

Report to: Transport Committee

Date: 25 May 2018

Subject: **Changes To Home To School Transport Provision**

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Is this a key decision?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Is the decision eligible for call-in by Scrutiny?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
Does the report contain confidential or exempt information or appendices?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No
If relevant, state paragraph number of Schedule 12A, Local Government Act 1972, Part 1:	

1 Purpose of this report

- 1.1 The approve amendments to the policy guidelines applied to the provision of home to school transport for pupils who are not entitled to home to school transport under the Education Acts.
- 1.2 To approve a programme to dispose of MyBus vehicles approaching the end of their operational life.

2 Information

- 2.1 The Combined Authority arranges home to school transport on behalf of the local authorities in West Yorkshire. Provision for students entitled to free transport through the Education Acts is funded by the respective local Council, provision for other students is funded by the Combined Authority using its Transport Act powers. To maximise the opportunity for efficiencies, organising both is carried out the Combined Authority.
- 2.2 It is opportune to review the basis upon which the Combined Authority provides transport for those students who aren't statutorily entitled to reflect changes to demand and budget availability.

Revision Of Policy Guidelines

- 2.3 Policy guidelines for School Transport were adopted by the Transport Committee in 2014 and are included as Appendix 1. These have been reviewed with input from officers of the respective Council's Education Transport teams. The changes are aimed at ensuring the provision is targeted at those students for whom no alternative means of getting to school is available. It is therefore proposed to adopt the revised policy guidelines set out in Appendix 2 which amend the 2014 set as follows;
- New requests for services – the CA will not provide a service for pupils not attending one of their three nearest schools within a six mile radius
 - Appraisal of existing services – it is proposed to reduce the threshold for cost effectiveness to £2 per passenger trip. Typically a school bus carrying 40+ students will meet this criteria. Where possible services carrying less than this number will be consolidated into other services.
 - Appraisal of existing services- a more rigorous application of the “test of reasonableness” will apply to existing services and in particular services will not support students who could use alternative regular public transport or are within 1.5 miles (30 minutes’ walk) of school.
 - Appraisal of existing services- no account will be taken of post 16 students as they generally have greater flexibility in terms of their school day and have the confidence/ability to use the public transport. Bespoke school services will not, therefore, be routinely provided for this age group.
 - Appraisal of existing services – subject to consultation with the respective local authority, the CA will withdraw any service provided for pupils not attending one of their three nearest schools within a six mile radius.
- 2.4 Where the application of the revised guidelines results in the withdrawal of service for a significant number of pupils, an Equality Impact Assessment will take place to assess any impact on groups protected under the Equality Act. Due consideration will also be given to issues which might affect students ability to travel including economic hardship, issues with walking routes and availability of regular bus services (both in terms of capacity and frequency).
- 2.5 It is also proposed that the Combined Authority charges a management fee for making arrangements on behalf of directly funded schools. Also that the Combined Authority will not meet any additional costs where schools do not conform to the published district calendar, or make arrangements for or fund ‘one off’ changes to the school day.

Disposal of MyBus Vehicles

- 2.6 In 2003, the former Passenger Transport Authority secured a grant from the Department for Transport to purchase 165 purpose built school buses. These vehicles supported an uplift in the quality of school bus operation under the branding “MyBus” to create an “American style” provision of dedicated school

buses. This approach has raised the standard of school bus services however, local authority policies have changed in subsequent years with fewer students eligible for free travel. As a result the MyBus vehicles have been largely deployed to supplement the existing provision with many secondary schools now served by a mix of MyBus and standard single and double deck vehicles.

- 2.7 Approximately 20% of all secondary age students carried on school buses procured by the Combined Authority travel on MyBus vehicles. The remaining 80% travel on standard single and double deck buses. MyBus vehicles are also used to serve primary school pupils where service delivery and safeguarding requirements are more stringent to reflect the greater level of vulnerability of young children.
- 2.8 The MyBus vehicles are now approaching the end of their operational life and it is necessary to consider their replacement. Whilst the vehicles remain safe and roadworthy, they are becoming increasingly unreliable with spare parts difficult to source as the UK distributor went into liquidation.
- 2.9 Replacement of 165 vehicles on a like for like basis would require a capital investment of around £25 million. To obtain a financial return on this investment would require annual savings in operating costs of £1.6m over the 15 year life of the buses; this is not attainable in current conditions.
- 2.10 At the time the vehicles were purchased, school buses were largely operated with fully depreciated non accessible vehicles and it was considered necessary to introduce a new form of school bus. MyBus vehicles were purpose built for schools operation with high capacity seating, seatbelts and CCTV (although the latter facility is now obsolete). The buses meet Euro VI standards following the fitment of selective catalytic technology in 2014 and 2015, funded by the DfT. They are not however suitable for regular service bus operation or longer distance travel. Consultation with secondary age students would suggest that they prefer to travel on the same buses as the adult population. It is advised that the rationale for investment in purpose built school buses is not the same as existed in 2002.
- 2.11 With the exception of seat belts, modern service buses provide a similar or better level of passenger comfort and safety than the MyBus vehicles. It is therefore proposed that the Combined Authority does not replace the purpose built school buses and arranges to transport secondary age pupils in modern single or double deck vehicles. In order to ensure the air quality benefits of the current fleet are maintained and the grant obligations to DfT are observed; the replacement vehicles will be required to meet Euro VI emission standards.
- 2.12 Where MyBus services operate to primary schools, it is appropriate to maintain the current higher standards of service delivery and safeguarding including passenger assistants and seat belts.
- 2.13 It is therefore proposed to withdraw and dispose of the current MyBus vehicles over the next three years as current contracts expire. To ensure that the

Combined Authority maximises revenue from their sale, the vehicles will be disposed through auction. The withdrawal will be in three phases as follows

Contract Expiry Date	Number of buses
31 August 2018	54
31 August 2019	39
31 August 2020	72

- 2.14 There are opportunities to consolidate routes to secondary schools where two MyBus single decker routes are combined into one route using a double deck vehicle. Providing there is no significant impact on the journey time for pupils, this will enable a cost saving which will assist with meeting the reduced budget available for bus service support.

3 Inclusive Growth Implications

- 3.1 The application of the revised policy guidelines will seek to minimise any potential negative impact on access to education and attendance levels.

4 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The phased withdrawal of My Bus vehicles and the amendments to policy guidelines are expected to reduce costs in line with the reduced budget for bus service provision.

5 Legal Implications

- 5.1 The amendment to the policy guidelines will apply to the discretionary aspects of school transport provided by the CA under its Transport Act powers. The CA will continue to provide services to students eligible for transport under the Education Acts under the direction of the relevant Council.
- 5.2 The proposed changes to the policy guidelines have been assessed using the Combined Authority's Equality Impact Assessment Screening Tool. This identified that the impact of the policy changes will vary on a service by service basis depending upon the mix of students affected and the alternatives available to them. Equality Impact Assessments will therefore be undertaken on a case by case basis where a service is proposed for withdrawal or where a significant number of students will no longer have access to bus travel to school. In the event that an Assessment identifies a material impact, mitigating actions will be considered.
- 5.3 The proposed disposal of vehicles will be carried out within the rules which apply to the disposal of assets.

6 Staffing Implications

- 6.1 There are no staffing implications arising directly from this report

7 External Consultees

- 7.1 These proposals have been developed with input from District Council officers responsible for Education Transport.
- 7.2 Liaison will take place with affected schools to ensure they are aware and can inform changes to provision.
- 7.3 Communication of the revised arrangements to parents/ carers and students will take place ahead of the start of the academic year.

8 Recommendations

- 8.1 That the revised policy guidelines for the provision of school transport set out in Appendix 2 be adopted.
- 8.2 That the Combined Authority progresses a phased disposal of MyBus vehicles as set out in this report.

9 Background Documents

10 Appendices

Appendix 1 - Policy Guidelines for Bus Services to Schools – September 2014
Appendix 2 - Policy Guidelines for Bus Services to Schools – September 2018
as proposed