

REPORT TO: Executive Board

DATE: 24th January 2008

REPORTING OFFICER: Strategic Director
Children and Young People

SUBJECT: Out-Borough School Transport

WARDS: Runcorn Wards

1.0 PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

1.1 The purpose of this report is to seek the Executive Board's approval to withdraw two bus services currently operating between Halton and Frodsham and Helsby High Schools in Cheshire. It is proposed that these services should be withdrawn from September 2008 as the Council is subsidising them to the sum of circa £36,400 annually, the cost being borne from the Children and Young People Directorate's mainstream home to school transport budget.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION: That

- (1) The report be received
- (2) Approval is given to:
 - i) Withdraw the two bus services from the end of the Summer Term 2008 and,
 - ii) Issue a letter to parents advising them of the withdrawal of the service

3.0 SUPPORTING INFORMATION

3.1 Halton Borough Council has, since attaining unitary status in April 1998, provided assistance with transport for Halton resident pupils attending Frodsham and Helsby High Schools by operating two buses from Halton to Frodsham and Helsby. Prior to unitary status Runcorn was part of Cheshire County Council and, as such, parents could express preferences for their children to attend Frodsham and Helsby High School. The schools, at that time, being within their home authority. This was on the proviso that the children met the admissions criteria, and secured a place at the school.

3.2 During the Local Government Review process, it was agreed that in order to continue to facilitate the attendance of those children at Frodsham and Helsby schools until the end of their school career, the services would continue to operate with financial assistance being given to those already attending. In subsequent years parents who expressed

a preference for Frodsham and Helsby Schools have had the opportunity to purchase any remaining spare seats on these services, the cost being paid by the parent to Halton Borough Council.

- 3.3 The number of children receiving assistance from the Council has declined, nevertheless, through parental preference, Halton resident parents have continued to gain admission to Frodsham and Helsby High Schools and the bus service has continued to operate. There are no children receiving financial assistance from Halton Borough Council under the School Transport Policy to travel to these schools, but there are a small number of remaining pupils using the service and Halton Borough Council currently subsidises the bus service at a cost of £36,400 per annum.
- 3.4 For the 2007/8 academic year there are 15 children using the service who attend Frodsham High School, and 24 children using the service who attend Helsby High School. From September 2008 it is anticipated that there will be 10 attending Frodsham High School, and 16 attending Helsby High School.
- 3.5 The proposal is to withdraw the two bus services from the end of the Summer Term 2008, which will affect a total of 26 children. Transport Co-ordination have drawn up individual school travel plans for the children affected by the withdrawal of the service and the suggested Travel Plans would be included with any correspondence to parents advising them of the cessation of the service.

4.0 POLICY IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 The Children & Young People's Sustainable School Transport Policy makes no reference to the provision of transport for Halton resident pupils whose parents have expressed a preference for their child to attend non-denominational out-borough schools, therefore there are no policy implications. By withdrawing the services currently offered, the Council will make financial savings of approximately £36,400 per year.

5.0 OTHER IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 None.

6.0 IMPLICATIONS FOR THE COUNCIL'S PRIORITIES

6.1 Children and Young People in Halton

Savings made from the cessation of the service will allow the funding to be used to support children and young people attending Halton Schools.

6.2 Employment, Learning and Skills in Halton

None.

6.3 A Healthy Halton

None.

6.4 A Safer Halton

None.

6.5 Halton's Urban Renewal

None.

7.0 RISK ANALYSIS

- 7.1 The Council has a duty to protect public funds and ensure Best Value for money. By ceasing the services described the Council is fulfilling this obligation. The Council has drawn up Individual travel plans for those pupils affected, and it remains the parent's responsibility to ensure their child's attendance at school.

8.0 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY ISSUES

- 8.1 Parents may continue to express a preference for either a Halton School or for schools in neighbouring authorities. The Council will continue to provide assistance with transport where required to do so by law and in accordance with the Council's Sustainable School Transport Policy which actually offers enhancements beyond the statutory requirements. From September 2008 children from low-income families will also receive extended rights to assistance with transport. The Council is in a position to suggest alternative travel arrangements for those parents requiring assistance.

9.0 REASON FOR DECISION

- 9.1 The Council is currently funding a service that impacts upon the School Transport Budget and supports the transportation of pupils to out-borough non-denominational schools when those children could be educated in Halton schools.

10.0 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED AND REJECTED

- 10.1 None.

11.0 IMPLEMENTATION DATE

- 11.1 September 2008.

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

12.1 None.