



Equality Analysis

School Transport
Summer 2019

Question 1 - What is the nature of and are the key components of the proposal being presented?

The County Council proposes to remove the funding for school bus services where there have been no students who are entitled to free home to school transport or school transport assistance travelling for two years and where the revenue from fares and season tickets does not cover the cost of the service.

This proposal was agreed in principle by County Council Cabinet on 3rd December 2018 subject to a consultation being carried out on the proposal and its outcome being reported back for consideration of a final proposal prior to any implementation.

Question 2 - Scope of the Proposal

Is the proposal likely to affect people across the county in a similar way or are specific areas likely to be affected – e.g. are a set number of branches/sites to be affected?

At this stage 10 school bus services are at risk of meeting the criteria whereby funding might be withdrawn from September 2020, the proposal includes provision to give 12 months notice of the withdrawal of a service during which time the County Council will work with schools and bus operators to see if there is another way to provide the service. These services are:

S24 Lancaster Meeting House Lane to Central Lancaster High School;

605 Holmeswood, Rufford to Tarleton Academy (used as a connection service to Burscough Priory, Bishop Rawsthorpe Church of England Academy and St Bede's Catholic High School);

623 Mellor, Traders Arms to Clitheroe Royal Grammar School;

684 Ashton to Lea Endowed Church of England School and St Mary's Catholic Primary School;

699 Penwortham to Brownedge St Mary's Roman Catholic High School and Sports College and Walton-le-Dale High School;

743 Skelmersdale War Memorial to Lathom High School;

860 Blackburn Roe Lee to Clitheroe Royal Grammar School (also serving Bowland High School);

873 Accrington Gloucester Avenue to St Annes Roman Catholic Primary School;

889 Simonstone to Clitheroe Royal Grammar School;

913 Skelmersdale War Memorial to Our Lady Queen of Peace Catholic High School.

There are also two services identified as having no eligible pupils having used the service for the past two years but where revenue from season tickets and fares currently meets costs but where it is possible that this situation may not continue. In that event these services would be subject to the application of the proposed policy. These services are:

775 Mellor Brook, Langho The Rydings to Clitheroe Royal Grammar School;

876 Longridge to Clitheroe Royal Grammar School.

Should the proposal be approved it would set down criteria that could potentially be applied to any school bus service funded by the County Council in the future.

Question 3 – Protected Characteristics Potentially Affected

Could the proposal have a particular impact on any group of individuals sharing protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010, namely:

- Age
- Disability including Deaf people
- Gender reassignment
- Pregnancy and maternity
- Race/ethnicity/nationality
- Religion or belief
- Sex/gender
- Sexual orientation
- Marriage or Civil Partnership Status

And what information is available about these groups in the County's population or as service users/customers?

The proposal will impact children and young people (age protected characteristic) who use any school bus services affected by it.

As some of the schools served by services are Church of England or Roman Catholic schools whilst others are not, the religion or belief protected characteristic is also relevant and people could be impacted on grounds of their religion or belief.

Question 4 – Engagement/Consultation

How have people/groups been involved in or engaged with in developing this proposal?

Head teachers at the affected schools were contacted directly as well as all the other schools that the County Council provides school transport for. The schools directly affected were encouraged to publicise the consultation via their school's website and social media account. These schools were also asked to share the information with their feeder schools and a notice was also placed on the school portal system at the County Council which schools regularly access.

Bus operators affected were also emailed directly.

The consultation was also promoted via the County Council's social media account, press releases, panels on the relevant pages of the County Council's website - e.g. bus information and school admissions pages – and was promoted to LCC staff via Staff News and County Councillors through C-First the County Councillors portal. A stakeholder email was also sent to District and Unitary Councils, health partners including Clinical Commissioning Groups and MPs.

The consultation period ran for six weeks from 25 February 2019 to 8 April 2019 to allow for school holidays. The consultation was available on-line and print versions were available on request. 195 completed responses were received of which 179 were completed by students, parents or carers, 12 were completed by headteachers and 4 were completed by bus operators.

NB: The comments below are not necessarily reflective of the views of Lancashire residents or users of school bus services but are reflective of those people who were made aware of the consultation and had the opportunity and felt compelled to respond. It was also clear that some bus services attracted a larger numerical response than others, but this equality analysis addresses the proposal as a whole.

In terms of the demographics of respondents to the public consultation:

97% of respondents were residents of Lancashire.

Sex/gender 74% of respondents were female and 23% were male, 1% identified as "other" and 2% preferred not to say. Consultations on County Council services

do seem to attract a disproportionate number of responses from women so this is not an unusual response rate.

Age 1% of respondents were aged 11-15 and 2% were aged 16-18 which is a higher figure than for many consultations and suggests some young people took the opportunity to respond. Over half (55%) of respondents were aged 35-49 and over a quarter (28%) were aged 50-64 which may reflect the likely level of interest from this age group as parents or grandparents.

Disability or Deaf People – 85% of respondents answered "no" to this question whilst 10% prefer not to say. There was a lower response from disabled or Deaf People than for most consultations. 3% of respondents had a physical disability, 1% had a mental health related disability and 2% had an "other" disability.

Ethnicity 80% of respondents identified as White and 13% "prefer not to say". 5% of respondents identified as Asian or Asian British, 1% as Black or Black British, 1% as Mixed and 1% as other. Respondents appear to be broadly comparable to the Lancashire population.

Religion or Belief 62% of respondents identified as Christian; 17% had "no religion"; 5% were Muslim; 1% were Hindu, Jewish and "Any Other Religion" respectively and 15% "prefer not to say". These figures are broadly in line with the Lancashire population at the 2011 Census.

Three other questions were included in the demographic questions which do not directly relate to protected characteristics but are of relevance to this proposal.

Respondents were asked if they had any children or young people in their household aged under 20. 10% of respondents had no children or young people in their household and 3% preferred not to say. 9% of respondents had children aged under 5, 49% had children aged 5-11, 65% had children aged 12-16 and 20% had children aged 17-19. This is reflective of the nature of the proposal.

Respondents were also asked if there were any disabled young people in their household aged under 25. 6% of respondents said there were which is reflective of many service consultation demographics.

Finally respondents were asked if they had access to a car or van in which they could travel to and from school. 35% said they had access to a car or van they could use to travel to school; 27% said they had access to a car or van they could use to travel from school; 49% said No, 3% said "don't know" and 13% "prefer not to say".

Of those who responded to the public/wider consultation 81% used or their child used school bus services, 17% said they did not but might do in the future and 2% did not and said they would not need to in the future.

For the public consultation 88% of respondents disagree with the proposal and 9% agree with it. Of the headteacher respondents 6 agreed with the proposal, 4 disagreed and 2 neither agreed nor disagreed. Three of the bus operators disagreed with the proposal and one neither agreed nor disagreed.

Respondents were asked why they said this and for the public consultation the highest responses were that rural areas already had a minimal bus service (25%), that childrens safety could be at risk (22%) and that there was no alternative transport/children would be stranded. Other responses with an equalities dimension included that pupils would have to change school or not go to the school they wanted (15%), parents work and could not get the children to school (15%), it could potentially affect pupil attendance/attainment (11%), it discriminates against pupils going to grammar schools/middle class working families (8%) or lower income/benefit families (7%). Headteacher responses reflected the concerns about the impact on those in rural areas, areas where there were limited or no other transport options and the difficulties of low income families who can't afford to run a car.

The public consultation asked how it would affect respondents if there was no bus service for their childrens' school. 29% said it would have an effect on their work hours/risk their employment; 23% said it would be impossible to get to school; 18% said they would have to attend a different school/not their choice of school; 17% identified safety concerns and 16% said they would face a long walk or long waiting times. A number of responses coded in slightly different ways did focus on similar themes and the impact on low income families was also mentioned. 14% of respondents did say they would drive.

Similarly respondents were asked if there was no bus service for them or their child to use, how they would get to school. 42% said by car, 41% said other public transport, 23% said don't know/no alternative buses and 6% said walk or cycle.

Headteachers also expressed concerns that their budgets would not be able to assist in this area nor did they feel it should be a requirement for schools to do so.

Bus operators were concerned that contracts would be ended partway through their duration and that this may impact their businesses.

A petition and two MPs letters were also received referring to concerns about the potential withdrawal of the 623 service.

Question 5 – Analysing Impact

Could this proposal potentially disadvantage particular groups sharing protected characteristics and if so which groups and in what way? This pays particular attention to the general aims of the Public Sector Equality Duty:

- To eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation because of protected characteristics;
- To advance equality of opportunity for those who share protected characteristics;
- To encourage people who share a relevant protected characteristic to participate in public life;
- To contribute to fostering good relations between those who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not/community cohesion;

There is the potential that this proposal could impact the ability of children, families and young people to remain at or select their preferred school if they found it difficult to find an alternative means of transport. This could also mean that they are unable to remain at or choose a school which best meets their religion or belief requirements since a number of the schools served by services which are at risk are faith based schools whilst others are none denominational. It is possible that schools which are alternatives may not have the same faith or non-faith ethos as the school a child currently attends or would prefer to attend. This may be seen as adversely impacting the equality of opportunity for these families and children/young people to choose their preferred school.

A potential impact may also be on the ability of parents/carers to combine taking their child to and from school with their working commitments. This could impact the equality of opportunity/participation in the workforce for some parents/carers and it is likely that women may be more heavily represented amongst those affected.

A number of consultation respondents raised concerns about the safety of children and young people who would no longer be able to catch withdrawn services. This could be based on concerns about waiting for transport or walking further to access it – possibly particularly on dark mornings and evenings. Whilst this may impact most children in a similar way, it is possible that some pupils may be or may feel more vulnerable because of other protected characteristics, e.g. if they

are known to be or are perceived to be LGBT or wear clothes which identify their religion or belief.

A number of comments were made that the proposal discriminates against particular groups at different income levels or who have chosen to send their child to a grammar school. These particular elements are not protected characteristics under the Equality Act 2010.

Question 6 –Combined/Cumulative Effect

Could the effects of this proposal combine with other factors or decisions taken at local or national level to exacerbate the impact on any groups?

Over recent years the County Council's support for non-commercial bus services has reduced. This has affected the numbers and frequency of services and made some journeys less straightforward. Whilst support for non-commercial services is focussed on daytime services which may assist those travelling to and from schools, the times of any services may not be compatible with school hours. Routes may also not be compatible with the journeys which will potentially be withdrawn.

Question 7 – Identifying Initial Results of Your Analysis

As a result of the analysis has the original proposal been changed/amended, if so please describe.

At this stage the proposal remains unchanged.

Question 8 - Mitigation

Will any steps be taken to mitigate/reduce any potential adverse effects of the proposal?

If this proposal is implemented for any school bus service the County Council will give schools and parents a full academic year's notice before funding is removed. During this time the County Council will work with schools and bus operators concerned to see if there is another way to provide the service. This may provide some mitigation for some or all services. However, there remains the possibility

that in some cases no effective mitigation will be identified to retain some or all services.

Question 9 – Balancing the Proposal/Countervailing Factors

This weighs up the reasons for the proposal – e.g. need for budget savings; damaging effects of not taking forward the proposal at this time – against the findings of the analysis.

This proposal has emerged as the County Council, like many councils across the country, is going through financially challenging times. This is as a result of funding not keeping pace with the increasing demand and cost of services being delivered. The County Council needs to continue to look at ways of reducing costs to help balance the books for future years. This means that changes have to be considered to how some services we currently provide are delivered.

It is against this background that this proposal has emerged. The County Council is required to provide free home to school transport for some pupils and will continue to do so. Where there are seats available on these bus services other pupils may use them by buying a season ticket or paying a fare. This proposal will apply to those services where no pupil entitled to free home to school transport has travelled on a service for over two years and where the revenue from sales of season tickets and fares does not meet the cost of providing the bus service.

It is acknowledged that this proposal will impact children and young people who currently use the identified services and their families or may do so in the future and that this may also impact some pupils and their families also on the basis of their religion or belief including having no religion or belief if their service is withdrawn.

Although mitigation is proposed as an integral part of the arrangements in terms of looking to identify alternative ways to continue making some provision for those schools affected this may not be successful in all cases.

Question 10 – Final Proposal

In summary, what is the final proposal and which groups may be affected and how?

The County Council proposes to remove the funding for school bus services where there have been no students who are entitled to free home to school transport or school transport assistance travelling for two years and where the revenue from fares and season tickets does not cover the cost of the service.

Question 11 – Review and Monitoring Arrangements

What arrangements will be put in place to review and monitor the effects of this proposal?

All school contracts will be reviewed annually to determine if there has been no students who are entitled to free home to school transport or school transport assistance for two years and if the revenue from the service does not cover its costs. This annual review will take place in June so that schools can be made aware in the September of any changes i.e if funding will cease in the following September.

Services that have been highlighted in the consultation will be reviewed in August 2019 and we will spend the academic year 19/20 working with schools and operators to see if the service could continue.

Equality Analysis Prepared By Jeanette Binns, Equality and Cohesion Manager and Liz McClarty Transportation Officer

Equality Analysis Endorsed by Line Manager and/or Service Head
Public & Integrated Transport

Decision Signed Off By

Cabinet Member or Director

For further information please contact

Jeanette Binns – Equality & Cohesion Manager

Jeanette.binns@lancashire.gov.uk