

## **Cabinet Member Response to the recommendations of the Children, Families and Skills Scrutiny Committee following its review of Report of the School Place Planning Inquiry Day on the 20 September 2023**

At its meeting of the 20 September 2023, the committee considered a report of the School Place Planning Inquiry Day (Mainstream and SEND) and School Transport. A written response has been provided to the recommendations by the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport.

### **Report on School Place Planning Inquiry Day**

**Resolved:** That the following recommendations be shared with the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and the Cabinet Members for Highways and Transport:

- 1. A piece of work to take place on school place planning and how it has been distorted by various factors such as margin of error above 5% and new housing developments. Faith schools to also be included in this review.**
- 2. Consideration be given to what issues cause inaccurate forecasting when the margin of error is above 5%.**
- 3. Consideration be given to what measures can be taken to ameliorate the destabilisation of established schools when the margin of error is approaching 5%.**

Response to recommendations 1,2, & 3:

The Department of Education scorecard provides feedback in relation to each local authority forecast need for places. The scorecard refers:

"Estimating place pressure in future years relies on the forecasts of pupil numbers made by local authorities, as provided in the annual school capacity survey. The scorecard illustrates the forecasting accuracy of the selected local authority for forecasts made one year ago and provided in SCAP22, and two years ago in SCAP21. These pupil forecasts have been compared with pupils on roll from the January 2023 school census numbers to produce a forecast accuracy score for one and two years ahead. A negative forecast accuracy score indicates an underestimation of pupils, a positive score indicates an overestimation."

The 2022 Scorecard (published June 2023) indicates Lancashire's forecast accuracy at:

- Primary: -0.4% one year ahead, -0.6% two years ahead
- Secondary: +0.1% one year ahead, +0.2% two years ahead.

As such the scorecard reports the council's forecast accuracy at a county level as within +/-1%, however the Service is committed to improving how it works, which includes looking at the forecast methodology and factors such as the impact of housing.

- 4. The Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport to consider the reinstatement of the Safer Travel Unit, as and when the budget allows.**

Funds are currently unavailable to reinstate the Safer Travel Unit as before, but options to tackle anti-social behaviour are actively being considered.

- 5. A report be presented to the Children, Families and Skills committee setting out how we work closer with the district planning authorities to ensure that we maximise developer contributions. Progress to be reported and updated on a regular basis on the Dashboard.**

The Asset Management Service is in the process of procuring external support to assist with developing its approach to engaging with local planning authorities and securing contributions towards education infrastructure.

- 6. Consideration be given to a review of the procurement process for school transport contracts in relation to environmentally friendly issues such as cleaner, low carbon and greener options and for this to be considered as part of the scoring process. Review to include types of fuel, vehicle age and plans for electric/hydrogen vehicles etc.**

This would require an amendment to the procurement arrangements (Dynamic Purchasing System) to which all operators would need to agree. The costs involved in accelerating environmental improvements to school bus provision are likely to be high.

- 7. That the Education Improvement Team liaise with schools and consider using the safest routes (not necessarily the shortest) to schools when assessing eligibility for home to school transport applications and proximity of schools to homes.**

The criteria for establishing the right to transport is set in law. If the Council wish to establish a safer routes policy above that which is already in place within the current legislation and guidance, this will require consultation and a change of policy and is likely to result in an increase in eligibility and therefore cost to the Council.

- 8. That the School Transport Team and School Place Planning Team have a closer working relationship with the aim of endeavouring to avoid an allocation of a place for which school transport is eligible but cannot be provided due to a lack of capacity.**

The School Transport Team plan for the number of pupils that qualify for statutory assistance, hence it is not possible to plan for the availability of places in such a way.

First and foremost, it is the child that is eligible not the place. Further, if a child is allocated a place at a school and is eligible for transport then it must be provided.

- 9. That a review of School Transport take place in conjunction with the Public Transport Team, to consider how best to increase uptake of greener school transport options and bus use more widely through better service provision. The aim of the review will be to provide sufficient places for all those who want to use the bus (notwithstanding the fundamental statutory obligation to provide for children who qualify for home to school transport). The review could explore:**
  - a. increased co-ordination of commercial, subsidised, school buses, and where appropriate, school-commissioned bus services;**
  - b. making better use of existing combined resources,**
  - c. more flexible fares for young people, and co-ordination with the Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP)**

A wide-ranging review of school transport provision by the service is under way. This includes consideration of fare arrangements within the constraints of the need to have consideration of budgetary consequences. Commercial and competition considerations must also be noted.

- 10. That the Cabinet Members for Education and Skills and Highways and Transport attend a meeting of the Lancashire Association of School Governing Bodies.**

Both the Cabinet Member for Education and Skills and the Cabinet Member for Highways and Transport are happy to attend a meeting of the Lancashire Association of School Governing Bodies.