

**REPORT TO:** Executive Board

**DATE:** 29th November 2007

**REPORTING OFFICER:** Strategic Directors– Environment / Children and Young People.

**SUBJECT:** School Travel Pathfinder Bid and Sustainable School Transport Policy

**WARDS:** Borough wide

## **1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT**

The purpose of the report is to seek approval from the Executive Board to enhance the Sustainable School Travel Policy for the 2008/9 and subsequent academic years in line with statutory requirements and seek approval for the submission of a bid to the Department of Children, Schools and Families for new funding under the School Travel Pathfinder initiative. The aim of the proposed bid is to improve access for children and young people, in particular from low-income households to a wider range of education, training and work based learning facilities within the Borough.

## **2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That Executive Board:-**

- (1) Approve the statutorily required enhancements to the Sustainable School Transport Policy which allows for the provision of assistance with transport for families on low-incomes; and**
- (2) Confirm the submission of a bid by Halton Borough Council to the Department of Children, Schools and Families for School Travel Pathfinder funding at the end of November 2007.**

## **3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION**

### **Background**

- 3.1 The Education and Inspections Act 2006, requires local authorities to improve the travel assistance it offers to children of both primary and secondary age from low-income households when travelling to and from school. In addition, Executive Board will recall that as from this year the Council has been required to publish a Sustainable School Travel Policy, detailing the assistance the Authority offers in terms of home to school travel. The first such statement was approved by Executive Board on 6<sup>th</sup> September 2007. [Minute EXB26]

- 3.2 From September 2008, Halton Borough Council will be required to provide free travel for pupils from low income households attending one of the three nearest qualifying schools, provided the school they attend is between 2 and 6 miles away. The Council will also be obliged to provide free travel arrangements for secondary school aged pupils from low income families to their nearest preferred school on the grounds of "religion and belief" where the school is between 2 and 15 miles from their home.
- 3.3 The Government, through the newly created Department of Children, Schools and Families (DCSF) has also invited bids from local authorities for funding under the School Travel Pathfinder initiative. The aim of this initiative is to enable local authorities to offer on a trial basis extended support for home to school travel beyond the thresholds set by the Education and Inspections Act 2006. In particular, the Government is looking for bids which demonstrate the following improvements:-
- Provide enhanced transport arrangements which support parental preference;
  - Improve transport assistance for pupils living more than 2 miles from school; and
  - Reducing levels of car use on the home to school journey.
- 3.4 The Government has indicated that it may approve up to 20 Pathfinder schemes, with the first projects starting in September 2009. It is anticipated that if successful funding will be made available until the end of July 2012.

### **Objectives of the Proposed Bid**

- 3.5 The aim of the Halton School Travel Pathfinder Bid is to provide greater travel choices and support for children and young people when travelling to a range of education and training facilities across the Borough. There is a strong emphasis within the bid on improving participation rates and attainment levels by children and young people living in the most deprived communities within Halton, by providing free, readily accessible and easy to use transport choices. This will in turn help support the Authority achieve new key National Outcome and Indicators for Children and Young People (as set out in the 2006 Local Government White Paper) as well as key local objectives in the Halton Children and Young People's Plan.
- 3.6 Funding is sought to provide a highly focused package of travel assistance / support for the following groups of children and young people, which are not currently provided within the Council's existing policy for assisted home to school travel, consisting of:-
- ***Improved travel opportunities for children and young people attending pre and after school activities;***

- ***Improved travel opportunities for young children and their parents / carers attending the new network of Children's Centre's across the Borough;***
- ***A package of travel assistance and support for learners participating in the new 14-19 diplomas within Halton; and***
- ***A further expansion of the Independent Travel Training initiative.***

3.7 The total amount of School Travel Pathfinder funding requested by Halton Borough Council is £803,370 which covers the period 2009/10 to 2012 /13, with an additional £50,000 in "pump prime" funding required during 2008/9. For its part, Halton Borough Council has already committed £407,370 from its Local Transport Plan to the project

### **Key Elements of the Proposed Bid**

3.8 There are 3 key elements of the proposed bid, including:-

- **An expansion of the new "Door2Door" accessible transport scheme to cater for the above groups who are unable to use conventional public transport;**
- **Enhancing the independent travel training initiative; and**
- **A trial free public transport ticket for 14-16 year olds participating in the new 14-19 diplomas.**

## **4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS**

4.1 If the proposed bid is successful, the additional funding will allow the Authority to offer additional travel assistance for the following categories of children and young people, which is not currently provided under the existing Sustainable School Travel Policy:-

Free travel on the pre bookable "door to door" transport will be offered to the following groups (where no suitable alternative is available):-

- Young children and their parent / carer (from low income families) travelling to and from home to their nearest Children's Centre within the Borough where the walking distance from home is over 1 mile;
- Primary school children up to the age of 11 years of age (from low income families) attending pre and after school activities where the home to school walking distance is over 1 mile. Other primary school children from non low income families shall be eligible to use the bookable "door2door" service to attend pre or after school activities if they live over 2 miles from their nearest primary school and provided no adequate conventional public transport service or other suitable alternative is available.
- Secondary school children aged between 11 and 16 years of age (from low income families) shall be eligible to use the bookable "door2door" service to attend pre or after school

activities provided they live over 2 miles from their nearest school (provided no alternative adequate conventional public transport or other suitable transport is available).

- 4.2 In addition, funding is being sought to provide additional transport to support learners participating in the new 14-19 diplomas which are due to start in Halton from September 2008. Funding is also sought to expand the independent travel training initiative which has been funded for two years by Neighbourhood Renewal Funding.

## **5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS**

### **Resource Implications**

If the bid is unsuccessful, the Council will not be required to introduce the suggested improvements as set out in the bid.

### **Social Inclusion Implications**

The measures contained within the proposed bid, will significantly enhance accessibility for children and young people from low-income households to a wide range of education, training and work based learning facilities across the Borough.

### **Best Value**

The measures contained within the proposed bid are in line with the recommendations contained within the recently completed Best Value Report on Transport and Accessibility (2006).

## **6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES**

### **6.1 Children and Young People in Halton**

If successful the proposed bid will assist in helping to meet a wide range of key objectives as contained within the Halton Children and Young People's Plan.

### **6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton**

If successful the bid will help to further enhance access to education, training and work based learning facilities within Halton for 14-19 year olds.

### **6.3 A Healthy Halton**

No significant impact.

### **6.4 A Safer Halton**

No significant impact

## **6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal**

If successful the bid will assist in meeting a wide range of objectives as set out in the Halton Local Transport Plan 2006/7 – 2010/11.

## **7.0 RISK ANALYSIS**

7.1 No significant risks are envisaged. If successful the additional travel will be funded from external Government grant funding. There is no commitment for the Authority to continue with the enhanced level of travel assistance beyond the trial period.

## **8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES**

8.1 The proposed bid will increase the accessibility of a wide range of education, training and work based learning facilities, providing opportunities for children and young people from all sections of the community within Halton. If successful the bid will ensure Halton Borough Council remains in the vanguard of pioneering transport authorities nationally.

## **9.0 LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS UNDER SECTION 100D OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT ACT 1972**

<b>Document</b>	<b>Place of Inspection</b>	<b>Contact Officer</b>
<b>Halton School Travel Pathfinder Bid</b>	<b>Transport Co-ordination, Rutland House.</b>	<b>David Hall Tel 0151 4717514</b>