

Gwynedd School Transport

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Local Authorities have a statutory obligation to provide free travel to and from school for eligible learners. Gwynedd Council discharge this duty by providing free transport to learners who live in the County and who have registered in a school or unit maintained by the Council under the following circumstances:

- Primary schools – for learners who live 2 miles or more from the school in their catchment area, or the nearest school.
- Secondary schools – for learners who live 3 miles or more from the school in their catchment area, or the nearest school.
- Learners with special educational needs or disabilities in accordance with the recommendations of the Special Educational Needs Joint Committee.

1.2 It is expected for learners in primary and secondary schools (except those with special educational needs or disabilities) to walk up to 2 miles to meet any transport provided by the Authority.

1.3 In cases where a walking route is deemed to pose an unreasonable risk, taking into consideration a range of factors, free travel is provided by the Authority.

2. HOW GWYNEDD COUNCIL DISCHARGES ITS DUTY

2.1 The Authority discharges its duty for eligible learners in a number of ways including:

1. 'Closed' education bus contracts.
2. 'Closed' education taxi contracts
3. Payment for seats on commercial bus services (a. either on basis of a set amount per learner (£1.50 school pupil / £2.20 per college student) or as b. a tendered 'job price'.
4. Contribution, based on numbers of learners, to a sum that supports a local bus service
5. A payment, based on a mileage rate, currently £0.30 per mile, to parents.

2.2 The average cost associated in providing arrangements made through 1, 2, 3b and 4. differ considerably in relation to various areas / routes. This is due to the services being procured through a tendering process which in terms of transport services takes into account such things as the specified route and the distance, amount of 'dead' mileage, type of vehicles suitable for a route and competition in the local market.

2.3 The Integrated Transport Unit is charged with procuring the services that comply with the relevant policies and legislation in the most efficient and cost effective way possible on behalf of the Authority.

3. LEARNERS NOT ELIGIBLE TO FREE TRANSPORT

- 3.1 Learners, not eligible for free transport, can benefit from opportunities to travel by public transport, train as well as bus in some cases, to their place of education. These arrangements apply to pupils who live within the designated distance or who chose to attend a school other than their nearest or catchment area school.
- 3.2 For local bus services operated on behalf of the Authority a long standing arrangement has been in place whereby pupils pay a nominal £0.30 single fare for travel when they live within the 2/3 miles of their school.
- 3.3 For closed education bus services a 'vacant seat scheme' is available whereby learners can pay a fixed fee of £25 (within catchment) / £50 (outside catchment) per term for travel utilising spare capacity on vehicles. This arrangement is only afforded where spare capacity exists.
- 3.4 Some learners will already pay a commercial fare, be it on a single/ return basis or other ticket offering as introduced by bus companies to satisfy the demand.
- 3.5 A principle applies whereby the availability of transport for those learners not eligible for free travel, should in no way incur additional costs to the Authority.

4. CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The various arrangements in place do mean there is a disparity in the availability of travel opportunities for ineligible learners depending on the particular area where they live or the route to school. This generally reflects the local bus network and is applicable and affects the opportunities for travel available to the wider society in the County also.
- 4.2 Due to changes in the way bus services are operated and increasing scrutiny of service provision it is likely that these will have an impact on those ineligible pupils who travel by local bus services to education. This is especially true for services operated on a 'commercial' basis as bus companies will be seeking to charge a commercial fare for travel. In such circumstances the Authority is not in a position to influence the decision of those companies with regards setting fares
- 4.3 The ongoing passenger transport review considers the various elements relevant to the matter, as outlined in this report. The review seeks to redress any examples, where the Authority has an ability to influence, of inconsistencies in regards the practical implementation of the relevant policies.
- 4.4 The review and wider impacts of interventions relating to local bus services are likely to have considerable consequences. These will include the availability of travel opportunities for ineligible learners as well as the associated fares charged. In terms of applying policy the outcomes are justified however these are unlikely to receive a positive response from stakeholders on what is an especially emotive and sensitive matter.