

CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - 2
NOVEMBER 2015

SCHOOL TRANSPORT AND SCHOOL FOOD

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF CHILDREN AND FAMILY SERVICES

Purpose of Report

1. To provide the Children and Families Overview and Scrutiny Committee with information as requested about the activities of the school transport service, located in the County Council's Environment and Transport department, and of the school food service, located in the County Council's Corporate Resources department.

Policy Framework and Previous Decisions

2. A range of services previously located in the Children and Young People's Service were moved to other County Council departments during 2011 and 2012, primarily as preparation for the County Council's response to the Academies Act 2010 and the Education Act 2011, but also, at a later stage in response to Public Health being transferred into the local authority. The proposed changes were reported to the Children and Young People's Service Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 2nd May 2012, and agreed by the Cabinet on 8th May 2012.
3. Following extensive consultation, changes to the Mainstream Schools Policy were agreed by the Cabinet in July 2013.

Background

School Food Service

4. Every child in reception, year 1 and year 2 in state-funded schools have received a free school lunch from September 2014. The aim is to improve academic attainment and save families money – over the course of a year the average family spends £437 on school lunches per child. At the same time, the government extended free school meals to disadvantaged students in further education and sixth form colleges.
5. Other children may also be eligible to claim a free school meal, providing they receive a qualifying benefit. The current benefits are:
 - a) Job Seekers Allowance;
 - b) Income Support;
 - c) Employment and Support Allowance;
 - d) Child Tax Credit, provided the annual taxable income, as assessed by the Inland Revenue is not in excess of £16,190;
 - e) The Guarantee element of the State Pension Credit;
 - f) Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999;
 - g) Children who receive Income Support or Income Based Jobseekers Allowance in their own right.

6. From 1st May 2009, where a parent has been entitled to Working Tax Credit during the 4 week period immediately after their employment ceases, or after they start to work less than 16 hours per week, they are eligible to claim free school meals over that period.

School Transport Service

7. The legal minimum for free school transport to be provided is for pupils aged between 5 and 16 years who live over the statutory walking distances of 2 miles for those up to age 8, and 3 miles for those over 8, from home to the nearest school or educational placement with places available. Leicestershire's policy is more generous and provides for distances of 2 miles for primary pupils (up to age 11) eligible.
8. From September 2015 the recognition of traditional 'catchment' areas for transport was changed.
9. The Sustainable Travel Group (STG) carries out transport eligibility checks for pupils who have been offered a school place using the entitlement criteria in the County Council's Home to School Transport Policy. All parents are contacted by the STG to advise them about the school transport processes, including information about qualifying schools and eligibility for free transport.
10. Schools and colleges that are classified as 'qualifying' under the school transport policy are as follows:
 - a) Community, foundation or voluntary schools;
 - b) Community or foundation special schools;
 - c) Non-maintained special schools;
 - d) Pupil referral units;
 - e) Maintained nursery schools;
 - f) City technology colleges;
 - g) Academies, including free schools and studio schools.

Recent developments

School Food – free infant meals

11. The 203 primary schools that buy back into the School Food Service started to receive free school meals for infant children on 28th August 2015. Ten of the eleven kitchen refurbishments were operational for 28th August. The one kitchen refurbishment that was not complete was due to unprecedented national demand for equipment and associated resources. The kitchen was fully operational from 1st September. A hot meal was still provided which was transported in on both days from a neighbouring school. Sufficient staff were recruited and hours increased for existing staff as required.
12. Schools that do not buy back into the School Food Service made their own arrangements for the provision of free infant meals.
13. There was a slow start partly due to a number of schools and parents who assumed that the initiative didn't start until 1st September and also because the reception children do not stay for a full day at the start of term. The table below shows the gradual increase as all children take a meal.

Week Ending 12 Sept	Cumulative Daily Average Meals Current Week Compared To Previous Week	Meal Numbers Increase/Decrease	Percentage Increase/Decrease	Cumulative Percentage Update	Percentage Uptake - Current Week
Primary - Universal Free Meals	11,740	1,027	9.58%	65%	73%
Primary Total	21,743	1,072	5.19%	50%	53%
Senior Total	7,092	-120	-1.67%	32%	32%
Grand Total	28,834	952	3.41%	46%	49%

School Food - strategy

14. The School Food Service has recently agreed a new strategy for achievement by 2020 as set out below.

Overview	Key Drivers	By 2020
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Our vision is to provide a quality cost effective service to a diverse customer market. Provide a fully traded catering service to over 200 schools also trade and provide support to all remaining schools in the county. Recently awarded the Silver Catering Mark from the Food for Life. School Food provide an average of 31,000 meals a day 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase the profitability of the service. To meet legislative requirements by providing universal infant free meals. Ensure menus and recipes meet the Government Food Based Standards and the criteria for the catering mark. To provide a healthy balanced meal to children and young people. To continue with the development of School Food 's succession plan for management. To confirm and raise staff competence. To continue and further develop our quality performance management system. Expand and diversify the business to existing customers and secure new business with neighbour LA's. Working with partners to develop a whole school approach to School Food. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Achieved over a 5 year period the total target savings/contribution of £3.8 million. Grown the business by diversifying services to existing customers. ie nursery meals, after school clubs, holiday clubs and hospitality catering. Expanded the market base by gaining business in neighbour authorities. Have an efficient cost effective offering that will reflect a quality service/business. Leicestershire's School Food will have enhanced their already excellent reputation and be recognised as a market leader.

School and College Transport

15. The County Council's web pages provide comprehensive information for parents regarding transport arrangements. These include sets of Frequently Asked Questions.
16. The changes to mainstream home to school transport, as agreed by the Cabinet in July 2014, have now taken full effect. This affects pupils starting primary school for the first time, those transferring to a secondary school and new post 16 students.
17. The phasing out of voluntary aided transport assistance to denominational schools was also fully implemented from September 2015 meaning that no new transport is now provided for a faith school, other than for low income families who qualify under extended rights legislation or families where the faith school is the nearest school to the home address and over the qualifying distance.
18. Leicestershire County Council bus passes can be purchased but parents are encouraged to consider commercially available alternatives as these could be better value and give increased flexibility. More commercially available season tickets enable travel at any time and on any day, including weekends.
19. Home to school transport arrangements can be complex and highly individualised. Full details available to parents can be found at:
http://www.leics.gov.uk/index/highways/passenger_transport/school_college_transport

Resource Implications

20. The School Food Service is a traded service.
21. Changes to school and college transport arrangements have been made in the light of financial pressures.

Background Papers

22. Report to the Cabinet on 15th July 2014 – Mainstream Home to School Transport Policy

Circulation under the Local Issues Alert Procedure

23. None.

Officers to Contact

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Equality and Human Rights Implications

24. Families in receipt of various benefits that meet eligibility criteria are able to access free school meals and transport.