase in demand. They are concerned that the proposal may disproportionately affect the most disadvantaged families. Stakeholders are also concerned about the potential negative impact on attendance at school and on attainment and achievement. HM Inspectors agree that there are potential benefits through wider participation in active travel. However, HM Inspectors do not agree that the council have sufficiently set out the potential educational benefits that may help address concerns expressed by stakeholders. It will be important for the council to review walking routes and any changes in traffic to ensure safe routes to school. Should this proposal be agreed then the council should work with stakeholders to help mitigate their concerns.*

The main recommendations from Education Scotland for consideration by the Council are:

*i) The council states that if it proceeds with the proposal, it will help protect school budgets from further savings. The council may wish to provide additional information on the impact of not proceeding with the proposal in its final report.*

**Council response**

The cost to the council of providing free home to school transport at current levels has increased by almost £3 million in the last year alone and is expected to continue to rise due to ongoing volatility in the private sector transport market from which almost all our mainstream transport is sourced. This continuing overspend has become unsustainable and places other elements of education provision, including schools and their staffing, at risk.

The changes outlined in this report are part of a wider package of measures constructed carefully by North Lanarkshire Council to help meet a shortfall of £65 million in the budget allocated by the Scottish Government.

On 17 May 2023, the Accounts Commission for Scotland stated that the public should be "very worried" about the scale of the financial challenges facing councils further stating that budget constraints and cost pressures are putting council finance under "severe strain". The Accounts Commission also stated that local authorities must radically change how they operate to help maintain and improve services.

Information on the current financial position will continue to be provided to elected members via the usual reporting methods.

*ii) Most children, young people,* *parents and staff that met with HM Inspectors agree that there are potential health and wellbeing benefits from active travel to and from school. However, HM Inspectors consider that it may be challenging for all the educational benefits outlined in the proposal to be achieved. HM Inspectors recommend that the council provides clearer evidence to support the proposal before they make a final decision.*

**Council response**

The report to elected members on the outcome of this consultation process will include the information and evidence of the benefits of active travel provided at our consultation public meetings along with the revised Educational Benefits Statement shown at Appendix A.

*iii) If the proposal is agreed, the council should work with stakeholders to ensure safe routes to school.*

**Council response**

The Service has made a clear commitment to assessing all routes identified as being potentially unacceptable for walking including those identified by respondents during the consultation process. Assessments will be carried out by experts in the field and will follow accepted local authority practice. Outcomes will be openly published. Transport will remain in place for those routes deemed unacceptable for walking. The Service is also committed to working with other agencies to ensure children and young people can access the benefits of the Scottish Government’s free travel scheme for under 22s should they choose to do so.

*iv) HM Inspectors recommend that the council continues to work with stakeholders to undertake and share information on impact assessments.*

**Council response**

The Service is committed to ongoing review of the impacts of these changes including via formal equality impact assessments. This will include demonstrating due regard through evidence and analysis to help identify the likely positive and negative impacts that these changes may have in areas such as attendance, attainment, behaviour, cost and whether the changes disproportionately affect vulnerable groups.

*v) HM Inspectors recommend that the council works closely with the Dioceses and families from denominational schools to alleviate their concerns prior to making its final decision.*

**Council response**

The service is committed to meeting with representatives of the Archdiocese of Glasgow, the Archdiocese of St Andrew’s and Edinburgh and the Diocese of Motherwell to discuss concerns further prior to formal committee reporting on the outcomes of this consultation.

**Summary**

The service is pleased that HM Inspectors agree that the proposal is in line with national guidance and statutory walking distances and that there are potential benefits in adopting more active travel measures. The service also accepts that the educational benefits of this change are ambitious and will require robust and periodic review, in partnership with our stakeholders, if they are to be fully realised and if we are to ensure that the concerns raised by respondents in relation to these potential benefits are successfully mitigated.

**APPENDIX A**

**Educational Benefits Statement**

*(includes any requests from Education Scotland to provide additional information)*

North Lanarkshire Council is committed to supporting all children and young people realise their full potential and to reviewing and designing services around people, communities, and shared resources. This can be demonstrated through:

* Improvements in attainment and achievement
* Investment in our school estate
* Investment in ICT and digital technology

It is hoped that this proposal will:

* Reduce carbon emissions be reducing the number of large vehicles on our roads.
* Encourage wider participation in active travel options such as walking or cycling.
* Promote the benefits of active and healthy choices at an earlier age which can be carried into adulthood.
* Encourage physical activity and the positive impact this can have on mental health and wellbeing.
* Reduce traffic around schools.
* Reduce cost associated with the provision of free school transport and in doing so protect school budgets from further cuts.

The most obvious benefits of active travel are physical health and mental wellbeing. Active travel is one way of making up the recommended 60 minutes of moderate or vigorous intensity physical activity for children as recommended by the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for Scotland. It also boosts energy, levels resulting in improved mood, behaviour and concentration in the classroom.

Other benefits of active travel for children include:

* Improves road safety skills
* Promotes independence and resilience
* Opportunities for increased social connection with friends and family
* Active travel is a key commitment of the Scottish Government

The Hands Up Scotland survey shows that active travel is reducing. In North Lanarkshire it has fallen from 49.4% in 2008 to 38.3% in 2021. The current national level is 43.9%.

There is a positive relationship between physical activity and academic performance. Exercise can also help reduce anxiety and stress.