



RECORD OF DELEGATED OFFICER DECISION

SUBJECT: SERVICE CHANGE PROPOSALS:- HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE.

PURPOSE OF REPORT:

The purpose of the report is to provide operational guidance that will ensure that the Council's new Learner Travel Policy, which is being introduced for the 2016/17 academic year, is applied consistently and equitably across the County Borough.

Due to the urgency of publishing the guidance to assist parents in respect of Home to School the decision to be taken forward by Delegated Decision.

In accordance with the Council's Scheme of Delegation, this report has been prepared to accompany the intended Officer decision of the Group Director of Corporate & Frontline Services as described below.

DELEGATED DECISION (Date):

- (a) Endorses the principles contained in the Home to School Transport Operational Guidance (and detailed in Appendix A of the report) to ensure the consistent and equitable application of the Council's new Learner Travel Policy, which is being introduced for the 2016/17 academic year.
- (b) Makes the Home to School Transport Operational Guidance available on request, and for reference at the Council's offices, schools, colleges and libraries within Rhondda Cynon Taf and on the Council's web site www.rctcbc.gov.uk/schooltransport


Chief Officer Signature

CHRISTOPHER LEE
Print Name

18/2/16
Date

The decision is taken in accordance with Section 15 of the Local Government Act, 2000 (Executive Functions) and in the terms set out in Section 5 of Part 3 of the Council's Constitution

K. J. Munn

18/02/16.

CONSULTEE CABINET MEMBER SIGNATURE

DATE

OFFICER CONSULTEE SIGNATURE

DATE

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RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2015-16

18 FEBRUARY 2016

**REPORT TO ACCOMPANY THE DECISION OF THE GROUP DIRECTOR,
CORPORATE & FRONTLINE SERVICES**

**SERVICE CHANGE PROPOSALS:- HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT
OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE.**

AUTHOR: Charlie Nelson – Transportation Manager (01443 494818)

1. PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide operational guidance that will ensure that the Council's new Learner Travel Policy, which is being introduced for the 2016/17 academic year, is applied consistently and equitably across the County Borough.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1 Recommended to:

- (a) Endorse the principles contained in the Home to School Transport Operational Guidance (and detailed in Appendix A) to ensure the consistent and equitable application of the Council's new Learner Travel Policy, which is being introduced for the 2016/17 academic year.
- (b) Makes the Home to School Transport Operational Guidance available on request, and for reference at the Council's offices, schools, colleges and libraries within Rhondda Cynon Taf and on the Council's web site www.rctcbc.gov.uk/schooltransport

3 REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 During 2015, the Council reviewed, consulted upon and made amendments to its Learner Travel Policy for the 2016/17 Academic Year. In particular, changes were made to how it chooses to exercise the discretionary powers that are afforded to it under the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 in respect of the provision of Home to School Transport. A copy of the Learner Travel Policy for the 2016/17 Academic Year is attached as Appendix B.
- 3.2 In order to ensure that the policy is applied consistently and equitably across the County Borough, and to inform parents, guardians and learners on the detail of how the policy is practically implemented, the Council has

prepared associated guidance on the operation of its new Learner Travel Policy.

- 3.3 It complies with the requirements of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 and is in accordance with the Welsh Government's Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance (June 2014).
- 3.4 It is applicable from September 2016 and requires endorsement to provide provenance for the operational decisions that are taken in the implementation of the new policy.

4. BACKGROUND

- 4.1 At its meeting on 8 September 2015, Cabinet agreed to make changes to the Council's Learner Travel Policy for the 2016/17 Academic Year, such that it would continue to exercise its discretionary powers to provide school or college transport at a discounted but still subsidised charge.
- 4.2 Having decided to make such a significant revision to its Learner Travel Policy, Cabinet recognised that it would need to be supported by detailed operational guidance. Such guidance would be used by officers involved in the assessment of entitlement for both the statutory and the discretionary, chargeable, service in order to ensure that there was a consistent and equitable approach across the County Borough. It would also serve to inform parents, guardians and learners on how the policy is practically implemented.
- 4.3 The operational policies/guidance deemed necessary for, and incidental to, the implementation of the revised Learner Travel Policy is attached to this report. The document contained in Appendix A is the operational guidance that is considered to be necessary to underpin the policy.

5 EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA) was undertaken as part of the process that informed the Cabinet decision on 8 September 2015 to change the Learner Travel Policy for the 2016/17 academic year. A further assessment is not required at this time. The previous Equality Impact Assessment can be accessed by contacting the author of the report or the Cabinet Business officer.

6 CONSULTATION

- 6.1 A full Consultation was undertaken as part of the process that informed the Cabinet decision on 8 September 2015 to change the Learner Travel Policy for the 2016/17 academic year. These proposals simply provide operational guidance in the implementation of the revised policy. Consequently further consultation is not considered appropriate.

7 FINANCIAL IMPLICATION(S)

- 7.1 The Cabinet decision on 8 September 2015 to change the Council's Learner Travel Policy for the 2016/17 academic year and implement a charge for the discretionary elements of the service was identified as delivering full year savings of £1.416m (part year savings of £0.884m). The Operational Guidance identifies how the Council will endeavour to apply the policy and deliver these savings.

8 LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

- 8.1 The Operational Guidance complies with the requirements of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 and is in accordance with the Welsh Government's Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance (June 2014).

9 LINKS TO THE COUNCILS CORPORATE PLAN / OTHER CORPORATE PRIORITIES / SINGLE INTEGRATED PLAN.

- 9.1 The provision of operational guidance to underpin the Council's new Learner Travel Policy reinforces the priorities set out in the Council's draft Corporate Plan by promoting independence and positive lives for everyone.
- 9.2 It responds to the challenges and opportunities, as outlined in the Council's draft Corporate Plan, by delivering a redesigned local service that is integrated and efficient, ensuring that Rhondda Cynon Taf's children and young people will receive a great start in life. It demonstrates that the Council is working in a way that makes the best and most sustainable use of its limited and decreasing resources, delivering the service in an alternative way that limits the impact on the Council taxpayer.

10 CONCLUSION

- 10.1 The Operational Guidance enables the new Learner Travel Policy to be delivered in a consistent and equitable manner across the County Borough, in a way that is transparent and readily understandable for services users.
- 10.2 It will ensure that decisions can be made clearly and concisely, based on the information provided in the Council's Learner Travel Policy and the Home to School Transport Operational Guidance, with any decision made being final, subject to compliance with these two documents.

Appendix A

Home to School Transport Operational Guidance 2016/17

This document has been produced by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (the Council) to provide Operational Guidance on the Council's Learner Travel Policy for the 2016/17 academic year. It does not replace the Learner Travel Policy but is a supplementary document, designed to ensure that the policy is applied consistently and equitably across the County Borough and to inform parents, guardians and learners on the detail of how the policy is practically implemented.

In doing so, it complies with the requirements of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 and is in accordance with the Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance. It is applicable from September 2016.

Any decisions made by Council Officers, such as the eligibility for free transport, priority to purchase a seat at the discretionary charge or the charge levied will be based on the information provided in the Learner Travel Policy and this Operational Guidance. Any decision made is final, subject to compliance with these two documents.

1. Statutory & Discretionary Provision

The definition of statutory and discretionary provision is given in the Council's Learner Travel Policy.

2. Free School Transport

Learners eligible to receive free school transport do not need to apply and will be notified of their entitlement by the Integrated Transport Unit (ITU).

3. Sale of Seats

Seats are sold to two categories of payers – Priority Payers and Other Payers.

Priority Payers

In addition to the statutory provision of free school transport, the Council has exercised discretionary powers to provide school or college transport at a discounted but still subsidised charge (see section 8). Learners who are given priority to purchase a seat for travel are detailed in section 3 of the Council's Learner Travel Policy – "Provision of Home to School/College Transport". These are known as 'priority payers'.

Other Payers

The Council offers parents of learners who do not meet the eligibility criteria for free school transport, and who are not given priority to purchase a seat, the opportunity of purchasing spare seats on its school or college transport at the discounted charge (see section 8). These seats are subject to availability and on a first come first served basis. These are known as 'other payers'.

4. Mileage Assessment

The criteria used to determine the eligibility to receive free school transport or to be given the priority to purchase a seat at the discounted charge is based on safe walking distance, measured by the shortest, available walking route. A route is considered to be available if it is safe for a learner to walk alone or, if appropriate for the age of the learner, accompanied by an appropriate adult. Each individual case is assessed as detailed in the Council's Learner Travel Policy.

Distances calculated by driving routes do not represent accurate measurements. Neither are measurements that use post code areas. When measuring walking routes, the Council measures to three decimal places. It uses MapInfo Professional which calculates route measurements using Government standard Ordnance Survey data. This determines address points by using 6 digit geo-codes, which are accurate to 1m² and is generally accepted to be the most accurate data available.

5. Application Process – Priority Payers

Learners with priority to purchase a seat on school transport at the discretionary charge are required to apply. A separate application is required for each learner who wishes to take up this option. Details of the application process for priority payers will be sent in a letter;

- in the spring term to existing learners who have previously taken up this option;
- in the spring term to learners moving into Year 7 in the following September;
- in the summer term to learners commencing nursery or primary education in a catchment area (English, Welsh, dual language or voluntary aided (faith) mainstream school or special school/class as appropriate.

This letter will specify the dates within which an application must be made. The Council guarantees that transport at the discounted charge will be offered to any learners classified as 'priority payers', who apply within these dates. Applications made outside of this period will be considered, but will be subject to available capacity in accordance with the process for 'other payers' (with the exception of new-starters – See section 15).

6. Application Process – Other Payers

Learners who are not given priority to purchase a seat on school transport have the opportunity of purchasing seats, subject to availability, at the discounted charge. A separate application is required for each learner who wishes to take up this option. Learners who have previously taken up this option will be sent details of the application process in writing in the summer term.

This letter will specify the dates within which an application must be made, normally the first Monday after the end of the summer term. Applications made before this date will not be considered.

The completion of an application form **does not guarantee** that you will be sold a seat. Seats can only be sold subject to availability, and are sold on a first come first served basis, with requests only considered once the numbers of spare seats available, if any, are identified.

7. Commitment

All applicants must commit to pay for transport for the full academic year at the relevant rate, with the exception of:

- Learners in years 11 and 13 who are sitting exams. These learners will have the option of committing to travel and consequently to pay for Autumn and Spring terms only (see section 14).
- Learners starting school part-way through the academic year. These learners are required to make a commitment to the end of the academic year (see section 15).

Where a '*change in circumstances*' results in a learner no longer travelling on school transport at the discretionary charge, a credit will be issued to a priority payer from the start of the half term after the date that the pass is returned to the ITU.

Priority to purchase a seat on school transport at the discretionary charge will not be offered in future years to any learner where the pass is returned and cancelled within the committed period unless it is due to a '*change in circumstances*'.

8. Charging Basis

Charges apply to both priority payers and other payers. The standard discounted charge for discretionary transport is £285 per learner per year.

The charge for discretionary transport for learners who are eligible for free school meals is £95 per learner per year.

There is no reduction in transport charges for part-time attendance. In such circumstances, learners should consider whether public transport is a more cost effective option.

9. Free School Meal Entitlement

Parents will be required to confirm if they are, or will be in receipt of free school meals during the period that transport is required. All submissions will be checked to ensure that the correct information is submitted.

Entitlement to free school meals is assessed prior to the start of each term and applies throughout the following term. The charge will not be adjusted if entitlement changes outside of these assessment dates, unless by that date the Council has received but not yet processed any free school meal application which changes entitlement.

If, as a result of a change in free school meal entitlement, the applicant no longer wishes to purchase a seat on school transport at the discretionary charge, the pass can be returned to the Council for a pro-rata credit note/refund. Charges will continue to be incurred until the transport unit has confirmed that they have received and cancelled the pass.

10. Maximum Charge

The maximum charge that a *family* with two or more children will pay is £570 per academic year at the standard rate or a reduced rate of £190 for learners entitled to free school meals.

Where free school meal entitlement changes at an assessment date, the maximum charge will be calculated on a pro-rata basis.

11. Termly Charge

Where an applicant purchases transport for less than a full academic year (see section 14) or starts school from the beginning of the spring or summer terms (see section 15), the following charges will apply in 2016/17 for each term:

	Days	Standard Rate £	Free School Meal Rate £
Autumn	70	105.00	35.00
Spring	63	94.50	31.50
Summer	57	85.50	28.50
TOTAL	190	285.00	95.00

Schools are able to set their own inset days. For the purposes of the costing, it is assumed there are 2 inset days in the autumn term, 1 in spring and 2 in summer. Standard charges above will apply to all learners regardless of actual timing of inset days.

12. Payment Methods

By default, payments to purchase a seat on school transport at the discretionary charge will be made over 10 equal instalments from September to June. Applicants can choose to pay in fewer instalments (e.g. termly or annually) but they must ensure that as a minimum, the payments match the monthly profile e.g. by the end of February half of the total invoice must be paid.

Where an application is made to purchase a seat on school transport at the discretionary charge later than the start of the autumn term, a pro-rata charge will apply from the date that transport is provided. Payments can be made monthly but the full balance must be paid by the end of June of that academic year.

Options for making payments will be consistent with other Council payments and the following methods can be used:

- Monthly Direct debit.
- By Credit or Debit Card via the Council's Call Centre and/or website.
- By Cash or Cheque at any of the Council's One4All centres.
- At a bank (full annual payment only).

A 2% charge will be made for payments made using credit cards.

Where there has been difficulty in collecting payments, the Council reserves the right to limit the choice of payment methods and timescales in future years e.g. we may require full payment in advance before the issue of a travel pass.

13. Debtors Policy

The Council's standard debt policy will apply to all invoices raised for the purchase of a seat on school transport.

Where an invoice or agreed instalment remains outstanding after 59 days, the travel pass(es) will be cancelled and learners will no longer be entitled to travel. The pass(es) will only be reinstated when the full outstanding balance has been paid. If

the balance is not paid, the Council will seek to recover the charges through its usual debt recovery process. In addition, priority to purchase a seat on school transport at the discretionary charge will not be offered in future years to any members of a *family* where any school transport debt remains outstanding.

14. Exam Years

Learners in years 11 and 13 can opt to purchase transport for the autumn and spring terms only. Where learners have opted to do this, they will not be able to travel on school transport at any point during the summer term. The charge per term is given in section 11.

Families with more than 2 children travelling on school transport at the discretionary rate may already pay a reduced amount due to the capped maximum charge (see section 10). Where this is the case, opting not to travel in the summer term may not reduce the total family charge any further.

15. New Starters

Learners given priority to purchase a seat on school transport at the discretionary charge, who start school part-way through the academic year can apply at any point during that academic year. There may be a delay should new transport arrangements have to be made. A charge will be made from the half term after the application is made.

16. Dual Residency

Only permanent established living arrangements should be considered e.g. a learner who stays two nights of every school week with one person with parental responsibility and three nights of every school week with the other, or alternate weeks with each parent. Such arrangements do not apply where a learner spends weekends with a different parent from where the learner lives during the school week. The nights of the school week are Sunday evening/Monday morning to Thursday evening/Friday morning inclusive.

If the second home address is:

- Above the statutory distance - They will be entitled to free transport for the days they will be travelling on that route.
- Within the discretionary distance – A separate application can be made if required.
- Below the discretionary distance - No transport will be provided but sale of seat options may be available (see section 6).

17. Dual Registered Learners

Where a learner is registered at two schools (mainstream and a second establishment as a SEN placement) only the mainstream discretionary element will be chargeable. A pro-rata charge for the number of days per week travelling to the mainstream school will be calculated.

18. Carers

Where a learner who is a registered carer does not require full time transport (i.e. return travel 5 days a week) as a direct result of their caring duties, they can apply to the Council for a reduction to the standard charge. Each application must specify:

- The nature of the caring duties.
- The reason this impacts on travel to school.
- The extent of the impact e.g. length of the care requirement.

A reduction will only be given for the periods when the learner is not able to use the transport. Each case will be considered on its own merits and will be reviewed on a regular basis.

19. Service Families

Where a service family is posted abroad and the learner no longer requires school transport, they can apply to the Council for a reduction to the standard charge. Each application must specify:

- The nature of the posting.
- The reason this impacts on travel to school.
- The extent of the impact e.g. length of the posting.

A reduction will only be given for the periods when the learner is not able to use the transport. Each case will be considered on its own merits and will be reviewed on a regular basis.

20. Transport on Medical Grounds

Free transport to and from school may be provided on medical grounds e.g. chronic illness or temporary incapacity for short but continuous periods. This includes retrospective invoice adjustments where a learner may not have travelled for prolonged periods of time due to serious medical issues.

Each application must specify:

- The nature of the illness or incapacity.
- The reason that this impacts on travel to school.
- The extent of the impact e.g. expected duration.

Each case will be considered on its own merits and will be on the recommendation of an appropriate Health / Medical Officer and subject to confirmation by the Council's Medical Transport Gate-keeping Panel. Where agreed, this provision will be subject to a regular review.

21. Travel Behaviour Code

Where learners who have purchased a seat on school transport at the discretionary charge misbehave whilst travelling on school transport and have their right to transport removed for a specified period, no refunds will be made.

22. Inclement Weather

Where school transport, on which a seat has been purchased at the discretionary charge, has not been provided for more than three consecutive days due to inclement weather, a refund equivalent to the lost days will be applied to the next bill. The credit will be given at the applicable daily rate for any learner affected up to a maximum of £3.00 per family per day or £1.00 per family per day for learners on free

school meals (equivalent to the maximum daily charge per family). The credit will be applied automatically and does not need to be applied for.

23. Home to School Transport Exceptional Circumstances Discretionary Fund

The Council has established a 'Hardship Fund', the principle of which is to manage the impact of hardship that results from the introduction of charges for the discretionary elements of school transport. The fund will be made available as a contribution towards the transport costs for learners who are experiencing exceptional personal and/or socio-economic circumstances, which have the potential to become barriers to his/her engagement with education and where there are exceptional circumstances that have a bearing on the ability of the learner to meet the costs of home to school transport.

There are other funding streams (including external funding support) available to families in financial hardship and this discretionary fund is intended to be used to support those in 'exceptional circumstances' which may not otherwise entitle them to financial aid. The intention is to support learners in exceptional personal circumstances, where these circumstances may affect their access to education.

Exceptional circumstances could include, but not be limited to; sudden and interim upheaval to the family, such as as a result of flood, fire, or other circumstances which render the primary home temporarily uninhabitable; the diagnosis of a disability or illness within the family, which results in the learner temporarily changing primary address; or divorce or separation, which results in the learner temporarily changing primary address, pending the establishment of permanent custody arrangements. All applications to the fund will be considered on a case by case basis.

The fund will not be used to waive the discounted charge entirely. It is not intended to deal with prolonged situations that should be subject to other forms of funding and support. It is to be used to provide financial support in exceptional circumstances via a "one-off" grant which will be used as a credit towards the discretionary charge.

The fund is primarily intended for low income families where learners who are not already in receipt of a reduction to home to school transport charges as a result of:

- Free school meals.
- Chronic illness.
- Service families.
- Young carers.
- The third term of an exam year.

It is acknowledged that circumstances may change after the termly assessment for free school meals is undertaken, with learners moving in and out of entitlement. The fund may be used to support cases where exceptional levels of hardship occur as a result of such a change.

Each application to the fund will be considered on a case by case basis, once all other potential reductions to the discounted charge have been applied. Where appropriate, additional information held by the Council will be used to inform consideration of the case (e.g. school attendance, 'looked after' status)

The administration and awards from the fund will be undertaken by a designated senior officer. Appeals against the decisions that are made will be considered by a

'gate keeping' panel, comprising representatives from several appropriate service areas – Education, Finance and Transport. Appeals against the decisions that are made by the 'gate keeping' panel will be referred to an appeal panel comprised of Council members. The decision of the member panel will be final.

Where learners are being considered for hardship funding, families will be signposted to other avenues of additional support; financial (e.g. other Council hardship funding policies) or otherwise.

Applications for the fund, detailing the circumstances, should be made in writing. Details of the address at which to apply will be published on the Council's website in due course.

GLOSSARY

Assessment Date	The date on which eligibility for free school meals is assessed. There will be three assessment points during the year, prior to the start of each term.
Change in Circumstances	This includes a house move or a decision to change school. It does not apply where a parent/carer/learner has decided that they no longer wish to travel on school transport or where the learner has been excluded from school.
Dual Resident	Living with 2 parents (people with parental responsibility) at separate addresses.
Family	For the purposes of the Home to School transport provision, a family is defined as any number of <i>siblings</i> living at the same address.
Siblings	The definition follows that included within the starting school booklet. Children will be classified as siblings if: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• they are half or full brother or sister• they are an adoptive brother or sister• they are children living full time/ permanently in the same household.

Provision of Home to School/College Transport 2016/17



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Provision of Home to School/College Transport

Learner Travel Policy, Information and Arrangements

This document has been produced by Rhondda Cynon Taf County Borough Council (the Council) to make available information about its policies for the 2016/17 academic year and the arrangements it puts in place for transporting learners. In doing so, it complies with the requirements of the Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 (the Measure) and is in accordance with the Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance June 2014.

The Council has reviewed its Learner Travel Policy for the 2016/17 academic year, and in particular how it chooses to exercise the discretionary powers, in respect of the provision of Home to School Transport, afforded to it under the Measure.

It is the intention of the Council to provide a system of transportation that will seek to carry learners safely, comfortably and without unreasonable levels of stress.

1. Statutory Provision of Free School Transport

There is a statutory duty placed upon the Council to:

- Assess the travel needs of learners in its area.
- Provide free home to school transport for learners of compulsory school age attending primary school who live 2 miles or further from their nearest suitable school.
- Provide free home to school transport for learners of compulsory school age attending secondary school who live 3 miles or further from their nearest suitable school.
- Assess and meet the needs of “looked after” children in its area.
- Promote access to Welsh medium education.
- Promote sustainable modes of travel.

To meet this duty, the Council provides learners with free transport to their nearest suitable school if they reside at or beyond safe “walking distance” to that school, where safe “walking distance” is defined as two miles for learners of compulsory school age receiving primary education and three miles for learners of compulsory school age receiving secondary education.

2. Discretionary Provision of School / College Transport

Beyond the statutory minimum, the Council has determined that when assessing entitlement on the basis of safe “walking distance”, the term nearest suitable school applies to the catchment area English, Welsh, dual language or voluntary aided (faith) mainstream school or special school/class as appropriate.

In addition, the Council has exercised the discretionary powers afforded to it under the Measure to provide school or college transport at a discounted but still subsidised charge (the ‘discounted charge’) for those learners who are not entitled to statutory free transport in respect of distance, faith, pre school, post 16 and Welsh language.

The discretionary elements of the Council’s policy are subject to periodic review and may change. Any proposed changes will be subject to consultation with learners and parents/guardians and, if agreed, will usually apply from the start of a school year and will have regard to the latest edition of the Welsh Government Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance.

3. Transport Provision

The following table gives an overview of mainstream school transport provided by the Council for each age and group of learner.

Age	User	Transport Provision
Start of the term after the learner turns 3 years old until the end of the term in which the learner turns 5 years old.	Non-compulsory school age, learner selecting education through English/Welsh medium or in accordance with their preferred religious denomination.	Where places are available at their catchment or nearest suitable school, free transport is provided to nursery age learners who live beyond a safe “walking distance” of 2 miles or more from that school. Learners who live within a safe “walking distance” of more than 1½ miles and less than 2 miles from that school, and who choose to travel on the Council’s funded school transport, are given priority to purchase a seat for travel at the discounted charge.
Start of the term after the learner turns 5 years old until the end of the academic year in which the learner turns 11 years old.	Learner receiving compulsory primary education, learner selecting education through English/Welsh medium or in accordance with their preferred religious denomination.	Free transport is provided to learners receiving compulsory primary education at their catchment or nearest suitable school who live beyond a safe “walking distance” of 2 miles or more from that school. Learners who live within a safe “walking distance” of more than 1½ miles and less than 2 miles from that school, and who choose to travel on the Council’s funded school transport, are given priority to purchase a seat for travel at the discounted charge.
Start of the academic year after which the learner turns 11 years old until the end of the academic year in which the learner turns 16 years old.	Learner receiving compulsory secondary education, learner selecting education through English /Welsh medium or in accordance with their preferred religious denomination.	Free transport is provided to learners receiving compulsory secondary education at their catchment or nearest suitable school who live beyond a safe “walking distance” of 3 miles or more from that school. Learners who live within a safe “walking distance” of more than 2 miles and less than 3 miles from that school, and who choose to travel on the Council’s funded school transport, are given priority to purchase a seat for travel at the discounted charge.
Start of the academic year after which the learner turns 16 years old until the end of the academic year in which the learner turns 18 years old.	Post-16 learners selecting education through English/Welsh medium or in accordance with their preferred religious denomination.	Post 16 learners in full time attendance, who live beyond a safe “walking distance” of 2 miles or more from the nearest school or college at which the approved course of study that they wish to pursue is offered, and who choose to travel on the Council’s funded school transport, are given priority to purchase a seat for travel at the discounted charge.

The provision of school transport (as set out above) will be arranged to coincide with the start and end of the normal school day only, not at lunchtimes, and shall be provided during the school term time.

For further information about the Council’s charging policy and the discounted charge payable under this policy please refer to Section 19.

4. Looked After Children

The same age and distance criteria apply to 'looked after' children as to children who are not looked after. If the Council determines that a looked after child should attend a school other than the nearest suitable school then transport will be provided upon request by the child's social worker in accordance with the Council's agreed policy on walking distance, safe routes and charging (as set out in section 3).

5. Parental Preference

Should any parents/guardians choose to place their child(ren) in a school other than the local catchment area school (English, Welsh, dual language or voluntary aided (faith) mainstream school or special school/class as appropriate) then those parents/guardians are totally liable to organise and pay for the cost of transport to the chosen school, unless that school is nearer to the learner's home than the designated catchment school.

6. Cross Border Transport

In accordance with the Council's agreed policy on walking distance, safe routes and charging (as set out in section 3), transport may be provided to eligible learners attending courses of study outside the County Borough where such attendance is consistent with it being the nearest suitable school rather than the designated catchment school.

Learners living in Bryncae, Llanharan and Brynna who secure a place in Pencoed Comprehensive School will be provided with either free transport or given priority to purchase a seat for travel at the discounted charge.

7. Over Subscribed Schools

If a learner cannot be admitted to the nearest suitable school (the catchment area English, Welsh, dual language or voluntary aided (faith) mainstream school or special school/class as appropriate) and, as a result, has to attend another school beyond the walking distance from their home then transport will be provided to the next nearest suitable school. In such circumstances, consideration will be given to transporting siblings to the same school.

8. Protected Provision – Catchment Area Variations

Where the Council decides to vary the catchment area for a school (English, Welsh, dual language or voluntary aided (faith) mainstream school or special school/class as appropriate), existing transport arrangements will be protected for the learners living in the areas affected for the duration of their attendance at the school or until they reach the end of that phase. In exceptional circumstances, consideration may be given to transporting siblings to the same school.

9. Special Arrangements - Hazardous Routes

A route is considered to be available if it is safe for a child to walk alone or, if appropriate for the age of the child, with an accompanying adult. It is recognised that occasions will arise when routes may become hazardous. In these circumstances, the Council reserves the right to provide free school transport over distances below the discretionary limits if this is recommended by appropriate officers in the interests of the safety of the relevant learners.

In determining the comparative safety of a walking route, the Council will conduct an assessment of the risks that escorting parents/guardians and children might encounter along the route between home and school. The assessment of a route will take place at the time of the day and on the days of the week that learners would be expected to use the route. It will take a road safety perspective and follow the Welsh Government Statutory Guidance on Risk Assessing Walked Routes to School.

As a matter of policy, these routes will be reviewed biennially and discretionary provision may be withdrawn where the identified hazard has been mitigated and the route identified as available to walk in safety. Parents/guardians will be given at least one term advance notice of the withdrawal of such discretionary transport.

10. Children with Special Educational Needs/Disabilities

Free transport is provided for learners with special educational needs/disabilities receiving education at their catchment or nearest special school, pupil referral unit or learning support class and who live beyond a safe “walking distance” of 1½ miles or more (nursery and primary age learners - start of the term after the learner turns 3 years old until the end of the academic year in which the learner turns 11 years old) or of 2 miles or more (secondary age learners - start of the academic year after which the learner turns 11 years old until the end of the academic year in which the learner turns 19 years old). Applications must be supported by appropriate evidence and be confirmed by the Council’s Access and Inclusion SEN Panel.

Learners with special educational needs/disabilities (as defined by the Equality Act 2010) may be entitled to assistance with transport from home to an appropriate school/college even though the Council’s agreed criteria on safe “walking distance” (as set out above) are not met. Assistance may include transport from after school provision. Such provision is subject to referral to, and approval by, the Council’s Access and Inclusion SEN or Gate-keeping Panels. Any such referrals must be supported by appropriate evidence and each case will be considered on the basis of individual need.

Where the Council has arranged for a learner to attend an out of county residential school, transport will only be provided at the start and end of each half term.

11. Transport on Medical Grounds

Free transport to and from school may be provided for short periods on the recommendation of an appropriate Health/Medical Officer and will be subject to confirmation by the Council's Gate-keeping Panel. Where agreed this provision will be subject to regular review.

12. Provision for Learners Aged 16 to 19

There is no statutory requirement to provide transport for post 16 learners.

The Council has decided that post 16 learners, who enrol for approved study courses within the appropriate 14-19 area timetabled provision, who live more than 2 miles from the school or college and who choose to travel on the Council's funded school transport, will be given priority to purchase a seat for travel at the discounted charge (as set out in section 19). The area timetabled provision excludes higher education courses.

Post 16 learners may be eligible for the Education Maintenance Allowance (EMA), funded by Welsh Government and administered on their behalf by Student Finance Wales. The EMA is currently £30 per week, and it is to support post 16 learners to access post 16 education. Details are available to determine eligibility for EMA from the Student Finance Wales website www.studentfinancewales.co.uk/fe/ema

In accordance with the Council's agreed policy on "walking distance", safe routes and charging (as set out above), transport may be made for learners pursuing approved full time educational programmes at Bridgend, Merthyr Tydfil, Neath Port Talbot and Coleg Y Cymoedd (Ystrad Mynach). Details of the approved educational programmes are available from the;

**School Improvement Team, Education and Lifelong Learning,
Ty Trevithick, Abercynon, Mountain Ash, CF45 4UQ.**

Learners who wish to pursue a study course other than within their area timetabled provision will be responsible for their own transport arrangements, except where the location at which the course is available is closer to the learner's home than the school or college offering the area timetabled provision.

No transport will be provided for mainstream learners beyond the second academic year after the end of compulsory education.

This transport policy covers school 6th form and college further education courses only and does not extend to higher education courses funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for Wales (HEFCW). (The one year Foundation Art & Design course at the University of South Wales is not funded by HEFCW and transport may be provided to learners pursuing this course subject to the age, walking distance, safe routes and charging criteria set out above).

Details of learners who wish to continue their courses of study at school after year 11 (GCSE or equivalent) are formally provided to the Integrated Transport Unit by the

school. Learners who wish to pursue a college course who choose to travel on the Council's funded school / college transport and have purchased a seat for travel at the discounted charge (as set out in section 19), are also required to complete an application form and supply three passport approved photographs to the College.

For those post 16 learners who choose to travel on the Council's funded school / college transport and have purchased a seat for travel at the discounted charge (as set out in section 19), bus passes, for use on either contracted services or the local public transport network, are provided. Information including travel times, pick up and drop off points etc for contracted services is available on the Council's web site

www.rctcbc.gov.uk/schooltransport. Public transport information is available from the Traveline Cymru's web site **www.traveline.cymru**.

Where learners do not take up an offer of, or withdraw from, a school 6th form or college further education course, passes should be returned to the Integrated Transport Unit. Failure to do so will result in the full cost of transport being reclaimed.

For post 16 learners with special educational needs, free transport is provided and may be made available until the end of the academic year in which they attain their 19th birthday. Travel arrangements in respect of any subsequent attendance are at the discretion of the learning provider.

No provision will be made by the Council for learners with special educational needs following the academic year that any such learner attains their 19th birthday. Where the course continues into subsequent years, the learner will be entirely responsible for arranging and funding their transport needs for continued attendance.

13. Eligibility

The entitlement to receive free transport or to be given priority to purchase a seat for travel at the discounted charge (as set out in section 19) is assessed in accordance with the eligibility criteria (as set out in section 3) and eligible learners or their parents/guardians are notified of the arrangements in advance of the provision commencing.

In cases where distances are disputed, the Council will determine the most appropriate method of measuring the distances. This may be by foot, in a vehicle, by another method deemed appropriate or by a combination of methods. The measurement undertaken by the Council will be the final and definitive distance and will be used to assess transport eligibility. Where it is found that the Council has provided free transport in error, the parent or guardian will be informed of this, with notice given that transport will be withdrawn at the end of the school term.

The Council takes very seriously any attempt to gain an advantage by giving false information, and will investigate fraudulent claims. If school transport is offered and it is then discovered that the offer was made on fraudulent or misleading information e.g. a false claim to living at an address, that offer will be withdrawn and the cost of transport will be reclaimed. This could cause considerable distress, particularly for the child involved.

The Council will process the information you have provided in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998 and any amendments to that act. Any personal information will be held in confidence, with only the necessary people able to see or use it. Please note that the information provided may be given to any organisation, including other Council departments, legitimately investigating allegations of fraud, other criminal offences or child protection. In addition, it may also be crosschecked and verified against information held by other Council departments.

14. Bus Passes

Bus passes are issued to all secondary school learners who are entitled to receive free transport or who choose to travel on the Council's funded school / college transport and have purchased a seat for travel at the discounted charge (as set out in section 19). College students who choose to travel on the Council's funded transport and have purchased a seat for travel at the discounted charge (as set out in section 19) are issued with passes at the start of their course. College bus passes are valid for one academic year only. If a student leaves college before the end of the academic year, the pass is to be returned, otherwise the Council's contribution toward the cost of the pass will be recovered. If a college student returns for a second year, they must re-apply for a pass.

Bus passes for use on contracted services are colour coded to correspond with the coloured sign, which is located at the front of each school bus. The Council applies a no pass no travel policy. Learners are expected to produce their passes for inspection by the driver on every journey undertaken. No exception is made and parents/guardians must ensure that learners do not leave home without a valid bus pass. Lost passes can be replaced at a nominal cost, with the charge being reviewed annually. Details are available from the Council's web site www.rctcbc.gov.uk/schooltransport.

All issues relating to the operation of the no pass no travel policy, either by the operators or the schools, must be taken up with the Council's Integrated Transport Unit. Please do not approach the driver or contact the transport operator.

15. Mode of Transport

In all cases, the efficient use of resources will dictate the mode of transport provided (subject to any special needs requirements). Transport may be provided by means of contracted school transport services or existing public transport services which, together with the size and type of transport (bus, minibus, train, taxi, etc.) will be dictated by cost effectiveness. In exceptional cases, learner or parental reimbursement will be offered where this is the most cost effective method of providing transport. The provisions of Section 88 of the Transport Act 1985 place a duty on local authorities to secure, in the interests of its local residents, the best value for money from expenditure on public passenger transport as a whole. The Council will therefore be mindful of its duty to provide socially necessary (public transport) bus services when arranging transport provision for learners.

Transport will normally be provided from pickup points at approved bus stops on the nearest public transport route to the learner's home. Where a learner has to walk an unreasonably long distance to the bus stop, special transport arrangements may be made. For learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) transport is usually provided to and from the home address, with every effort being made to collect / drop off at the kerbside. It is for parents/guardians to take / meet their child(ren) to / from the vehicle. No arrangements will involve the transport provided operating onto private land or farm access tracks.

16. Journey Times

The Council does not specify a time limit for journeys. However, journey times should be reasonable, taking into account the age and individual needs of the learners, and the nature, purpose and circumstances of each journey. Where parents/guardians express preferences for their children to attend voluntary aided (faith) schools or Welsh/dual language schools that are some distance away from their homes, journeys may generally be longer. This will also apply to some SEN journeys.

17. Other Transport Provision

Some learning providers operate, or contract, their own transport provision – in addition to that which is legally required – for which a charge is made. Parents/guardians and learners should be aware that this is not part of the statutory or discretionary functions carried out by the Council and are private arrangements between parents/guardians and learners and the transport providers.

Careers Wales may be able to offer assistance to clients in its Youth Gateway programme if transport is a barrier to accessing education, employment or training. Such provision is assessed on an individual needs basis.

18. Other Fare Paying Passengers

The Council will reserve the right to make spare capacity available on an existing contracted school transport route to learners who do not meet the eligibility criteria for free transport or who are not given priority to purchase a seat for travel at the discounted charge (as set out in section 19). It is not possible to allocate spare seats at the start of the new academic year, as the Council must assess available capacity. This does not just include changes in demand due to new starters but also post 16 learners who decide whether or not to stay on in school or to attend college after receiving their examination results toward the end of August. In addition, seats also become available during the first few weeks of term as some learners who are entitled to free travel or who are given priority to purchase a seat for travel at the discounted charge decline the seat offered and do not travel on the vehicles provided. Once all these factors are taken into account, any spare seats are released for sale.

19. Charging

Learners who are not entitled to free transport (as set out in Section 3) and choose to travel on the Council's funded school transport, are given priority to purchase a seat for travel at the discounted charge. When places on a vehicle are made available under this provision, they will be charged at a flat rate per learner per term. The rate will be assessed annually. The charge from September 2016 is £1.50 per day.

This charge will be further discounted to £0.50 per day for learners in receipt of free school meals. Details of entitlement to receive free school meals and how to take up the entitlement can be found on the Council's website www.rctcbc.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals.

The charges are capped for families with more than two children using Home to School Transport so that no charge is made for the third child or beyond.

The Council also operates a 'Hardship Fund', which aims to further support low income families in exceptional circumstances to meet the costs of home to school transport. Details of the Hardship Fund and how you can apply to access it will be published on the Council's website at www.rctcbc.gov.uk/schooltransport and will also be available upon request from the Integrated Transport Unit.

Spare capacity on an existing contracted school transport route that is made available to learners who do not meet the eligibility criteria for free transport or who are not given priority to purchase a seat for travel at the discounted charge (as set out above), will also be charged at the above rate.

20. Change of Family Home - Transport Arrangements

Learners in receipt of free transport whose families move to an address outside the local area of the school to which transport has been provided will be assessed in accordance with the eligibility criteria (as set out in section 3).

Families need to be mindful of this fact when they are considering moving home, especially in the years when learners have commenced formal examination courses (years 10 and 11 for GCSE or equivalent and years 12 and 13 for AS and A level or equivalent).

21. Monitoring

All vehicles will be available for random checks by DVSA or other appropriate body, when required. Any complaints received by the Council concerning services or vehicles will be immediately investigated. In the event of the complaint being upheld, the necessary and appropriate steps will be taken in accordance with the contract or as a matter of urgency. The Council will undertake random checks on contracts, to ensure that the contracts are being operated in accordance with the terms and conditions of the contract. As part of the monitoring exercise, checks will be made to include; punctuality, adherence to route, size of vehicle, licences, use of DBS cleared staff and the checking of bus passes, all of which are designed to ensure safe and stress free travel.

22. The Travel Behaviour Code – Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008

The Welsh Government has introduced an initiative called “The Travel Behaviour Code” to promote safe travel for all children and young people, by setting out the standards of behaviour required when travelling between home and school. The Code encourages schools and local authorities to work proactively with learners, their parents/guardians and the community to promote positive behaviour. If learners misbehave whilst travelling on school transport and do not follow the Travel Behaviour Code, action may be taken and the right to transport may be removed for a specified period depending on the severity of the incident.

23. Work Experience

Where, as part of a course of study, learners follow a work experience placement they are normally required to make their own transport arrangements. **No provision will be made by the Council.**

24. Availability and Accessibility of this Policy Statement

The school transport policy statement is available on the Council’s website **www.rctcbc.gov.uk/schooltransport**

The policy is also made available to learners, and their parents/guardians, prior to admission to school.

25. Feedback

The Council is committed to using any feedback received to improve service quality. If you have any comments on the content of this document, please contact:

The Integrated Transport Unit

Tel: 01443 425001 • Email: HomeToSchoolTransport@rctcbc.gov.uk

26. Further Information and Points of Contact for Learners Seeking Transport Support

Further information, including Frequently Asked Questions and details of contracted bus routes and pickup points can be found on the Council's web site.

www.rctcbc.gov.uk/schooltransport

Contacts:

Coleg y Cymoedd Student Services

Tel: 01443 662800 • www.cymoedd.ac.uk

Rhondda Cynon Taf Education & Lifelong Learning

School Admissions Tel: 01443 744232

Email: schooladmissions@rctcbc.gov.uk

Rhondda Cynon Taf Highways and Streetcare

Integrated Transport Unit Tel: 01443 425001

Email: HomeToSchoolTransport@rctcbc.gov.uk

Other Sources of Information:

Careers Wales

www.careerswales.com

Individual School/College prospectuses

Information about public transport services for the Rhondda Cynon Taf area are available from:

The Welsh Government's Public Transport Information Service

Tel: 0300 200 2233

Traveline Cymru

www.traveline.cymru

Welsh Government - Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 - Travel Behaviour Code

www.legislation.gov.uk/mwa/2008/2/crossheading/travel-behaviour-code

Welsh Government - Learner Travel Statutory Provision and Operational Guidance - June 2014