



RHONDDA CYNON TAF COUNTY BOROUGH COUNCIL

MUNICIPAL YEAR 2025/26

**OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY & EDUCATION & INCLUSION SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

24th MARCH 2026

**REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR DEMOCRATIC SERVICES, WELSH
LANGUAGE & COMMUNICATION**

**UPDATE REVIEW OF THE CHANGES TO THE COUNCIL'S SCHOOL
TRANSPORT POLICY**

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Language & Communication**

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 The purpose of the report is to provide Members with an update on the implementation of the revised Home to School Transport Policy which took effect from the 1st September 2025. This update emanates from the [Notice of Motion](#) agreed by full Council on October 22nd, 2025.
- 1.2 The report presents the information currently available to support the Committee's consideration as part of the post-decision scrutiny and outlines progress made against the actions requested in the above referenced Notice of Motion.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that Members:

- 2.1 Note the report.

2.2 Consider and scrutinise the information presented and the evidence provided by stakeholders as part of the post-decision scrutiny (based on the latest available information).

3. BACKGROUND

3.1 At its meeting on [18th September 2023](#) the Cabinet received an update on the Council's Medium Term Financial Plan 2023/24 to 2026/27. This reported an estimated budget gap of £35.005M for 2024/25 financial year, rising to £85.4M (cumulatively) across the next 3 years. This followed the Council having balanced its largest ever budget gap for the 2023/24 financial year.

3.2 Given the size of the budget gap and with a focus across the medium term, at its meeting on [20th November 2023](#), Cabinet agreed to initiate a public consultation in respect of a proposed new Home to School Transport Policy, which, if approved, would be adopted from the beginning of the 2025/26 Academic year.

3.3 On [20th March 2024](#), the Council's Cabinet approved amendments to the Home to School Transport Policy, to revert to the Welsh Government statutory walking distance to secondary schools and colleges of three miles from September 2025.

3.4 The revised Home to School Transport Policy aligns transport provision more closely with Welsh Government statutory transport requirements and supports the Council to: maintain affordability within future financial constraints; continue to be able to meet its statutory requirements; and maintain discretionary transport for its most vulnerable users (e.g. Additional Learning Needs (ALN) pupils).

3.5 It was acknowledged by Cabinet that the policy change would impact learners and following consideration of the feedback from the public consultation process, Cabinet decided to retain the one-and-a-half-mile discretionary distance criteria for primary schools. Furthermore, Cabinet decided to retain many other discretionary elements of the policy which go over and above what the Council is expected to provide, such as transport to Welsh Language and Faith schools, transport for learners aged under five, and transport for those undertaking post-16 studies.

3.6 The updated school transport policy was published within the Council's 2025/26 'Starting Schools' booklet in October 2024, with letters confirming future entitlement sent to parents/guardians in April 2025.

4. UPDATE AND CURRENT POSITION

4.1 As per the commitment set out at the Cabinet meeting on 20 March 2024, walking routes to schools were reviewed and re-assessed, where appropriate, using the criteria laid down by the Welsh Government Statutory Guidance for the Risk Assessment of Walked Routes to School.

- 4.2 The walking route assessments were undertaken independently by an external organisation, with 19 assessments completed in total.
- 4.3 Following completion of the assessments, transport eligibility from September 2025 was determined, with approximately 2,300 learners informed in April 2025 that they would no longer be eligible for school transport from the start of the next school academic year.
- 4.4 A comprehensive re-scheduling and tendering exercise was subsequently undertaken, resulting in a reduction of 62 school bus routes.
- 4.5 The revised Home to School Transport Policy was implemented across all secondary schools from September 1st, 2025.
- 4.6 Under the revised Home to School Transport Policy, the Council continues to provide a significant amount of discretionary transport provision in excess of the current minimum Welsh Government statutory requirement, and a more generous eligibility policy than 18 of the 22 Councils in Wales that have already adopted the statutory distance requirements for secondary schools and colleges.
- 4.7 The level of discretionary provision and the number of pupils benefitting from this provision is set out in the table below:

Service Provision	WG Statutory Policy	RCTCBC Policy From September 2025	No. of Discretionary Learners
Primary School Distance >1.5 miles	✗	✓	305
Secondary School or College Distance >3 miles	✓	✓	Statutory
Pre-compulsory School Age <5years ¹	✗	✓	230
Transport to nearest suitable Faith School (Primary and Secondary) ²	✗	✓	1,547
Transport to nearest suitable Welsh Medium School (Primary and Secondary) ³	✗	✓	2,835

¹ Subject to meeting relevant distance criteria

² Parents and learners may express a preference for a particular school, a particular type of language provision or faith school, but the Measure does not confer on those parents and learners any rights to free transport to their preferred school and or location, unless that school is determined by the local authority to be the learner's nearest suitable school and the learner meets the distance criteria. Section 6 of the Measure provides local authorities with the power to provide discretionary transport arrangements for learners who are not attending their nearest suitable school because of language preference.

³ Same as footnote 2.

Post 16 Education Transport (6 th form or College) ⁴			2,349
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4.8 In addition, learners continue to be able to select their nearest “suitable school” in accordance with choice of English or Welsh Medium language or preferred religious denomination, even where that school is outside of the County Borough.

5. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION REVIEW

5.1 As part of the Notice of Motion agreed by Full Council on the 22nd of October 2025, an interim report has been prepared for the Committee’s consideration, outlining the progress made against implementation and each of the agreed resolutions.

5.2 The agreed resolutions set out in the Notice of Motion are as follows:

It was resolved that Council requests:

4a The production and publication of an updated Equality and Children’s Rights Impact Assessment to include analysis of the impact on attendance and household costs across a range of scenarios (single vs. multiple children, ages 11–15 and 16–18, income levels, and access to Welsh-medium education). This Council requests that this information forms part of the post decision scrutiny and analysis of this decision already identified within scrutiny work programmes.

4b That the relevant Cabinet Member writes to the Welsh Government seeking:

- i. Fair funding for learner travel, including a dedicated grant to protect discretionary provision;*
- ii. Integration of school transport into forthcoming bus reforms, ensuring sufficient timetabled capacity, peak-time availability, and fair concessions for under-16s;*
- iii. Reform of national learner travel guidance to strengthen duties on promoting access to Welsh-medium education and to clarify the definition of “nearest suitable school” to reflect linguistic choice.*
- iv. Confirmation of the costs for fair funding for learner travel, including a dedicated grant to protect discretionary provision.*

4c Pending the outcome of 4a) and 4b), i, ii, and iii, that Cabinet engage formally, as a matter of urgency, with the “Save the School Transport – RCT/Wales” campaign, school leaders and governing bodies, to co-design mitigations and route-specific solutions, and to publish a public tracker of actions and walking-

⁴ Same as footnote 1.

route re assessments and to furthermore engage with the Children’s Commissioner for Wales, and the Welsh Language Commissioner.

5.3 As requested in resolution a), the production and publication of an updated Equality and Socio-economic Impact Assessment, in the form of a progress review, can be found at Appendix 1. Members will note that RCTCBC does not use Children’s Rights Impact Assessments; however, the Protected Characteristic of Age is included within the Council’s Equality and Socio-Economic Impact Assessment process. Specific Term 1 data covering the period September 1st, 2025, to December 19th, 2025, has been used from section 5.4 to 5.7 to identify policy impact on school attendance, lateness, household costs and the Welsh Language.

5.4 ATTENDANCE

5.4.1 During the Notice of Motion debate, Members expressed concern that the change in policy may discourage or inhibit some children and young people from attending school, due to their parents/carers being unable to transport or accompany their child to school.

5.4.2 In assessing the impact of the policy changes on attendance for Term 1 of the 2025/26 Academic Year (only) a comparison of the attendance level for those secondary school learners receiving home to school transport provision was made against those learners who do not use home to school transport to get to school. This data has also been compared to the same data sets prior to the policy change and is set out in the table below:

	Autumn 2023	Autumn 2024	Autumn 2025
Attendance levels of pupils making their own way to school	87.05%	88.19%	88.91%
Attendance levels of pupils who are in receipt of school transport	86.42%	87.68%	88.39%
Overall difference (i.e. attendance levels of pupils making their own way to school being higher (-) or lower (+) than those in receipt of school transport)	-0.63%	-0.51%	-0.52%

5.4.3 It is positive to note that secondary school attendance levels for both student categories have increased post-policy implementation, comparing the autumn terms of 2023, 2024 and 2025.

5.4.4 For the same periods, when attendance levels of pupils making their own way to school is compared to those in receipt of school transport, these have been consistently higher for those pupils making their own way to school.

5.4.5 This demonstrates an improvement since the same term in the 2023/24 academic year.

5.5 LATENESS

5.5.1 Members have also previously noted concern around the potential impact the revised transport policy could have on student punctuality.

5.5.2 In assessing the impact of the policy changes on student lateness for Term 1 of the 2025/26 Academic Year (only) a comparison of the number of late marks for those learners receiving home to school transport provision was made against those learners who do not use home to school transport to get to school. This data has also been compared to the same data sets prior to the policy change and is set out in the table below:

	Autumn Term 24/25	Autumn Term 25/26	Difference (autumn term 25/26 higher (+) / (-) lower than autumn term 24/25)
Total Students (Year 7 - 14)	16,795	16,802	+7
Students with Transport	7,276	5,033	-2,243
Students without Transport	9,519	11,769	+2,250
% Late (All Students)	3.35%	2.95%	-0.40%
% Late (Students with Transport)	2.55%	1.92%	-0.63%
% Late (Students without Transport)	3.96%	3.39%	-0.57%

5.5.3 While the number of students who no longer receive home to school transport has increased from 9,519 to 11,769, there has been a 0.57% reduction in lateness for those pupils making their own way to school comparing the autumn term 2025 with the autumn term 2024.

5.5.4 Overall, there has been a decrease in students arriving late for school of 0.4% comparing the autumn term 25/26 (2.95%) with the autumn term 24/25 (3.35%). This demonstrates an improvement since the same term in the 2024/25 academic year.

5.6 **HOUSEHOLD COSTS**

5.6.1 The Council has introduced a number of financial initiatives to assist with students accessing their education. These include the use of external funding via the UK Government's Shared Prosperity Fund to run the £1 bus scheme for 5–15-year-olds in RCT – this local scheme meant that children and young people in RCT had access to the Welsh Government's nation-wide scheme 2 months early.

5.6.2 The Council has also allocated a £100,000 hardship fund to secondary schools to support families. This fund can be used to help cover any cost associated with

overcoming barriers to attendance and engagement, which could include educational resources, short-term barriers to attendance, school lunches, targeted family engagement support and other essential needs that support a pupil's wellbeing, attendance, and learning.

- 5.6.3 In addition, the Council has also liaised extensively with Transport for Wales around the monthly student tickets and initiatives to implement reduced student fares.

5.7 **WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS**

- 5.7.1 The changes to home to school transport have been applied to learners in both English and Welsh medium secondary school settings and a range of [impact assessments](#) were undertaken to inform the decision-making process. It was this consideration and conscientious effort in assessing any impact that resulted in the decision to maintain transport entitlement for primary age pupils living 1.5 miles from school, as it was deemed as a positive mitigation against some of the potential disproportionate negative impacts identified within the Welsh Language Impact Assessment. The decision to implement changes to secondary school transport was implemented as the data supported the position that there was no disproportionate impact on that sector. Since implementation, a progress review on the mitigating actions as noted in the published Welsh Language Impact Assessment (March 2024) has been undertaken and is attached at Appendix 2, alongside the Welsh in Education Strategic Plan Annual Review Report (July 2025) attached at Appendix 3.

- 5.7.2 The Council has made significant investment in Welsh medium education as part of its Welsh in Education Strategic Plan (WESP) with the aim of growing the numbers in the sector. In recent years over £50M has been invested into the Welsh medium sector, through our school modernisation programme and Welsh Government's Sustainable Communities for Learning programme. There has also been investment in multiple early years settings, a Welsh language immersion service and three new ALN provisions in the Welsh medium settings. All developments have been in pursuit of our strategic aim to expand and further improve Welsh medium provision across the County Borough.

- 5.7.3 While PLASC data for 2025/2026 is not yet available in full, interim data from Term 1 shows positive progress against WESP outcomes overall. The data shows an increase in the percentage of pupils entering Welsh medium education at nursery, reception and year 7.

- 5.7.4 10 learners have been recorded as having transitioned out of Welsh medium education, noting that none of these are for reasons relating to the changes in the Home to School Transport Policy.

5.8 **REQUESTED ACTIONS**

- 5.8.1 In accordance with resolution b) of the Notice of Motion, the relevant Cabinet Member has written to the Welsh Government, and a response has been received. Copies of the correspondence can be found on the 2025-26 Notice of Motion page [here](#) and have been included at Appendix 4 for ease of reference.
- 5.8.2 Following the completion of resolution a) and b) of the Notice of Motion, resolution c) has progressed to the extent required at this stage.
- 5.8.3 A productive meeting has been held between the Leader of the Council, Senior Officers and the “Save the School Transport – RCT/Wales” Campaign Group. Discussions were focused on areas within the Council’s remit, as well as the detailed survey data collected by the group. The full report was subsequently circulated with the Council Leader and Officers for consideration, and a follow up meeting has been agreed with the group. Attached at Appendix 5 to the report is a written submission received from the group.
- 5.8.4 To summarise the feedback received from the “Save the School Transport – RCT/Wales” Campaign Group, the data shared covered several key areas, including, but not limited to, the list of schools and colleges, the transport survey results and associated comments, the risk survey findings and feedback, walking routes, cost of living, the impact on employment, examples of incidents within RCT, and statements provided by parents.
- 5.8.5 As with all provided transport, the Council’s arrangements will be kept under on-going review and should further proposed mitigating actions be identified for consideration, due regard will be given to the feedback of the campaign group, school leaders, governing bodies and elected Members. In this respect, Members will note that any such considerations will be informed by professional advice and undertaken in accordance with the Council’s statutory responsibilities. Members will also note that should actions be agreed and taken forward, a public tracker of actions will be published by the Council.
- 5.8.6 Engagement with the Children’s Commissioner for Wales and the Welsh Language Commissioner will be undertaken as required following consideration of the interim report.

6. CONSULTATION AND INVOLVEMENT

- 6.1 There are no consultation implications aligned to this report.

7. EQUALITY AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS (INCLUDING SOCIO-ECONOMIC DUTY)

- 7.1 Under the Public Sector Equality Duty as set out in the Equality Act 2010, Local Authorities are required to have due regard to the need to:

1. Eliminate unlawful discrimination.
2. Advance equality of opportunity.
3. Foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

7.2 There are no equality, diversity or socio-economic duty implications associated with this report.

8. WELSH LANGUAGE IMPLICATIONS

8.1 There are no Welsh language implications as a result of the recommendations in this report.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

9.1 The financial implications of the approved amendments to the Council's School Transport Policy have been incorporated into the Revenue Budget Strategy and will continue to be closely monitored as part of the Council's robust service and financial management arrangements.

9.2 The Council's expenditure on Home to School Transport is forecasted to be £16.9M for the 2025/26 financial year, in line with budget, and compares to an expenditure level of £10.5M in 2021/22. This position demonstrates the level of additional resources allocated by the Council to Home to School Transport arrangements over a number of years to ensure the on-going delivery of the School Transport Policy.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS OR LEGISLATION CONSIDERED

10.1 The Learner Travel (Wales) Measure 2008 places a statutory duty on Local Authorities to assess the travel needs of learners in its area and to provide free school/college transport to those learners of compulsory school/college age who live beyond a safe walking distance of 2 miles or 3 miles from their nearest suitable primary and secondary school/college respectively.

11. LINKS TO THE COUNCIL'S CORPORATE PLAN, NATIONAL PRIORITIES, AND THE WELL-BEING OF FUTURE GENERATIONS (WALES) ACT 2015

11.1 The delivery of Home to School transport services support and promote the Council's Corporate Plan, in particular, the well-being objective of People and Communities: *'Supporting people and empowering RCT residents and communities to live safe, healthy and fulfilling lives'* and, as part of this overall well-

being objective, '*Children and young people have the best start in life and can learn and grow safely*'.

11.2 The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 requires the Council to think about the long-term impact of their decisions, to work better with people, communities and each other and to prevent persistent problems such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change. To make sure we are all working towards the same purpose, the Act puts in place seven well-being goals on the Council:

- A prosperous Wales.
- A resilient Wales.
- A healthier Wales.
- A more equal Wales.
- A Wales of cohesive communities.
- A Wales of vibrant culture and Welsh Language.
- A globally responsible Wales.

11.3 The Act imposes a duty on all public bodies in Wales to carry out "sustainable development", defined as being "the process of improving the economic, social, environmental and cultural wellbeing of Wales by taking action, in accordance with the sustainable development principle, aimed at achieving the wellbeing goals."

11.4 The Act sets out five ways of working needed for the Council to achieve the seven well-being goals, these being:

- The importance of balancing short-term needs with the needs to safeguard the ability to also meet long-term needs.
- Considering how the Council's objectives impact upon each of the well-being goals listed above.
- The importance of involving people with an interest in achieving the well-being goals and ensuring that those people reflect the diversity of the area within which the Council services are delivered.
- Acting in collaboration with other persons and organisations that could help the Council meet its well-being objectives; and
- Acting to prevent problems occurring or getting worse.

12. CONCLUSION

12.1 Clear progress has been made to implement the revised Home to School Transport Policy from the beginning of the 2025 / 2026 academic year and to deliver the agreed actions arising from the Notice of Motion agreed by full Council on 22nd October 2025.

12.2 The report sets out that, based on the latest information available (i.e. for the first term of the 2025/2026 academic year), early indications following the policy implementation highlight improvements in attendance, reductions in student

lateness, and no identified negative impact on Welsh-medium education, and any further actions will be published in accordance with the Notice of Motion.