

**Manchester City Council
Report for Resolution**

Report To: Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Executive

Date: 16th June 2009
24th June 2009

Subject: Review of Free School Travel Policy 2009

Report of: Director of Children's Services

Summary

This report is a review of the current Free School Transport policy and includes recommendations to revise the criteria for the 2009/10 academic year.

Recommendations

The Executive is asked to agree:

1. to extend free GMPTE transport provision to Manchester Looked After Children living out of the authority and/or attending a non Manchester school;
2. to extend the eligibility criteria for free school travel passes from September 2009 to include children attending RC secondary schools;
3. to extend eligibility for free school travel passes to Manchester children who attend non Manchester schools where the Council were unable to offer 3 suitable schools in Manchester;
4. to make provision of free travel passes available to children in temporary accommodation;
5. to adopt a cycle allowance as an alternative to free bus passes.

And to note:

1. the increase in price for 2009 of GMPTE concessionary pass;
 2. that the LA will seek to improve the clarity of information to parents in publicity of the revised scheme;
 3. that additional costs are expected to be contained within the available budgets, dependant on the uptake of the cycle allowance.
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Wards Affected: All

Community Strategy Spine	Summary of the contribution to the strategy
Performance of the economy of the region and sub region	The policy supports uptake of school places and education opportunities and allows parents to manage travel to work and school.
Reaching full potential in education and employment	The policy supports attendance in school and uptake of school places.
Individual and collective self esteem – mutual respect	The policy supports children to be independent and encourages social development.
Neighbourhoods of Choice	The policy supports access to local schools in the first instance but allows for subsidised transports where travel is required.

Full details are in the body of the report, along with any implications for:

- Equal Opportunities Policy
- Risk Management
- Legal Considerations

Financial Consequences – Revenue

Within core budget and grant subsidy.

Financial Consequences – Capital

None

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Background documents (available for public inspection):

The following documents disclose important facts on which the report is based and have been relied upon in preparing the report. Copies of the background documents are available up to 4 years after the date of the meeting. If you would like a copy please contact one of the contact officers above.

None

1.0 Introduction

- 1.1 1.1 Section 508B of the Education and Inspections Act places a mandatory duty on Councils to make travel arrangements for eligible children in their area to facilitate their attendance at school and it must be provided free of charge. Eligible children are broadly those who are in receipt of benefits and travel distances from home to school in excess of 2 or 3 miles. The City Council currently operates a free school transport policy for pupils. This policy was amended for the 2008/09 academic year to increase the eligibility criteria of the free travel pass scheme to include children whose families receive the maximum working tax credit.
- 1.2 There have been a number of parents who have questioned the current policy and some neighbouring local authorities have commented that children who live in Manchester who attend schools outside Manchester are not given equal access to travel passes. The policy has now been reviewed along with the policies determined by our neighbouring authorities and a number of areas have been identified for consideration for the 2009/10 academic year as set out;
- 1) Reviewing the uptake of free travel passes for 2008 in comparison previous years
 - 2) The current capacity of Manchester's Roman Catholic schools
 - 3) Eligibility criteria
 - 4) Other LAs policies

SEN travel policy is arranged within the SEN transport unit and is not part of this review

Key Issues

2. Uptake of passes

- 2.1 The Executive agreed on the 25 July 2007 to extend the eligibility criteria (see Appendix 1 – Current Policy) for secondary school free travel passes from September 2008 in line with the Schools Admissions Code 2007. The policy for the academic year 2008/09 reduced the distance criteria from 3 to 2 miles for those families claiming maximum working tax credit or free school meals, enabling more children from disadvantaged families to claim free travel to school.
- 2.2 Claims for free bus passes have been increasing year on year since 2006. The change to policy for 2008 was expected to produce a 65% rise in claims for 2008/09 on 2007/08. Expected budget pressure was predicted to be £317k. Findings show that applications only rose by 22% on last year as at September 2008. This is due to fewer than expected claimants applying. The overall projected increase of passes issued for the full year is expected to be only 17%.

Academic year	Increase in applications
Sept 06	5%
Sept 07	14%
Sept 08	22%

- 2.3 It was anticipated that an additional 800 children would become eligible and apply under the working tax credit criteria. Under the Current Policy to date 252 children living 2-3 miles from their secondary school and whose parents receive the maximum working tax credit (**WTC**) have been awarded a free bus pass. Considering this rate of uptake, the full year expected uptake on the WTC criterion, the figure has been adjusted to 360 from 800.

3. Faith Schools

- 3.1 The current MCC policy allows children who attend Jewish or Church of England schools outside of Manchester to be eligible for free school transport. This was based on the knowledge that these schools within Manchester are oversubscribed. Until recently it has been the case that the supply of places at the 6 Manchester RC high schools in the city was sufficient to meet demand. For this reason Manchester children attending a RC school outside of Manchester were not given access to free transport provision. The tables below show the secondary faith schools in location and year 7 admission numbers for RC schools.

School	District
Trinity Cof E	Central West
King David Jewish school	North West
St Pauls RC	Wythenshawe
Barlow RC	South
Our Lady's	North West
St Peter's	Central East
St Matthew's	North East
Loreto RC	South

- 3.2 This year however has seen a rise in demand for RC school places. The position of RC schools has now moved to one where five out of the six RC schools are full and the overall surplus number of RC places city wide is only 4%, where the previous year was 21%.

- 3.3 The table below shows the year 7 intake against planned admission numbers in RC secondary schools.

School	Planned Admission Number 2008	Actual year 7 Intake 2008
St Paul's RC	180	180
Barlow RC	180	180
Our Lady's	150	156
St Peter's	180	180
St Matthew's	220	232
Loreto RC	180	150
TOTAL	1090	1047

For 2009 Loreto has an agreed admission number of 150 from 180 which will further reduce the surplus RC places to 1.5%.

- 3.4. As Manchester is less able to meet all the demand for school places in secondary RC schools, it is recommended that the LA extends eligibility to children attending Roman Catholic schools for the bus pass scheme.

4. Eligibility

- 4.1. **Legal Requirements.** Under Section 508B of the Education Act 1996, the LA has a mandatory duty to make such travel arrangements as they consider necessary for eligible children as defined in schedule 35 of the Act. The rules on eligibility include a child's financial circumstances, their age, the distance from school and the availability of school places nearer to their home (see appendix 3). Under Section 508C of the 1996 Act, the Council has a discretion to make whatever scheme it considers appropriate to be made in relation to travel to and from schools for other children. In reviewing the current policy it is recommended that the eligibility criteria are made clearer for parents and carers.
- 4.2 **LAC.** The eligibility for LAC children needs to be further clarified in the current policy. It would be clearer if the primary and secondary distances of two and three miles respectively were stipulated as criteria for eligibility but capped at a maximum of 15 miles. Manchester LAC children are often placed out of the authority however this should not be a disadvantage for them when applying for free travel. It is recommended that LAC children residing in a neighbouring authority but looked after by Manchester and attending a non-Manchester school should be included in the policy from 2009. This will support the attendance and attainment priorities for this vulnerable group of children.
- 4.2.1 There are approximately 261 Looked After Children (LAC) children who are looked after by Manchester and are placed out of the Manchester LA, in neighbouring authorities and attending schools within 15 miles of their placement. A proportion of this group would be eligible for passes under the new proposals if they live more than two miles from their primary school or three miles from their secondary school.

- 4.2.2 A proportion of these children may have access to alternative transport ie their carer's car. Furthermore the LA's in which they reside may provide for these children in their free school travel arrangements. An additional proportion may also have Special Educational Needs and have their transport needs met by SEN transport funding. Last year around 50 passes were issued to LAC. Calculations based on a further 35 applying under the new eligibility for this group the potential increase in cost could be circa £15K.
- 4.3 **Availability of suitable schools.** It is proposed to amend the policy and consider eligibility on the basis of whether a parent applied for a Manchester school or Academy in the first instance and Manchester were able to offer places at 3 suitable schools or Academies within 6 miles of their home. It is recommended that in these cases where an applicant then chooses to accept a school place in another authority they will not be eligible for a free school travel pass. Additional costs for this group can be met from the additional DCSF grant in 2009/10.
- 4.4. **Homeless Families.** Currently children in temporary accommodation and homeless families do not always qualify under the current policy as the criteria is based on the permanent registered address and distance to school. Families who are housed in refuges and hostels find that they are excluded from the provision but have the added disadvantage in some situations of having to travel further to their school.
- 4.4.1 It is recommended that discretion is exercised with this group of children with the aim to support transport to school and ensure that the absence of a permanent home address is not a barrier to access. In conjunction with the homeless families team joint working should be established with the Admissions and Transfers team. This provision could form part of a child in need plan supporting the child to continue and attend at school during periods of disruption in their lives.
- 4.4.2 This is expected to apply to a small number of children at any one time; therefore additional costs can be met within the additional DCSF grant allowance for 2009/10.

5. Other Local Authorities Arrangements

- 5.1 Appendix 2 provides a summary of neighbouring Authorities free travel arrangements. Findings show four out of six of our neighbouring Councils are not restricted to the provision of bus passes and offer other options, for example; cycling allowances. Manchester has ambitious plans for school transport initiatives and school travel plans aim to encourage more children to cycle to school. We propose to include cycle allowances as an alternative to free bus travel for secondary children. This will help Manchester achieve some of its targets around child health (particularly obesity), and transport in terms of congestion relief.

6. Cycle Allowance

- 6.1 In consultation with the corporate transport group it is recommended that MCC offer a £180 cycle allowance over two years (£90 limit for Year 11s) linked to the completion of a cycle training programme. This in turn may generate demand for school travel plans to be implemented by schools which includes cycle awareness training. The cycle allowance should be paid in the form of a voucher as an alternative to the free bus pass.
- 6.2 Most LA's offer the cycle allowance in the form of a cheque. However, to ensure the money is actually used towards cycle equipment or maintenance, MCC propose to explore a voucher scheme to be redeemed by the applicant in Manchester bike shops. The allowance will be available to secondary age children who are eligible for free school travel but would prefer a cycle allowance.
- 6.3 MCC will not be responsible for the route the cyclist chooses or the safety of the bike users who have received a cycle allowance. The voucher will be printed to state that the cyclist is responsible for their own safety and security of their cycling equipment.
- 6.4. To ensure good uptake of cycle training offered by MCC, and support road safety we aim to link the provision of the cycle allowance voucher to the proof of completion of a cycle training programme. However where funding is not available for such cycle training programmes, this will need to be reviewed for the purposes of eligibility for the scheme.

7. Other Considerations

- 7.1 A number of new developments may contribute to an increase in volume of travel pass applications. These include;
- 7.2 **Academies** – the development of 7 new Academies is likely to have some impact on the decisions families make when choosing a school. The desire to attend a particular Academy may result in children travelling greater distances to attend school.
- 7.3 **Changes to the examination structure** – increased movement between school sites may be on the horizon with young people opting to study a variety of diplomas available at different institutions. The 14-19 Strategy team advise that a transport policy will need to be devised to support these changes. In 2008 the Admissions team agreed with GMPTE to support students attending several school sites in undertaking their diploma to have the facility for their free travel pass to allow travel to each of the sites. Whilst there has been uptake on these types of courses it has not translated to an overall increase in demand for passes and in fact the number of journeys for Manchester has actually reduced.
- 7.4 **Building Schools for the Future (BSF)** – The new proposals support the BSF Agenda by allowing free travel to schools with subject specialism where distance would normally be a barrier.

7.5 Changes to the school leaving age. From 2013 young people will be expected to stay in education or training until they turn 17 and from 2015 until they turn 18. This will in time impact on volume of passes and cost to MCC. The proposed policy is restricted to children of current statutory school age; 5-16.

8.0 Concessionary passes

8.1 GMPTE have secured funding from MCC's Passenger Transport Group for a new concessionary pass scheme. From September the new Young Person's concession card will entitle the holder to travel at any time for a flat fare of 80p for the duration of their secondary school education.

8.2 The free pass travel pass issued by MCC could be in the future linked to the new concessionary card in the initial implementation which could impact the need for MCC to administer free passes and will be further explored when GMPTE advise that the smart card technology is fully available.

9.0 Finance Implications

9.1 The DCSF administer a grant to Local Authorities to subsidise the free travel provision. As the eligibility to free travel was extended in 2007 this grant has been set to increase year on year.

DCSF Grant 08/09	£39k	
Core budget 08/09	£705k	
TOTAL 08/09	£744k	Equivalent to 2100 passes
DCSF Grant 09/10	£89k	
Core Budget 09/10	£878K	
Total 09/10	£967K	Equivalent to approx 2400 passes
DCSF Grant 10/11	£140k	
Core Budget 10/11	tbc	

9.2 The DCSF grant for 08/09 amounted to £39k in addition to a core budget of £705k. The DCSF funding will increase over the next 2 years. The award for 2009/10 will be £89k and £140k for 2010/11.

9.3 This increase in grant for 2009/10 equates to an additional 300 annual passes at 2009/10 prices.

9.4 Under the new eligibility scheme, there was a smaller than anticipated increase in the uptake of passes. From September 2008 to March 2009, 2100 passes were issued against an estimated 2414. The pricing review and the reduced uptake resulted in a budget saving for the financial year 2008/09 of £6k .

- 9.5** At the LA's request a price review of the cost of a bus pass, has been conducted by GMPTE based on Manchester children's actual number of journeys. This has enabled the LA to renegotiate the price of the GMPTE pass for 2008/09 to £354 from £379 in retrospect and has realised a £50k credit.
- 9.6** The charge to MCC for GMPTE annual passes in 2009/10 financial year will be £404. This is a 14% increase on the revised price and reflects the 14% price rise in the concessionary fare from 70p to 80p.
- 9.7** Some children may opt for the cycle allowance which is a cheaper alternative for MCC, at £90 per year equivalent, than the annual travel pass at £404 per year.
- 9.8** The impact of allowing Manchester LAC to apply for a GMPTE pass if their placement is in another authority and they attend a school more than 2/3 miles but less than 15 from their placement could incur additional costs of £15k at current price rate based on current numbers of LAC being eligible.

10. Conclusion

- 10.1 Appendix 4 shows the proposed policy for 2009/10 taking account of the above recommendations. It is recommended that the proposals are accepted in order to have a more inclusive policy for disadvantaged groups and ensure there is an equitable policy for children attending faith schools to reflect demand.

11.0 Contributing to the Community Strategy

(a) Performance of the economy of the region and sub region

Free school travel removes the financial burden from families in supporting travel to Manchester schools of choice. It also relieves the need for parents to take children to school themselves giving parents more flexibility in getting to work.

(b) Reaching full potential in education and employment

Subsidised school travel supports attendance and attainment of Manchester's children and young people.

(c) Individual and collective self esteem – mutual respect

Independent travel is a positive experience for children and young people and is part of socialisation and developing independence.

(d) Neighbourhoods of Choice

The proposed policy offers families the option to travel to schools of choice, without financial implication.

Wards / Locality issues

The free travel impacts on all wards and localities.

Engaging with Children and Young People

This initiative supports the engagement of children and young people in education across the city.

Impact on Internal and External Partners

GMPTE supply the passes to MCC. We will advise them of our policy and administration arrangements. For children who do not qualify for free travel there is the option of a concessionary pass for school children from GMPTE.

Equalities

This policy offers an improved equality and eligibility to disadvantaged groups of children in Manchester in supporting them to travel to school.

Appendix 1 Current Policy

From September 2008, to qualify for a free travel pass a child must be;

- a resident of Manchester or a Looked After Child in Manchester's care who has been placed outside of the Manchester area
and
- attending a secondary school, primary school or Academy in Manchester
or
- attending a Jewish or Church of England faith school outside Manchester where similar provision in Manchester is oversubscribed
or
- in years 10 or 11 and has recently moved into Manchester but wishes to remain at a school outside the area
and
- living 3 miles or more from the secondary school or Academy attended or 2 miles from the primary school attended
or
- living 2 to 3 miles from the secondary school or Academy attended and receiving free school meals or has a parent receiving maximum working tax credit.

All distances are measured by the shortest walking route.

Pupils who do not attend a Manchester Secondary School do not qualify for a free pass, even if they travel more than three miles to school.

Appendix 2

Bus Pass Policy – Review 2008/09

Eligibility criteria and scheme	Salford City Council	Tameside MBC	Rochdale MBC	Manchester City Council	Trafford MBC	Stockport MBC	Oldham MBC
Free bus pass scheme	No. Apply direct to GMPTE only.	y	y	y	y	y	y
Resident in relevant Authority	y			y	y		
Low income – WTC/ clothing grant/free school meals	y Defined as eligible for FSM/in receipt of WTC (max)	y defined as eligible for school clothing grant	y defined as eligible for FSM/in receipt of WTC (max)	y defined as eligible for FSM/in receipt of WTC (max)	y defined as eligible for FSM/in receipt of WTC (max)	y defined as eligible for FSM/in receipt of WTC (max)	y defined as eligible for FSM/in receipt of WTC (max)
School attendance in Authority				y	y		
Alternative to bus pass i.e. cycle allowance/ claim back travel expenses	Claim back travel expenses (quarterly in arrears).	Cycle allowance - £30 per year. Train pass.	Parents can claim travel expenses back - refund of fares at the end of each term.		Cycle allowance - £90 per year. Child must have successfully completed an accredited programme of road safety training.	Cycle allowance available – however policy does not give a specific amount.	Cycle allowance – rate to be determined by Directorate. Car allowance – mileage to be agreed between Authority and parent/ carer. Claims to be submitted monthly.
Journey variance vouchers					y for after-school activities.		

Appendix 3

Extracted from the Schools Standards and Framework Act. Categories of Eligibility for Free School Transport -Schedule 35B.

Paragraph 2

A child with **SEN, disabled or mobility problems** who is registered at a school **within walking distance** where no suitable arrangements have been made to obtain a place at a nearer school and having regard to his SEN, disability or mobility problems, he cannot be expected to walk to school.

Paragraph 4

A child who is **within the statutory walking distance** Section 444(5) but who is unable to walk to his school because of the **nature of the routes**, where no suitable arrangements have been made to enable him to become a pupil at a nearer school.

Paragraph 6

A child who is **not within statutory walking distance** where no suitable arrangements have been made to enable him to become a pupil at a nearer school.

Paragraphs 9-12 (Free School meals/ maximum working tax credit)

Paragraph 9

A child who is entitled to free school meals who is 8 but not yet 11 who attends a school more than 2 miles away where no suitable arrangements have been made to enable him to become a pupil at a nearer school.

Para 11

A child who is entitled to free school meals who is 11 who attends a school more than 2 miles away but not more than 6 miles where no suitable arrangements have been made to enable him to become a pupil at a nearer school and **there are not 3 or more suitable qualifying schools which are nearer to his home.**

Para 12

A child who is entitled to free school meals who is 11 who attends a school more than 2 miles away but not more than 15 miles and his parents wish him to attend that school on religious grounds and where no suitable arrangements have been made to enable him to become a pupil at a nearer school (and he is in receipt of free school meals

Appendix 4

MCC 2009/10 FREE SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY

The policy

From September 2009, to qualify for a free GMPTE travel pass a child must be aged 5 to 16 and fall into one of these groups;

Group 1 - LAC Primary

Looked after by Manchester City Council and attending a primary school more than 2 miles from their LAC placement.

Group 2 - Primary

Living in Manchester, and attending a primary school more than two miles but less than 6 miles from home, and nearer similar provision in Manchester is not available.

Group 3 - LAC Secondary

Looked after by Manchester City Council and attending a secondary school or Academy, between 3 and 15 miles from their LAC placement.

Group 4 - Secondary

A child living in Manchester, who is attending a secondary school or Academy more than 3 miles but less than 15 miles from home and similar provision in Manchester is not available **within 6 miles**.

Group 5 - Year 10/ 11

A child in year 10 or 11 who has recently moved into Manchester but wishes to remain at a school outside the area and lives between 3 and 15 miles from the secondary school or Academy attended.

Group 6 - Free School Meals/Maximum Working Tax Credit Allowance, Secondary

A child living in Manchester, attending a secondary school or Academy more than 2 miles from their home, who receives free school meals, or whose parent receives the maximum working tax credit.

Group 7 - Exceptions

We will award a free travel pass to a child within statutory walking distance (of 2 miles for primary and 6 miles for secondary) where the nature of the route is such that a child could not be expected to walk and there is no suitable school within walking distance.

Exceptions will be granted to children living in temporary or homeless families' accommodation.

All distances are measured by the shortest walking route.

MCC also offer a cycle allowance of £180 (for 2 years) or £90 for Year 11s as an alternative to a free bus pass for secondary age children within the above groups on condition of taking part in a cycle awareness programme endorsed by Manchester City Council and offered by Manchester schools.