

ROTHERHAM BOROUGH COUNCIL - REPORT TO MEMBERS

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| 1. | Meeting: | Cabinet Member for Town Centres, Economic Growth and Prosperity |
| 2. | Date: | 28th May 2012 |
| 3. | Title: | Petition relating to the withdrawal of free transport assistance to Aston fence Junior & Infants School and Aston Academy. Wards – Rother Vale and Holderness |
| 4. | Directorate: | Environment & Development Services |

5. Summary

The Cabinet Member for Town Centres, Economic Growth and Prosperity at the delegated powers meeting held on 23rd January 2012 resolved that *“free transport assistance, in the form of zero fare bus passes, be not renewed for pupils living on the Coalbrook Estate, Woodhouse Mill attending Aston Fence Junior and Infants School and Aston Academy, with effect from September, 2012. Pupils would no longer be classed as “eligible” due to the existence of an available safe walking route”* (Minute G86 refers).

Following communication of this resolution to the parents/carers of affected pupils, we have now received a letter from Orgreave Parish Council and a petition with covering letter from a parent of a pupil at Aston Fence School representing many parents within Orgreave

6. Recommendations

That Cabinet notes the receipt of the letter and petition both requesting re-consideration of the resolution of 23rd January 2012.

That Cabinet Member reaffirms the decision taken on 23rd January 2012 which is consistent with the council’s published policy.

7. Proposals and details

Following resolution at the delegated powers meeting of the Cabinet Member for Town Centres, Economic Growth and Prosperity on 23rd January 2012, Aston Fence Junior & Infants School and Aston Academy were both visited by the Principal Officer, Education Transport on 29th January 2012 and informed of the Cabinet Member's decision. Both schools were also presented with a draft copy of the proposed letter to parents/carers for their comments and a copy of the risk assessment of the available walking route to Aston Fence Junior and Infants school, which was performed between 25/11/11 and 17/1/12, was also given to the school. However, the risk assessment for Aston Academy, which covers a greater distance, was not available until 22nd February 2012 but it was felt necessary to communicate proposals to parents/carers of children attending both schools at the same time since some had children attending both schools. Letters were sent to parents/carers on 13th March 2012.

A number of articles had been printed in the local press which prompted some parents to query the action being taken. Fortunately most parents/carers received our letters directly after the press articles were published thereby reducing the number of representations received. A number of parents/carers have requested copies of the Risk Assessments and a further number of contacts have been received questioning further the rationale.

A 300 signature petition and covering letter has been received from a parent of a pupil attending Aston Fence Junior and Infants School representing parents at Orgreave and a separate letter has been received from Orgreave Parish Council. Both of these request re-consideration of the resolution at minute G86.

Although the petition contains 300 signatures it is worth noting that many of these are from Sheffield residents, whilst others are from Rotherham residents outside the affected area. The proposed action involving both schools will affect only 49 pupils. The letter from Orgreave Parish Council has been responded to by our Planning and Regeneration Service (Transportation and Highways Design).

The "school" bus to/from Aston Fence School will cease to run in September 2012 as there will no longer be the responsibility on the L.A. to fund this. Fortunately this also coincides with the end of a 4 year contract issued by SYPTE.

The "school" bus from Sheffield via Woodhouse Mill to /from Aston Academy will continue to run in September 2012 as this is operated on a commercial basis and is not subject to receipt of any funding from RMBC.

It is recommended that the resolution not to renew zero fare passes for use from September 2012 onwards is reaffirmed as this will be consistent with the council's agreed policy. All affected pupils will continue to benefit from use of existing zero fare passes until the end of the academic year in July 2012 after which they will not be renewed. The absence of zero fare passes in this area also removes the responsibility of the L.A. to fund a dedicated "school" bus service to Aston Fence Junior and Infants School. The "school" bus service to Aston Academy will continue

to operate from September 2012 as this is run commercially by the operator and not funded by the LA. There has been no change to Policy.

8. Finance

There are no financial implications in noting receipt of the letter and petition.

The cost of reinstating the free school transport to the two schools would be approximately £15,000; there is no financial provision for this and it could not be sustained within the 2012/13 budget.

Note: Home to School Transport also has a savings target of £98,000 in the current financial year.

9. Risks and Uncertainties

There may be future changes to the use of industrial premises and road infrastructure in the area scoped by the Available Walking Route Risk Assessment. Either of these may prompt a review of the risk assessment although this is true of any other area within the Rotherham boundary. Any changes in the area will need to be monitored and the risk assessment reviewed where necessary.

10. Policy and Performance Agenda Implications

The existence of an available walking route prompts review of free transport assistance, this ensures that free transport is only provided to those pupils who are eligible but not to those who do not qualify. The decision made at the meeting of 23rd January 2012 relating to transport to Aston Fence School and Aston Academy was made ***in accordance with the agreed Council Policy***, and consistent with and a similar previous decisions.

11. Background Papers and Consultation

Minute G86 dated 23rd January 2012

Letter from Orgreave Parish Council to Martin Kimber dated 10th April 2012

Letter from Planning and Regeneration Service to Orgreave Parish Council dated 27th April 2012.

Letter and petition from Mr. T. Spencer to Martin Kimber dated 2nd April 2012

Policy on Home to School Transport

12 Contact

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