

DECISION NOTICE OF AN INDIVIDUAL MEMBER OF GWYNEDD COUNCIL CABINET

DATE OF DECISION 13 October 2021

DATE DECISION PUBLISHED 14 October 2021

DATE DECISION WILL COME INTO FORCE and implemented,
unless the decision is called in, in accordance with section 7.25 of
the Gwynedd Council Constitution **19 October 2021**

Cabinet Member: Councillor Cemlyn Rees Williams Cabinet Member for Education

SUBJECT : School Transport Policy Review (Vacant Seat Scheme)

DECISION

To update the Vacant Seats Scheme section of Gwynedd's School Transport Policy to better clarify the vacant seats scheme, annual timetable and payment arrangements.

Introduce a priority system for pupils with an Individual Development Plan (Authority) and pupils who live furthest from a school or school site when awarding new vacant seats or ending the use of vacant seats.

The revised policy will come into effect on 1 September 2022.

REASON WHY THE DECISION IS NEEDED

Please see attached Officer Report

DECLARATIONS OF PERSONAL INTEREST AND ANY RELEVANT DISPENSATIONS APPROVED BY THE COUNCIL'S STANDARDS COMMITTEE


None

ANY CONSULTATIONS UNDERTAKEN PRIOR TO MAKING THE DECISION

Consultation with
Gwynedd Council Statutory Officers

The results of the consultations are reported upon in the attached report

**DECISION NOTICE OF AN INDIVIDUAL MEMBER OF GWYNEDD COUNCIL
CABINET – OFFICER REPORT**

Name and title of Cabinet Member/s:	Cllr Cemlyn Rees Williams Cabinet member for Education
Name and title of Report Author:	Owen Owens Senior Manager Education Resources Service
Date of Decision:	13 October 2021
Signature of Cabinet Member/s:	

Subject:

School Transport Policy Review (Vacant Seat Scheme)

Recommendation for the Decision:

Update the Vacant Seats Scheme section of Gwynedd's School Transport Policy to better clarify the vacant seats scheme, annual timetable and payment arrangements.

Introduce a priority system for pupils with an Individual Development Plan (Authority) and pupils who live furthest from a school or school site when awarding new vacant seats or ending the use of vacant seats.

The revised policy will come into effect on 1 September 2022.

See policy wording in 'Appendix 1'.

Reason why Decision is needed:

Learners who are educated in Gwynedd and are not entitled to free transport can take advantage of any vacant seats in the Council's transport vehicles under the Vacant Seats Scheme of the School Transport Policy. The vacancy scheme is not available on public service bus contracts.

Greater clarity is needed regarding the Vacant Seats Scheme to avoid misunderstanding when awarding newly available vacant seats or discontinuing the use of vacant seats when seats are no longer available.

Reason and justification behind the Decision:

In considering how to prioritize the awarding of new seats and terminating the use of seats that are no longer available, consideration was given to:

- terminating entitlement to a vacant seat at the end of each academic year
- offering vacant seats on a 'first come, first served' basis or offering vacant seats on the basis of 'those living furthest first'
- terminating the right to vacant seats on the basis of 'the last applicant being the first to lose his/her seat' or to terminate a vacant seat on the basis of 'he/she who lives closest to lose his seat first'

It was decided to offer vacant seats for an academic year to those already on the scheme so that they get the first offer.

For the remaining vacant seats it was decided to prioritize pupils with an Individual Development Plan (Authority) and then pupils who live furthest from a school or school site when awarding new vacancies.

It was decided to give priority to pupils with an Individual Development Plan (Authority) and pupils who live furthest from a school or school site when terminating the use of a vacant seat.

There are no financial implications arising from this decision.

The decision does not affect the Equality Impact Assessment of the original policy.

Declarations of personal interest by any Cabinet Member consulted with and any relevant dispensations approved by the Standards Committee

None.

Any consultations undertaken prior to making the decision:

Head of Finance:

The decision notice states that there are no financial implications from the review presented here of the School Transport Policy. I welcome the clarity regarding the Council's Vacant Seats Scheme.

Monitoring Officer:

The proposed changes to the Policy in reality represent a better explanation of current arrangements and seem logical.

Local Member/s:

Not a local matter

SCHOOLS' TRANSPORT POLICY – 2022-23 update

Who is eligible for free school transport?

Gwynedd Council provide free transport to learners who live in the County and who have registered in a school maintained by the Council under the following circumstances:

(i) Single Site Schools:

- **Learners receiving primary education** - for learners who live 2 miles or more from the school in their catchment area, or the nearest school (does not include nursery class pupils).
- **Learners receiving secondary education** - for learners under 16 years old who live 3 miles or more from the school in their catchment area, or the nearest school.
- **Learners with additional learning needs or disabilities under 16 years old** in accordance with the recommendations of the Special Educational Needs Joint Committee.

(ii) Multi-site schools:

- **Learners receiving primary education** - for learners who live 2 miles or more from the nearest school site in their catchment area, or the nearest school site (does not include nursery class pupils).
[Every school site (in a multi-site school) will have a specific catchment area.]
- **Learners receiving secondary education** - for learners under 16 years old who live 3 miles or more from the nearest school site in their catchment area, or the nearest school site.
[Every school site (in a multi-site school) will have a specific catchment area.]
- **Learners with additional learning needs or disabilities under 16 years old** in accordance with the recommendations of the Special Educational Needs Joint Committee.

All secondary pupils and pupils who have disabilities or special educational needs **who are over 16 years old** who wish to take advantage of school or college transport will have to pay £120 (autumn term), £120 (spring term) and £60 (summer term) towards transport costs (you can get a tickets by calling Galw Gwynedd on 01766 771000).

It is expected for learners who receive primary or secondary education (except those with additional learning needs or disabilities) to walk up to 2 miles to meet any transport provided by Gwynedd Council.

In order to receive free transport, the parents of learners receiving primary or secondary education are expected to complete a free transport application form and return it to **Transport and Street Care Service, Regulatory Department, Gwynedd Council,**

Caernarfon, LL55 1SH. (You can make contact by phoning Galw Gwynedd on 01766 771000.)

Receiving free transport is subject to the learners' compliance with the code of conduct for school transport. It is the parents/guardian's responsibility to ensure compliance with the code of conduct. Failure to comply can result in losing the right to free transport from home to school. Should the right to free transport be lost, it is the parents/guardians' responsibility to shoulder the cost of transport from the home to the school.

Learners who attend a school (or a school site) other than the school (or school site) in the catchment area or nearest school (or nearest school site) are required to make their own travel arrangements and pay the cost for that transport.

Vacant Seats Scheme

Learners who are educated in Gwynedd and are not entitled to free transport can take advantage of any vacant seats in the Council's transport vehicles. The vacancy scheme is not available on public service bus contracts.

Take-up of the scheme is subject to the following:

- availability of vacant seats
- the vehicle not having to divert from its usual route
- no additional costs to Gwynedd Council
- paying the current vacant seats fee

There is no guarantee that vacant seats will be available for the duration of an academic year, if the entitlement ends, it will be attempted to give at least one week's notice. If this happens, the learner will have to arrange their own transport to get to school and your payment will be rounded to the nearest half term. Failure to comply with the Travel Behavior Code may terminate entitlement to a vacant seat.

When awarding new vacant seats or ending the use of vacant seats priority will be given to:

- pupils with an Individual Development Plan (Authority)
- pupils who live furthest from the school or school site

How to apply?

Apply online by following the following link www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/seddigwag.

When will the application be processed?

If the application is for September, the application will be assessed by the end of September. You will need to make your own travel arrangements until your application has been assessed. Applications received during the academic year (excluding September) will be considered as soon as possible. You will receive a response by email.

What if I don't want to continue with the scheme?

Please let the transport unit know immediately via transport@gwynedd.llyw.cymru or by letter if you do not wish to continue with the scheme. If you have received a bus pass you will need to return the pass to the Authority. We advise returning any passes by post by means of special delivery and needing a signature to ensure it arrives. The vacant seats fee will expire on the date the pass is received by us. If the pass is not received the fee will continue. If you pay by direct debit, do not cancel it, this will be done by the Authority.

A letter/pass can be sent to the address below:

Integrated Transport Unit
Gwynedd Council
Council Offices
Caernarfon
Gwynedd
LL55 1SH

What is the fee?

The fee will fall into 2 categories:

- Catchment Fee - a learner receiving primary education and living less than 2 miles from the catchment area school (or school site), or a secondary education learner living less than 3 miles from the school (or school site).
- Out-of-catchment fee - a learner who attends a school (or school site) other than the catchment-area school (or school site).

The fee is reviewed annually and the information will be available on the website www.gwynedd.llyw.cymru/traveltoschool .

How to pay?

You will be sent an invoice for payment, or you can arrange to pay by direct debit.

What help is available if walking routes are dangerous?

When learners receiving primary education live less than 2 miles from the catchment area school (or school site), or learners receiving secondary education live less than 3 miles from the catchment area school (or school site), and, therefore, are not entitled to free transport, but travel to school along a road that is considered by the Council to be especially dangerous, free transport is offered. A dangerous road is defined whereby the nature of the road (which includes public footpaths) means that it is not reasonable to expect learners (considering their age and with an escort as needed) to be able to walk in a comparatively safe manner. In assessing the comparable safety of a road, the Council will undertake an assessment of the risks a learner could face along the determined road (including, for example, rivers, ditches, traffic speed along the nearby road, history of accidents, overhanging trees or branches that could impair the ability of pedestrians or drivers to see, etc). The assessment would be held at the time of day and days of the week that learners would be expected to use the road.

The shortest route available is the route which is not deemed by the Council to be especially dangerous, after assessing the other routes available for the journey.

Is there help available to learners who change address during an examination course?

The Council will contribute towards the travel costs of a learner who has moved into a new catchment area during an external examination year, or previous year, e.g. GCSE course, and who wishes to complete the course in the same school (or school site) that serves their former home, by means of one of the following methods:-

- Offering free transport when it is possible to arrange transport without an additional cost to the Council.
- Offering to pay an amount up to a maximum of the equivalent to 20 miles of daily travel according to the current local government national public transport allowance scale.

Any payment will be made at the end of every term for every day the learner has been noted as being present on the school's register.